

PROGRAM BRIEF

GOVERNMENT OF LIBERIA (GoL)/UNITED NATIONS (UN) PROGRAM TO PREVENT AND RESPONSE TO SEXUAL AND GENDER BASED VIOLENCE (SGBV) AND HARMFUL TRADITIONAL PRACTICES (HTPs)

THE CONTEXT

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) is not only prevalent in Liberian society; it is accepted as an integral part of gender relations (UN/GoL 2014 Report). This perception was exacerbated during the conflict period, as rape was used as a weapon of war driven by unequal gender relations. For many Liberian women and girls, the appalling violence they experienced during wartime is still evident as physical and mental scars. Reports between 2014-2016 from the Ministry of Gender Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP) indicate a general acceptance of the most common types of sexual and gender based violence, identified by communities as rape, child marriage, offensive touching, wife beating, denial of resources, acid attacks as well as the more subtle and hidden forms of violence and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

THE JOINT PROGRAM

Given the high levels of violence that children and women continue to experience, the Government of Liberia proposed to collaborate with the United Nations System to step up the efforts to reduce SGBV by 80 per cent by 2020, by implementing a third phase of a Joint Program on SGBV. The Joint Program envisions that by 2020, communities, educational institutions and relevant stakeholders in Liberia will be fully engaged and active in preparedness, prevention and response to SGBV and harmful cultural practices (child marriages, denial of girls' education, teenage pregnancy and FGM). Through its five pillars, the SGBV Joint Program aims to prevent, respond, strengthen institutions, advocate and mobilize funds and finally coordinate SGBV issues at national and Sub-national within the 15 Counties. The Joint Program is a community-based approach that builds on community solutions. It is informed by a robust context- specific analysis of needs based on local communities' knowledge and existing protection strategies. The overall objective of the SGBV JP program is to ensure the protection of women and children's rights, provide a safe environment where women and children/girls can realize their full potential, shield them from the effects of vulnerability and discrimination and support the improvement of the socio-economic status and capacity of women.

GOVERNMENT OF LIBERIA (GoL) COMMITMENTS

The GoL has committed to end sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) against women and girls through the ratification of international and regional instruments such as the Convention of Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and girls (1979) and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights and its protocol on the rights of women in Africa, and the development of the 2006 National Action Plan to prevent and respond to sexual and gender based violence. Moreover, Liberia is committed to the Agenda 2030 and contributing to Sustainable Development Goal 5 and 16 in her actions towards the prevention and response to SGBV and HTPs.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE SGBV JOINT PROGRAM

- A specialized court, Criminal court "E" was established in 2009 with exclusive jurisdiction in all matters related to sexual offences, with concurrent jurisdiction granted to circuit courts in other areas
- Over 860 survivors have received psycho-social, protection and legal services through the referral pathway (One -Stop-Centers, Referral Hospitals, Police and the Criminal Court "E") in 2017 alone.
- Crimes scene investigation, case documentation, management and interviewing skills of 179 Police Prosecution officers, Health and Social Workers, Judicial actors and 83 Women and Children Protection Service Officers have been strengthened through training in 2017
- Physical infrastructure development or rehabilitation has taken place 15 Counties for women and child protection units of the Liberia National Police (LNP) and 7 safe homes in 7 counties.
- Social-cultural audits conducted with 260 Traditional Leaders and Zoes, religious leaders, youths and women's groups. These currently serve as agents of change and support the transformation of such harmful practices into useful skills for youths that are often targeted by the Zoes.
- Operationalization of national and Sub national standard operating procedures and systems for rapid referral of survivors to medical services, including 12 One stop SGBV centers currently offering comprehensive clinical survives for survivors of SGBV in 7 Counties.



Male champions for gender equality celebrate during the dedication of a new Peace Hut by UN Women in town of Zontuo in Nimba County. Photo: UN Women/Winston Daryoue



(GoL)/UNITED NATIONS (UN) PROGRAM TO PREVENT AND RESPONSE TO SEXUAL AND GENDER BASED VIOLENCE (SGBV) AND HARMFUL TRADITIONAL PRACTICES (HTPs)

CONTINUING ISSUES

Despite the Program's significant progress, focused interventions to prevent and respond to the problem remain fragmented, thus Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) (especially rape) continues to prevail with considerable impunity. Some of the main issues identified as being contributory factors, include:

- **An exploratory study by the NGO Consortium (2015) on education highlights a pattern of social attitudes among boys and girls that mirror broader societal values that drive SGBV.** The study indicates that out of 1,100 school boys and 758 school girls; 75% of boys and 22% girls agreed with the statement "men are superior to women"; 46% of boys and 34% of girls agreed that sexual violence and abuse is a 'normal part of a man-woman relationship'; 39% boys and 30% girls agreed that 'sexual abuse and violence against women and girls is a natural expression of males' sexual urges. These attitudes reinforce SGBV. The 2013 Health and Demographic Survey indicates that about 38% of the women aged 20-24 were married/in union before age 18 and that adolescent pregnancy accounts for a total 14% of Liberia's total fertility rate. Overall, teenage pregnancy stands at 31%.
- **Among other harmful traditional practices, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM),** is widely practiced and acceptable in 10 out of 15 Counties in Liberia. FGM is widely promoted by the Sande schools where approximately 72% of rural women belong (MoGCSP Report 2011). This leads to school drop outs with over 40% girls dropping out of school after attending the Sande School and become brides/ wives.
- **Social and cultural norms and practices that give rise to some of these abuses are normalized.** Norms such as early sexual exposure and the practice of casual and multiple sexual relationships especially by men in what is known as "market day marriages", practiced in some communities (specifically commercial trading centers, such as border towns, fishing communities and areas of large commercial activity), among others are not treated as offences. This increases the vulnerability of young girls that are always the target for these practices.
- **Nearly 74.3% of respondents in the community dialogues cited poverty as a key driver of SGBV (UN/GoL 2014 Report).** Findings from the assessment report indicate that a number of areas which expose children, especially girls to the risks of sexual violence include concession/mining areas, rubber plantations, fishing and coastal communities and border towns. They indicate that areas of economic activity provide significant "pull" factors that could lead to sexual exploitation and abuse. This is compounded by the lack of awareness and systems to identify, report and address sexual abuse and exploitation within these areas. The SGBV JP targets to create awareness in these vulnerable communities across all counties in Liberia.
- **The existence of inadequate legal systems to support SGBV survivors coupled with insufficient measures for the protection of witnesses and survivors.** In a study commissioned by the UNMIL Office of the Gender Advisor, survivors are unable to access timely medical and psycho-social services within the 72-hour period as per requirement due to logistical and cost related issues. This compromises their ability to effectively access justice and other appropriate remedial assistance. In addition, the lack of forensic labs, and inadequate logistical support hinders timely and appropriate response and support to survivors. Furthermore, gaps in the law and legal procedures such as inaccessibility of courts and the limited court terms, give room to impunity for perpetrators of SGBV.

PLANNED ACTIONS (2017-2020)

- Strengthen response to SGBV through comprehensive services and referral and reduce vulnerability to HIV and AIDs and other STIs;
- Enhance mechanisms to prevent and protect children (girls and boys) from sexual violence, abuse and exploitation within the school environment;
- Strengthen sub-national and national institutional support mechanisms and coordination to facilitate an effective joint programming on sexual and gender based violence in line with the Deconcentration Plan;
- Promote visibility on SGBV at all levels, community, schools and national levels;
- Ensure that early warning systems for disaster preparedness and emergency address vulnerability to sexual violence and protection of women and Children (girls and boys) in pre and post conflict situations.

TIME FRAME: The 3rd phase of the Joint Program covers started in June 2016 till June 2020. This follows a first phase between 2008-2010, and a second phase from 2010 to 2012.

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS: The Program involves five UN Agencies, including UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, UNWOMEN, UNHCR and UNMIL, in liaison with the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection and Ministries of Education, Information, Internal Affairs and Justice and relevant NGO/INGO in the counties.

TOTAL BUDGET:	36,000,000.00 USD
FUNDED:	3,200,000.00 USD (Swedish international Development Agency—SIDA)
FUNDING GAP:	32,000,000.00 USD