

A Gender Assessment

for

USAID

in

Liberia

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## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AFELL	Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia
ALP	Accelerated Learning Program
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DDR	Demilitarization, Demobilization and Reintegration
DHS	Demographic Health Study
FAWE	Forum for African Women Educationalists
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GoL	Government of Liberia
IFC	International Finance Corporation
iPRS	Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy
LEAP	Liberia Employment Action Program
LEEP	Liberia Emergency Employment Program
LTP	Liberia Teacher Training Program
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MoA	Ministry of Agriculture
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoG&D	Ministry of Gender and Development
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MoL	Ministry of Labor
NAP	National Action Plan
OSIWA	Open Society Institute in West Africa
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy
SEA	Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SC Res 1325	Security Council Resolution calling for women in peace-making, peace-building, and reconstruction
SC Res 1820	Security Council Resolution dealing with preventing and responding to sexual violence in situations of armed conflict, post-conflict, add implications for maintaining peace and security
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Women's Fund
UN JP FSN	UN Joint Programme for Food Security and Nutrition
UN JP GEWEE	UN Joint Programme for Gender Equality & Women's Economic Empowerment
UN JP SGBV	UN Joint Programme to Prevent and Respond to Sexual & Gender-Based Violence
UN JP YEE	UN Joint Programme for Employment and Empowerment of Young Women and Men
UNMIL/OGA	UN Peacekeeping Mission in Liberia/Office of Gender Advisor
USAID	US Agency for International Development
WB	World Bank
WFP	World Food Programme
WID	Women-in-Development
WIPNET	NGO: Women in Peace Network, Liberia
WLC	Women's Legislative Caucus
WOCAD	NGO: Women and Child Advocacy
WONGOSOL	Network of Women's NGOs in Liberia

## Preface and Introduction

This Gender Assessment was arranged, launched and implemented in record time – which would not have been possible without the strong support of some key people. Thanks are due to Pam White and Sharon Pauling for determining that I should undertake this assessment; to Don Brady and Sylvester Browne for getting me to Liberia and supporting my needs and logistics; to Anthony Kumi and Agatha Mangou-Koon for responding to my financial and housing needs; to Louise Fahnbulleh and John Stamm for their day-to-day support – and to David Henry and his motor pool team without whom it would have all been impossible!

I want particularly to thank all Liberian groups and individuals who not only took the time to meet with me, but were also quite open – sharing both information and their personal perspectives.

Lastly, my thanks to each of you who is now reading this report and has an interest in how to address the needs of women and girls, and to ensure that they are able to benefit from assistance while also contributing fully to Liberia's future peace and prosperity. Thank you for making the effort to use gender analysis and promote gender equality in order to strengthen USAID's results in your own work.

The purposes of the following Gender Assessment are three-fold:

- First, to inform USAID's new strategy, ensuring that the particular needs of women and girls are understood and integrated into USAID's plans<sup>1</sup>;
- Second, to help USAID (and other donors) prevent duplication while seeking productive linkages; and
- Third, to build better understanding of how understanding gender-related roles, responsibilities and relations can improve the results of post-conflict interventions.

This assessment included four parts that are now reflected in this report: The first part describes the status and situations of women and girls in Liberia. The second maps what the Government of Liberia, civil society, international NGOs and donors (usually in partnership with Liberian government and civil society) are doing for and with women and girls, and contributing to gender equality. Part three turns inward, to USAID's work - reviewing USAID's sector-foci, as reflected in draft Strategy and selective information provided by USAID's teams to flag gender-related issues for the strategy and activities – both pitfalls and opportunities. Taking account of the first three sections that articulate needs, what is being done by others, and how USAID has opportunities to contribute through its mainstream programs, the fourth part makes some recommendation(s) for how USAID might direct resources in Liberia toward addressing the needs of women and girls.

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<sup>1</sup> A May 2009 Executive Message on Gender Integration from Acting Administrator, Alonzo Fulgham, states: "I want to remind all USAID staff of the critical importance of integrating gender considerations into all stages of planning, programming, and implementation of development assistance. This is not only a priority of the Administration, but also an essential part of effective and sustainable development."

The underlying conceptual foundations for this assessment stem from a three-part framework of the gender dimensions of post-conflict reconstruction<sup>2</sup>:

- (1) **“Women-in-development” (WID)**: Identifying the particular needs of women, adolescent girls and the girl-child in order to provide targeted, compensatory support.
- (2) **Gender integration** (Gender and Development and Gender Mainstreaming): Looking at mainstream programs to find ways in which understanding gender-based roles, responsibilities and relationships may remove obstacles or offer opportunities to enhance program results; and
- (3) **Transformative opportunities**: Exploring ways in which supporting women’s rights and contributions, and encouraging men and women to engage together in collaboration and with respect, may help to prevent a return to conditions preceding and often feeding into conflict, including respect for human rights, improved communications and cooperation, nonviolent mechanisms for dealing with conflict, and may foster a culture of non-violent dispute resolution, meritocracy, and respect for difference contributing to sustainable peace.

Though a statement of the obvious, the current conditions in Liberia with the legacies of years of conflict are complex. Yet there is also dynamism and determination – as evidenced by the many actors, ideas and programs relating just to women and gender alone. While it was not possible for this gender assessment to recognize, collect and report it all, this report should serve as a foundation from which it is hoped that USAID and its partners may add more pieces to the picture, deepen understanding, and contribute more effectively.

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<sup>2</sup> See “The Gender Dimensions of Post-Conflict Reconstruction: The Challenges in Development Aid” by Marcia Greenberg and Elaine Zuckerman in Making Peace Work: the Challenges of Social and Economic Reconstruction, edited by Tony Addison and Tilman Bruck, United Nations University-World Institute for Development Economics Research (2009), chapter 6, pp. 101-135.

## Part I: The Situation and Status of Women and Adolescent Girls

This section suggests key data and themes relating to women and adolescent girls as a foundation for considering how USAID's mainstream programs may address their needs and incorporate their contributions, as well as where USAID might target resources to support them. The information is drawn from the Liberian DHS, various gender assessments undertaken in the last several years (see box below), informants working with women and girls around Liberia, and documents they shared. For the most part, it is set forth within the four sector areas that USAID addresses: health, education, economic activities, and participation in governance and civil society.

It should be noted that the information suggests two themes: One, as reflected in the health and education sections, is the **needs and deficits** – where women need targeted support. This should be contrasted, however, with information regarding women's **strengths and contributions** (despite their needs and deficits), which are noteworthy within the economic and civil society sections.<sup>1</sup>

### Gender-Related Assessments<sup>2</sup>

- “Toward **Women's Economic Empowerment: A Gender Needs Assessment**”, World Bank (May, 2007)
- “Liberia: Gender Assessment of the **Agriculture Sector**”, World Bank (May 2007)
- “Opportunities for Women's Economic Empowerment in Liberia's **Infrastructure Program**” (World Bank, presentation in June, 2007 from rapid assessment)
- “Removing Barriers to **Enterprise Formalization** in Liberia: A Gender Analysis”, FIAS (Sept. 2007)
- “Republic of Liberia **Gender Profile**”, UNIFEM (Dec. 2007)
- UNDP/Sirleaf Foundation **survey of market women**
- **Girls' Education** Assessment, and why girls do not stay in school (see AED)
- “**Girls' Vulnerability** Assessment for Liberia Economic Empowerment of Adolescent Girls and Young Women Project”, World Bank (2008)
- Research on **Rape** (2008): Conducted in 15 counties (by UNMIL/OGA)
- Evaluation of **SEA** (2008): Did an assessment in 5 counties – and only reported 2 cases (knowing there are many more). People do not report, because regard earlier marriages as normal. (per UNICEF)
- For the Joint Programme on SGBV, the GoL is doing an assessment **in three counties** – Lofa, River Gee and Bomi (and next will be Gbapolu).
- FAWE and Oxfam did gender research on **girls' education in 7 communities** in Grand Mount,

<sup>1</sup> This is consistent with calls not to regard women just as victims, which suggests weakness and passivity; but instead to recognize women as assets for their families, communities and nations.

<sup>2</sup> Recognizing, of course, broader surveys or assessments that also generated data relating to women, including: the Comprehensive Food Security and Nutrition Survey (CFSNS) undertaken by the Ministry of Planning with the World Food Programme in 2006, the agricultural baseline survey of 2002, the civil service census (LISGIS) of 2005, Liberia's Human Development Report of 2006, the Millenium Development Goals report (2004), the UN country common assessment (2006) and the UN joint needs assessment (2004). (Summary taken from World Bank's gender assessment, p. 10)

Magibi, Montserrado and Bong counties (using “Reflect methodology”). Research included gender analyses, income/expenditure by sex)

- IRC has done **community-based gender analyses** with community involvement<sup>3</sup>
- CHF was in May 2009 just starting a **baseline economic activities needs-assessment in 6 counties** (Grand Bassa, Bong, Nimba, Lofa, Magibi, and Montserrado) to look at location and size, sales, customers, loans/access, attitudes, why in business, and job opportunities – aiming to report by July.

Two caveats should be kept in mind, however: First, **some of the data and information are still limited** – either not entirely complete or not entirely reliable. There are inconsistencies and sometimes conflicting accounts. Second, which partly explains the first, is the **multiple dimensions of diversity among women and girls in Liberia**. While some circumstances and characteristics apply to many women in Liberia, others attach according to the particulars such as location, local access to information and customary practices, age, and experiences during the years of conflict. Conditions for women in the southeast of Liberia obviously differ in some ways from those of women in Monrovia or in Islamic areas. Economic challenges for women of Americo-Liberian or Congo descent are clearly different from those for women whose families have come from and been isolated up-country.

### **One Account of Women’s Status in Southeastern Liberia**

Women’s status and girls’ education are particular problems in the South East. Women engage as prostitutes or in petty trade, but have few options. Women may be farmers while men drink palm wine. The culture is quite terrible there for women: men do not have respectful regard for women and many men are opposed to the President. (“In the Southeast, women are strong – and the like sex!”) With that culture, families prioritize boys’ education. But while suppression of women is bad, there is not much FGM in that area.

Finally, while data is an essential basis for understanding the situation, it requires analysis. This section of the report concludes, after setting forth the information gathered, with an attempt to “piece it all together”: seeking the forest for the trees to suggest what it all may mean in terms of efforts to improve the situation of women and girls themselves, and to enhance their ability to contribute to a peaceful and prosperous Liberia. This effort is that of only one person – and can certainly be improved by further discussion among the report’s readers.

## **What Data and Informants Tell Us**

### **FAMILY**

A starting point for understanding the situation of women and girls is to anticipate their lives within families – whether small or extended, healthy or dysfunctional – for this is the social base from which most women and girls live their lives. Family structure typically determines both their responsibilities/burdens and their support.

In Liberia, more than 3 out of 10 **households are female-headed** (FHHs) – 35% urban and 28.8% rural

<sup>3</sup> See Gertrude Musu Oberly at IRC for more information.

(DHS, p.9). In rural areas, it is men who tend to migrate to urban area (in 93% of households with migrants, it is males who leave) and “anecdotic evidence points to young males’ reluctance to go back to rural areas” (WB Gender and Agriculture, p. 11). This has significance in several ways. First, it may preclude traditional gender-based divisions of labor, giving women both nontraditional responsibilities and opportunities to engage in a range of activities and to be decision-makers.<sup>4</sup> But insofar as assistance is targeted to men with the assumption that they are heads-of-household, it may inadvertently exclude female-headed households. Similarly, activities that are structured for men – in places and times for them – may be problematic for women. Another factor is security in a society where women are often expected to have husbands or men to protect them, and where they are otherwise considered vulnerable.

Further, while the **average household size** is five, 11% are more than nine and 30% of households include foster children (38% urban and 27% rural). This is significant for several reasons: First, the numbers may increase women’s childcare and household burdens. At the same time, however, it may raise possibilities for one older child to undertake child care, in almost a communal way, while younger girls are then “free” to attend school. Second, to the extent that women are socially or culturally responsible in a household for providing food security or school fees, it increases their need for income-generating activities. Regarding girls and adolescent girls, 21% live with their mother, not father (just slightly fewer for boys) (DHS, pp. 9-10). In some cases, this may be significant in terms of protection, and for modeling a family structure.

## **HEALTH**

The data<sup>5</sup> regarding the health status of the women and girls is alarming at nearly every level – attributable to post-conflict destruction of institutions and knowledge, as well as their situation within families and communities. Some of the key data are the following:

**Fertility rates** in Liberia ranges from 6.5 in the lowest wealth quintile to 2.8 in the highest, from 6.2 in rural areas to 3.8 in urban, and from 6.0 for women with no education to 3.3 for those with secondary education or more. The good news, however, is that there is “some postponement of first births within the younger cohorts of mothers.” (DHS, p. 53) Fertility rates are critical for women for several reasons: Because once an adolescent girl has a child, she is most likely to leave school (and 26% of adolescent girls have had a birth while 6% were pregnant with the first child when surveyed, meaning that just under one-third of girls ages 15-19 have begun child-rearing, DHS p. 54); because each birth in a country with a destroyed health infrastructure faces health complications (see maternal mortality below); and because the more children for whom a mother is responsible, the more food and income she must generate to support them (and ideally, school fees).

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<sup>4</sup> The World Bank’s Gender and Agriculture assessment makes an important point with which I would very much agree: “If this trend [of more male migration and reluctance to return to rural areas] is confirmed, absence of men may have profound implications for the organization of social and economic life in rural areas, which should be analyzed carefully in the design of sector strategies.” p. 11 Failure to reach rural areas may not be purposeful discrimination against women, but it may be another “gender neutral” policy that has gender impacts – precluding women left behind from having opportunities to escape extreme poverty and to provide for their families.

<sup>5</sup> Several caveats regarding data: First it is often not available or still quite weak. Second, as the situation is constantly dynamic, data reflect the time at which they were collected with possibilities for subsequent improvements and setbacks. Third, there are consequently contradictions among sources. Hence what is cited from the DHS of (year) may differ from, for example, what is taken from the World Bank’s gender assessment of 2007, or UNIFEM’s gender profile of (date).

Age cohort	% whose first birth by age 15
15-19	2.8%
20-24	5.9%
25-29	6.5%
30-34	8,3%
35-39	8.3%
40-44	11.0%
45 and over	8.1%

**Maternal health** is a major issue in Liberia, where maternal mortality is “one of the highest in the world”<sup>6</sup> – and has increased since the end of the conflict. Factors include the age and health of mothers, i.e. small bodies from poor nutrition, and lack of access to proper healthcare: According to the DHS, 48% of women become pregnant by age 18, and the unmet need for family planning exceeds 60%. For mothers ages 15-19, there is a 14% maternal mortality rate. There is also a lack of emergency obstetric care and a lack of awareness. Most deliveries are therefore by unskilled birth attendants.

Yet **logistics and infrastructure** are a huge problem. Health professionals note that for all that is being done in Montserrado County (not to say that it is enough), services at health facilities rarely accessible for rural women: People do not have cars, and only rarely motorbikes, with which to reach clinics (never-mind hospitals) – and travel is near impossible at night or in the rain. Further, gender roles and practices can be huge problems: women are often unable to leave their villages to travel to clinics without the approval of their husbands and some monetary support.

A major issue is access to healthcare facilities and expertise. In a county of approximately 3.5 million people, there are reportedly about 30 physicians in total of whom most are in/near Monrovia – with only one OB/GYN.<sup>7</sup> Thirty-one percent or less of mothers in the regions give birth in a health facility, and 70% in Monrovia. Sixty-four percent of mothers with some secondary education have their babies in a health facility a compared with 28% of uneducated mothers.

But formal health facilities are often not welcoming or comfortable services for women. Procedures like waiting in line or taking a number, health workers who are not friendly (unhappy, perhaps, with conditions, low salaries (or no salaries)). In Monrovia, some people prefer a traditional birth attendant to going to JFK hospital. In addition, women often prefer the help of a woman, whether a TBA or midwife, rather than a professional male – both because they may get emotional understanding and support from a woman and because Liberian culture often means that male health workers treat women poorly. There is therefore a high prevalence of maternal mortality and complications in the field because of the lack of infrastructure and support.

There is reportedly a plan to train medical midwives to do caesarean sections – unusual, but if women will die for lack of care, arguably worth some greater risks.<sup>8</sup> Beyond the risk of death, early pregnancy

<sup>6</sup> The reported estimate from the 2007 DHS was 994/100,000 but UNICEF reports an “adjusted rate” of 1200.

<sup>7</sup> Reported by Dr. Pam Branning, visiting OB/GYN from Ashville, NC who spent 3 weeks in the field.

<sup>8</sup> Apparently Edna Johnson, from the University of Connecticut, has started a midwifery school at Lutheran Curan Hospital:

and the incidence of FGC lead to fistula and other complications. Ninety percent of fistulas are repairable. Yet for every fistula treated in Liberia, 200 are waiting 24 hours/day – it would take 20 years to fix all the existing fistulas. In Addis Ababa, there is a 6 weeks basic and 6 weeks advanced training for those who already have a medical degree to learn to treat fistulas.

According to the UNFPA, implementing partners and donors have not yet touched the issue of FGC in Liberia (and also, they said, in Sierra Leone).

Regarding **water and sanitation**, “Women are disproportionately more likely than men to collect drinking water. In half of households, adult women usually get water, as compared with 11% of men.” (DHS, p. 21)

**Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV)** is a major health issue for women and girls in Liberia. The World Health Organization’s 2005 survey of 1,216 women in 4 counties showed that “81.6% of women reported having experienced one or multiple acts of violence during and after the conflict; between 25 and 74 experienced any type of sexual aggression (pending on the act) and 34.3 percent reported domestic violence from their husbands or partners” (WB Gender and Agriculture, p. 12) There are, of course, ongoing health effects of violence experienced during the war. Multiple assessments report on how widespread and how almost unimaginably brutal the violence was – leaving ongoing physical and emotional symptoms and pain.<sup>9</sup> The further issue, however, is continued SGBV – from rape by strangers to rape and violence within families. For women and girls, the threat of violence impedes their movement for economic, educational and civic activities; while requiring time and attention to be vigilant and protected. When the threat becomes real, the results are physical (including an ever-growing possibility of HIV/AIDs and other STI infections) and psycho-social.

In one discussion with Liberians about the apparently increased incidence of rape, a man and woman who work actively with a CSO throughout Liberia offered their thoughts: First, they think that the number of rapes has not increased, but knowledge of them has. The UN sponsored a large outdoor gathering at the Samuel Doe Sports Arena where people heard about it. It is “all out now, no longer taboo.” At the same time, they recognize that a breakdown in families has left many children without guidance: mothers are not available and “big boys exploit” the younger one. At the same time, they say that “Liberia is becoming a ‘dump-site’”: along the street there are pornographic films readily available – making some practices seem part of “modern life”. Finally, however, they also acknowledged the belief that “big men” may increase their luck and power to win elections if they have sex with a virgin. Then, even if they are caught, they have enough resources to buy off the courts (members of juries in particular). (See discussion below of how women in their Peace Huts are gathering evidence and pursuing cases dropped by the formal system.)

While there may be some shift in programmatic focus from immediate post-conflict to development modalities, the impacts of SGBV continue to demand specialized attention within otherwise “normal” programming.

**HIV/AIDS** is an issue for women in Liberia as it is elsewhere. With the high incidence of gender-based violence and “transactional sex”, women are more often exposed to the risks. Usually having less power in the course of sexual relations, women are often unable to ensure the use of protection.

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06-53-44-53.

<sup>9</sup> For some of the many graphic reports, see WONGOSOL’s recent report from its TRC-oriented “Community Dialogue and Reconciliation Meetings”, page 3-4 (May 2009)

And once they are ill, the stigma of HIV/AIDS along with the expectation that they are the caretakers, places burdens on those women who are well. There is a Network of Women living with HIV/AIDS, the Liberia Women Empowerment Network (LIWEN).

## **EDUCATION**

**Levels of education and literacy** in Liberia are extremely low for everyone, but substantially worse for females than males. Fifty-six percent of females and 39% of males have *never attended ANY school*. In the northwestern areas of Liberia, 70% of females have no education at all.<sup>10</sup> Twenty-five percent of females and 26% of males have only a primary education. And the 29% of urban women who have attended some secondary school contrasts with only six percent of rural women. “Urban residents tend to be considerably more educated than their rural counterparts.” (DHS, p. 11) The median number of years of school is 5.3 for urban women *and 0 for rural women*. Whereas 45.8% of urban women have secondary education or higher (compared with 70.7% for men), it is 10.4% of rural women (and 37.4% of men).

The age breakdowns for those education data are critical, however. Among older women, some had the opportunity for education before the 14 years of conflict; young women who now have responsibilities for child-bearing and rearing and for income generation are those whose education way most seriously and consistently interrupted by conflict; and small girls should be those who now have increasingly consistent opportunities to attend school and remain beyond the primary level. Thus for purposes of social and economic development, and for achieving programmatic results, planners must anticipate a fundamental lack of cognitive skills, literacy/numeracy, and basic learning and information (as will be the case for many boys/men, as well, but fewer).

Regarding literacy, 41% of women, contrasted with 70% of men, are literate – and for ages 45-49, the literacy rates are 17% for women and 62% for men, but for adolescents ages 15-19, are 58% for women and 73% for men. (DHS, p. 32) Hence 38% of urban and 72.8% of rural women cannot read at all (to which one may add 9.7% urban and 11.5% rural who are only able to read part of a sentence.) (DHS, p. 33).

In the southeast of Liberia, young women are nearly all teenagers with babies – and often pregnant already, as well. The long-term issues are that they forego education and empowerment. Their lives are forever affected.

### **Educational Experiences May Have Negative Gender Impacts, As Well: An Example of Problematic Teaching Attitudes**

A visitor goes to a classroom. While she is there, the teacher says, “Girls! Stand up! Now everyone notice how low the skirt waists are!” (Though they have blouses tucked in, and no skin is showing.) The teacher then addresses the boys: “Boys: What do you think of their clothes?” The visitor says: “Stop this – there is no reason to hear from the boys. It is not their business to tell the girls how to dress!”

**Traditional Sources of Life Skills Education:** Young people gain education and learning not just from schools, but also from families and communities. In Liberia, education for girls and boys is not

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10 Compare with DHS p. 31: In Northwestern region, 6% of women and 39% of men have no schooling at all.

always found within formal or modern educational facilities. Many receive some education, particularly relating to life skills, in **“bush schools”**: the *Poro* for young men and *Sande* for young women. The bush schools traditionally lasted as long as 2 years, and may now be 3 months or more. To the extent that what takes place within them is supposed to be secret, information is difficult to obtain. Yet some information has been shared: The *Sande* are where girls undergo FGC; “join, bond and gain identity”, engage in dance and recreation, and are “prepared for marriage.” There are also rituals with blood that both inculcate fear. Those who participate in the *Sande* feel some superiority, and have extra powers (what we might, ironically, call “confidence-building” or leadership skills!) In some circumstances in a village, only they are allowed to come out of their homes. The leader of a *Sande* is a *Zoe*, who is believed to have extra, supernatural powers, and wield substantial power – over the young women and in the community. The *Zoe* may arrange marriage – of girls ages 13 or 14, to rich, older men. As Caroline Bledsoe suggests, the marriage connections are how to accumulate “wealth in people” – people who will provide support when in need, who are loyal connections. And in an odd modern twist, one informant reported that some families want to ensure their daughters are married early as a means of preventing prostitution.

How prevalent or powerful these schools are today is unclear – and likely inconsistent. As there is more awareness of women’s opportunities and some of the harmful consequences of the *Sande*, there are more women opposed to the tradition. Evidently, however, there has been bush school available to those living in Monrovia somewhere near the airport. Yet they are potentially very important for three reasons: First, they were in the past critical and powerful sources of information regarding health and gender roles. Second, for girls they would be preparation for their early marriage – often immediately upon returning from the schools. Third, the *Sande* would apparently establish leadership and loyalties to older women that would influence the decisions and knowledge of younger women.<sup>11</sup> Fourth, absent modern modifications, they can take young girls out of formal schools, interfering with their education. But on the positive side, if the *Sande* are still used by their leaders are open to new knowledge and seeking to do well for the young women in their community, they may be an effective way to provide new, accurate health information – and the *Poro* may be ways to introduce to young men some different attitudes toward women.

Finding **women to be teachers in Liberia** is another huge struggle. The lack of women teachers stems from the tendency for young women to drop out – because they are pregnant, because they are married young when leaving the *Sande*, because schools are not safe, etc. At this point, only about 10% of teachers are female. It is difficult to find qualified female teachers – but also difficult to train others up. The question within the Ministry of Education is how to attract more females. There is a huge old list of teachers, and trying to regularize who is actually teaching. Not have many women because the salaries are very low and because are more educated men in Liberia (resulting from historic disparities of education (less for girls) and teenage pregnancy causing and girls to drop-out). Another problem is that the teacher training program can require some weeks away from home – without childcare for the trainees’ children and difficulties leaving home if husbands are jealous or suspicious. Compare with the police approach: the Ministry of Education and Stella Maria signed a contract for special classes so that young women will have the requisite skills. Approximately 100 girls participate.

Now IRC and the MoE have started going to communities to find women to join training – but find that they do not meet the criteria if the WAEC (West Africa Education Certificate) is required. There are, however, some women who have completed high school without the WAEC, who may be tutors – and in one remote area, the woman principal and the teachers all have only a high school education. One

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<sup>11</sup> Women and Marriage in Kpelle Society, Caroline Bledsoe, Stanford University Press, 1980

possibility is to have those without the WAEC work with the younger children while the “provisional teacher” receives training for the WAEC. But location is an issue – as the provisional teacher must be in a larger town where she can get some education at the same time, and advance for herself. And if the teacher is Mandingo, it is difficult for her to go with her child(ren) to another town. In two communities, they have lights for evening classes; in larger towns there may be education, but no housing with security. A woman willing to become a teacher is vulnerable if on her own in a strange community, needing food and security or else exploited by the local men. Another alternative is that IRC has been recruiting teachers in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Ghana – but there are payment problems as some teachers are not yet on the MoE payroll, and say that they will quit if not paid by June.

#### **School for Market Women’s Children**

Beyond formal schools, there are civic efforts to establish some possibilities for children, as is happened about a year ago at the Rally Town Market. One market woman had a business for about eight years selling such items as oil, onions, and magit cubes. Last year, she decided to establish a school where there upstairs at the market were there are 200 students, ages 2-5, of whom 85% are children of market women. Just registered with the Ministry of Education, the school has 12 teachers who were trained by the National Adult Educators of Liberia (providing education for market women, but also a 3 month course for teachers) and are virtually volunteers – paid \$L 1,500 /month.

### **ECONOMIC STATUS AND ACTIVITIES**

According to the PRS, 63.8% of Liberians live below the poverty line and 48% in extreme poverty (1.7 and 1.3 million people respectively) – many of them women and girls. To address women’s economic status, there is both access to formal employment and a whole range of informal economic activities – from informal sector trade and businesses, to agriculture. Understanding the economic activities of women and men must start with attention to what “employment” data mean: recognizing the difference between work in the formal and informal sectors, between services and trade in urban areas and in agriculture, and between that which is cash-generating or subsistence and barter-oriented. Thus while many quote the statistic that unemployment in Liberia is 85%, this does not include those who are “self-employed” as farmers - who have livelihoods but are officially unemployed.<sup>12</sup> The DHS reports that 59% of women and 78% of men are currently “employed”, and that “rural women and men are more likely to be currently employed than urban resident.” (DHS, p. 37)

Regarding occupations, 55% of women and 53% of men are in agricultural occupations, and 37% of women and 21% in sales or services. Only 11% of all working men are in “skilled manual jobs”, for which women are a much lower percent. Only 3% of employed women (and 8% of employed men) are in professional, technical or managerial fields. (DHS, p. 40) The World Bank rapid infrastructure assessment states that women’s employment in the formal sector is 2% of the total employed. According to the LISGIS, women are only 23.7% of total public sector employees – but 50.6% of those women are in secretarial and clerical jobs, 16.4% in teaching and 8.1% in caretaking.<sup>13</sup> The World

<sup>12</sup> From the World Bank’s Gender Assessment. If I understood correctly, an assessment in September will verify data and, with ILO technical assistance, develop database capacity within the Ministry of Labor.

<sup>13</sup> The World Bank’s report “Toward Women’s Economic Empowerment: Gender Needs Assessment” is full of relevant and helpful information – but it does not make sense for this report to repeat it all, and the report that I read says: “Draft for Discussion: Do not Circulate or Quote”! Insofar as it reports from other data, such as the LISGIS, I have relied on it. Anyone focused on women’s economic empowerment in Liberia should really read the full report.

Bank has opined: “Overall, gender segregation in the labor market causes a critical mismatch between women’s occupations and the country’s drivers of growth. Thus, far from decreasing, gender inequalities in the labor market in Liberia are likely to increase in the short and medium term.”

As a starting point, one informant suggested that women’s skills or businesses currently include: selling food (e.g. oil, okra, cassava and rice), selling cooked food including bakeries, selling clothes, running a small shop, selling water, and seamstresses. The World Bank infrastructure assessment found that women did 17% of earthwork, 13% of de-shading, 13% of road brushing, and 35% of roadside brushing – and made up 15-20% of unskilled and 1.4% of skilled workers. A repeated theme is women’s need for skills training – recognizing, still, the high levels of illiteracy. One local organization is working with women on soap-making, tie-dyeing, weaving (which in the past was done by men), baking, sewing and carpentry. The World Bank notes that programs “fail to promote women’s involvement in new economic niches as they focus on traditional areas of women’s involvement like tailoring, tie and dye, cake making, etc. for which market opportunities are not necessarily buoyant.” There are also, however, examples of training both women and men in metal working – both through WOCAD and within USAID’s LCIP apprenticeship training.

When women do not have skills, and lack economic opportunities, they turn to what limited options they can find. One informant noted the number of girls in urban areas who, he said, are “idle and seek activities”, meaning that they may be prostitutes or be “used” for such illicit activities as trafficking drugs. He noted the number of adolescent girls who are without families and not in school – so going into “other things” as a survival strategy. This often amounts to “sex for ...”, when there is a market from peacekeepers and the international community (as well as Liberians with some resources). Another informant suggested that when young women do not have employment opportunities, they depend on men – a series of boyfriends who may support them even if it is while they are finishing school. But with no skills, young women have little opportunity for economic independence – or to get their first jobs. The UN’s Joint Programme on Women’s Economic Empowerment states: “There is a linkage between the lack of women’s productive work or the availability of decent work, which increases the risk of food insecurity and an increased risk of sexual exploitation.” (UN JP WEE, p.7)

### *Agriculture, Market Women and Land Tenure*

Many women are working hard, gradually making progress, and supporting their families – but outside the formal market, typically in agriculture and/or as market women. Women in Liberia are 53% of the agricultural labor force and produce 60 percent of agricultural output.<sup>14</sup> With regard to food crops, women contribute approximately 42.5% of the labor compared with 35.3% by men; but with regard to cash crops, women do 31.5% of labor compared with 48.5% by men (CFNS). Fifty percent of women engage in agricultural processing activities as compared with 25% of men. In agriculture, the crops that women cultivate and the tasks for which they are responsible vary around the country. Although women are major economic actors, there are approximately 103 agriculture extension agents, of which 18 are “home extension agents” expected to work with women. While women are 86% of micro-credit borrowers in greater Monrovia, micro-credit facilities are “almost non-existent in rural areas.” (UNDP, 2006)

Once they have produced and are ready to sell, women in agriculture are not alone. Rural women work in trade, and “carry out 80% of trading activities in rural areas and play a vital role in linking rural and

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<sup>14</sup> Ministry of Agriculture 2001 baseline survey and 2006 Statement of Policy Intent for Agriculture, as quoted in World Bank “Resource Pack”, p. 10.

urban markets through their informal networks.”<sup>15</sup> The Association of Market Women (AMW) is 36 years old, enacted into law in April 1978 and continuing throughout the conflict. There are approximately 15,000 members (of whom 11,500 are women). The organization has six executive members (President, VP/Administration, VP/Operations, Secretary General, Comptroller and Business Manager), along with county superintendents and local market representatives. There are workshops for superintendents – about leading, serving, and managing funds. They serve as liaisons with NGOs to direct market women to microfinance- which has benefited many of the market women. There is a security department (in Monrovia) that watches the market 24 hours/day and is on the payroll, a sanitation department that cleans the markets (also paid, and work is done by men or women), and a supervisory department. To belong, each woman pays small dues of \$L 1,500 per year. The AMW President is Ma Lusu and its Secretary General is Washington Tarbeh.

Going forward, the AMW needs to improve market structures – for which the Sirleaf Foundation will do some, but the need is much greater. They also need to establish some services, such as trash removal (for which UNDP has been helping, but the AMW pays for municipal trash service) and initiatives for improved sanitation. Many of the markets need generators – as without refrigeration, women must sell at low prices at the end of the day to prevent total loss of perishable foods. There is very little processing – be it cassava to farina or fufu, eldows to starch, potatoes, or greens, tomatoes or oranges. Regarding transport, there is a union – and the MWA negotiates with them, with joking, laughing and pretty good relations. The key needs are: roads, microfinance, market structure materials, and training (or exchange of experience among market women). Finally, they need childcare for market women’s children – some cost-sharing support for schools for the little children.

**Gender issues in the Liberia Statement of Policy Intent for Agriculture**  
(according to the World Bank Gender and Agriculture Assessment, p. 15)

“The Agriculture Policy Intent, which represents current thinking about the future reform of the agriculture sector, identifies women (and youth) as key groups to revitalize the rural economy and achieve rural development. One of the five principles which will guide the reform explicitly refers to “gender and youth sensitive development, particularly empowering women and creating incentives for youth (both girls and boys) for involvement in agricultural and rural development.” The policy intent recognizes women’s role in the production of food crops, and calls attention over gender specific obstacles that women face to carry out their productive functions in rural areas, particularly regarding gender discrimination in access to land. It proposes targeting rural programs and policies to female farmers in the context of achieving food security objectives.”

For individual women who are in agriculture – whether they grow for subsistence or for the markets, the constraints include small amounts of capital (sometimes accumulated through local “*susus*” or savings groups, from which 12 to 56% of rural women, depending on the region, may borrow) **and security of land tenure**. According to statutory law, women have full rights to own and inherit real property (land). The 2003 inheritance law grants wives the right to a third of their husbands’ property, both sons and daughters have equal rights to inherit land, and a married woman may hold the property that she brings to marriage. If a woman is educated and knowledgeable, she knows her rights and

<sup>15</sup> World Bank Gender Assessment, p. 4.

keeps her land. Legally, therefore, women are not disadvantaged and some of the obstacles arise from class rather than sex: obstacles to ownership arise for women, but also for men.<sup>16</sup>

For many, land tenure is not simply about ownership because of customary rights and communal use (as compared with ownership). Primary access to land is through customary tenure – by which one has access to land through membership in a kin group, and individuals use various kin relationships (through father, mother, husband or wife) to gain access. There is limited data about this – and it is important to assess by asking questions locally. The World Bank’s Gender and Agriculture assessment (p. 6-7) reports that

... community norms and arrangements continue to restrict women’s access to land in Liberia, despite advances in legislation. Community leaders, most of them men, have the right to grant communal land to individuals on a yearly basis for cultivation, and the responsibility for settling land disputes. Women report community leaders’ systematic preference for men in the process of granting land. The reason most commonly reported during community discussions for women’s lack of access to and was that “women are strangers to the community and tradition forbids them to inherit land”, pointing out that women lose their informal right to land when they marry out of their community.

Nevertheless, a woman who is single, widowed or divorced may often be at a disadvantage. The situations of widows often hinge on whether she had children with the man who owned their land. Family conflicts over land sometimes involve women, but may involve various members. Note, also, that land requires labor – and sometimes male labor – which can be a problem for a single woman who has to hire labor, for which she needs cash.<sup>17</sup>

When access to land is restricted and women are disadvantaged, their problems are often as much attributed to illiteracy and not knowing the law, as to their sex – which calls for more literacy and legal literacy programs for women. There are areas where there are pressures on limited land, and it is not known whether women have a harder time with access than men. An example of how both women and men have difficulty with access to land is that most land is privately owned – by Americo-Liberians or Congo in or near Montserrado, by local elite, by Firestone near roads, etc. And when owners are willing to transfer rights to use their land, they want arrangement for large parcels, not little ones; and often they do not like trees or more permanent growth on the land.

### *Women as Business Owners and Entrepreneurs*

Liberian women are “dynamic entrepreneurs, accounting for 77 percent of self-employment in urban areas.” Yet according to a September 2007 gender analysis by the “Foreign Investment Analysis Service” (FIAS) managed by the IFC, MIGA and the World Bank, although women and men agree that formal businesses are in advantageous positions women are much more likely to own completely informal firms (60% compared with 45% for men). This is significant not only for the women owners,

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<sup>16</sup> This information was provided by Jeannette Carter who confirmed that there is no data, and there has not been any assessment or report, about gender or women and land tenure throughout Liberia. The May 2007 World Bank Gender Assessment recommended “an assessment of land issues to review the complex dynamics that link gender and land reform in Liberia” – but I am not aware that anyone has yet undertaken one.

<sup>17</sup> Note that the LCIP project worked with some widows owning rubber farms, and helped them arrange contracts with men to work their land.

but for employment purposes as women business owners employ a more gender-balanced workforce but formal businesses increase employment 32% as compared with only 19% of informal business. What is significant for the future is the barriers that prevent women from formalizing their businesses: While “perceptual barriers to engaging in the formalization process, and a widespread lack of knowledge about the process” affect men and women alike, they are substantial for women. And yet beyond those barriers, women report “gender-based experiential differences”, such as “being victimized by or receiving unfair treatment from licensing officials.” (p. 9-10). In particular, women report that cannot meet all the requirements for formalization (37% of women compared with 16% of men). Often women lack the requisite license or certification – and “fully 44% of women who have not gotten a product license cite [misuse of power by local administrations or officers] as a reason” (compared with 21% of men. Additional impediments for women include access to financing, particularly when their businesses are not formalized, access to business associations (24% of women overall compared with 34% of men – but disparities as high as 18% compared with 44% in the north).

### **GOVERNANCE, CIVIL SOCIETY, POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND RULE OF LAW**

In this sector, the focus may be on both deficits, where women are not participating, and on women’s contributions – in various branches and levels of government, as well as civil society. Within the **executive branch**, there is obviously the president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. While her presidency alone does not necessarily ensure a broader base of women’s presence in decision-making (see, e.g., Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan or women from prominent families heading Angolan ministries), she has made use of her visibility and concerns for women to direct world attention and resources toward women’s needs and potential.

Stemming from that, Liberia’s Ministry of Gender and Development (MoG&D) has an extraordinary level of human resources, funding, and political support. The Ministry also has representatives in each county who are to submit regular reports. Some of their key issues are access to justice (and the women and child protection unit), security for women, seeds for women farmers, making use of AGOA, adult literacy, electricity (for time-saving machines and for light for night learning), know-how and equipment for added value to agriculture products and fisheries. Sector ministries also have gender focal points serving as gender advisors and connecting with the MoG&D – though their capacity and effectiveness surely are still limited.

As of 2006 (the UN CCA), women’s participation in government was 14% in the legislature, 31% in the Cabinet and 33% of county superintendents. Within the legislative branch, there is the **Women’s Legislative Caucus (WLC)**. Founded in 2006, it has 14 members (5 senators and 9 representatives). The members have a draft strategic plan and workplan. They define their key challenges as inadequate networking and apathy of its members, in adequate staffing for full-time activities, lack of an operational budget and lack of “database to support WLC research and information dissemination.”<sup>18</sup> The WLC’s four strategic issues are (1) strengthening its capacities, (2) enhancing women’s economic empowerment and participation in national and local leadership positions, (3) Facilitating advocacy and judicial processes for women and child rights, protection and development, and (4) Ensuing adoption of an “engendered budgeting process” in Liberia. Members are, however, getting skills training like public speaking, and are being prepared to participate in other committees. The members reportedly need more capacity – for meeting, organization and building coalitions (with men). There are also competing demands and approaches between the Executive (Ministry of Gender & Development) and the Legislative (WLC). The challenge is how the WLC will work with the MoG&D and with civil

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<sup>18</sup> See Women Legislative Caucus of Liberia, Strategic Plan 2008-2011.

society.

In a discussion about the MoG&D and its partners, the Women's Legislative Caucus (WLC) and civil society organizations (CSOs), the Minister noted her two concerns: that the WLC must focus on connecting with and representing constituents, and that CSOs need to assess their own governance, leadership and accountability. (NB: The Minister wants to be kept fully informed of projects focused on women or gender!)

**Women in civil society:** WONGOSOL is an umbrella organization for women's CSOs, and has nearly 60 member organizations. UNMIL's Office of the Gender Advisor helped to establish it – and it goes beyond a personality or briefcase organization to working hard at its mandate. They have recently developed a new strategy and action plan, and have a list of member organizations (of which copies were left with Louise). They have had institutional support from UNMIL/OGA in 2005-06, funding from the Global Fund for Women for developing their strategic plan, the African Women's Development Foundation and UNIFEM, and partner with ActionAID/Liberia, OSIWA and ICTJ on their TRC project. With UNMIL/OGA, they have trained immigration offices on gender, and have trained CHF staff and their own members about human rights, leadership and gender. WONGOSOL sees itself not as competition for government, but to complement – and to play a watchdog function. The members of WONGOSOL vary, from WIPNET to CBOs in rural areas, some more sophisticated than others.<sup>19</sup>

Regarding the situation of women and girls in Liberia, they point out that it is not just about Presidential leadership – that although the President may help with political will and resources, women are seriously marginalized and subject to discrimination. Women in civil society are highly committed – focused on issues whether they receive any pay or not. The women's CSOs are new, however, and need capacity building. WONGOSOL is looking to the Global Fund for Women to train women's CSOs, 25 women to become TOTs for others. They are committed to reaching men, as there is a “bad clash” as women gain power and men feel undermined and threatened.

**Women and information/media:** In terms of civic education (and preparations for the electoral process), receipt of accurate information is critical.<sup>20</sup> It is thus important to recognize the extent to which women are exposed to mass media. According to the DHS, 61.8% of rural women and 21% of urban women (though 18.6% in Monrovia, where 72.6% listen to radio) are exposed to “no media”, meaning newspapers, television and radio. Given that illiteracy precludes effective reach of newspapers, and electricity is needed for television, radio is often the “best bet” among “modern”/mass media. “Forty-nine percent of women and 73% of men listen to radio once a week.” Yet where as 28% of male-headed households have access to radios, only 15% of female headed households have access. (WB Agriculture, p. 9) Bottom line is that almost half of women (45%) and nearly a quarter of men (23%) have no access to mass media. (DHS, p. 35) On the other side, however, UNIFEM has supported establishment of a women's radio station: Liberia Women Democracy Radio, and has worked with LIWOMAC, Liberia Women in Media Action Committee.

**Women and elections:** According to the Minister of G&D, women were a huge force in the last elections. Last time, voter registration in week one was 80,000, but only 15% were women. For week

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<sup>19</sup> See list of members, left with the DG team. Note, too, that WONGOSOL's Executive Director, Cerue Garlo, said she would very much like a contact person at USAID – as she regularly advises the US Embassy of events, but does not know how to provide information to USAID.

<sup>20</sup> It is also important, of course, for receiving messages and information relating to health, sanitation, and access to formal legal protection.

two, they mobilized women to register – with \$2,700 from Search for Common Ground to rent cars and food (though they slept in cars and homes ...). They recorded radio messages, but also recognized that registration sites were too far from where women were – in the markets. The UNMIL OGA pointed out that they went to markets with mobile registration points. In the end, 51% of registered voters were women. The Minister suggested that women should be similarly mobilized for the upcoming elections. WIPNET reports that in 2005 they saw a need for civic education, and mobilized about 1,000 women as volunteers on buses to go to markets and even into the field. They plan to do similarly for the upcoming elections, but want to partner. This is perhaps the strongest example of where women are not necessarily marginalized, but rather should be regarded as invaluable assets.

While national governance and elections are important and will very much influence the lives of average women, it is also important to recall that for many women, “political” issues are not played out within formal political parties and systems, but instead within their local communities. It is that decision-making that most affects their lives – as well as being a training ground for more public or formal political participation. For example, WOCAD reports that in Cape Mount, where they have provided human rights training and economic skills, women want to be Paramount Chief. There is already one woman Paramount Chief, and from an upcoming election, there may be another.

**Women and the rule-of-law:** One way to look at legal systems is to recognize the need for three components: (1) the substantive, or the laws themselves, (2) the institutional, such as courts and investigators and police, and (3) the culture, i.e. whether people typically trust and turn to the formal, state-based legal system. Each component poses different challenges for women – particularly in countries with limited infrastructure, difficulties of access, cultural constraints and gender biases, and the possibility of local or traditional mechanisms for resolving disputes and gaining protection.

In Liberia, there has been a very strong push for both the substantive, passing laws protecting women. With substantial pressure from the **Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia (AFELL)** and others, the Government of Liberia has invested in drafting laws that protect women’s rights (such as the inheritance law and rape law).

#### Key Policies, Plans and Laws

- The Gender and Development Act (2001) establishing and defining the mandate for the Ministry of Gender and Development
- Anti-Rape Law (Rape Amendment Act 2006)
- Inheritance Law (Act to Govern the Devolution of Estates and Establish the Rights of Inheritance for Spouse of Both Statutory and Customary Marriages 2003)
- Act to Ratify the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (approved Dec. 2005)
- National Action Plan for 1325 (2009)
- GBV Plan of Action (2006-2011)
- “Fairness Law” (still being debated in Legislature): Re women in political parties
- National Gender Policy (not yet completed)

Resources have also gone into the institutional, both establishing units and courts charged with

protecting women and seeking to train their personnel to prevent gender bias. Two years ago, UNDP paid AFELL to prosecute SGBV. After a while, however, this was not sustainable, and had to become the government's responsibility. Though the AFELL lawyers temporarily played the prosecutors role, there is now the court for SGBV, and they say it is up to the government (not volunteer women lawyers) to make it work. There is now a new unit, and the director is from AFELL.<sup>21</sup> The prosecution department includes a roving unit, and they are working to establish county attorneys as well. The Peace-building Fund, with UNDP/Liberia, is supporting defense counsel. Yet most recognize that while most functioning courts are in Monrovia, protecting women's rights requires reach outside. At the same time, the Ministry of Justice has problems of staffing and capacity.

**AFELL** is a professional organization of lawyers with 48 members of whom 37 are active (including 5 recent graduates who did externships while in law school). They focus on getting laws for women passed – and then disseminating information. They simplify the laws, put them into local languages and bring them to local people – engaging them so they understand and trying also to understand their perspectives. They produced a poster about the steps for reporting a rape and using the legal system – and their 500 copies were snatched up so they have printed 1000 more.

AFELL also runs a legal aid clinic in Monrovia that provides legal advice, services and mediation or alternative dispute resolution (ADR) instead of long drawn out cases.<sup>22</sup> Rape survivors often go directly to them – and they can have women waiting at 7:30 for the doors to open, and a full house in the late afternoon. But most of their members have paid jobs and are employed – and so they are trying to get more recent women graduates placed with the Ministry of Justice or Ministry of State. They now have a male component as well – as women's rights issues are men's issues, too. They have done some training with all men, looking to get at the root causes; and have distributed questionnaires, and need to analyze men's responses – about why such SGBV, and what can do about rape.

“Gender is not just about women. It's about both sexes, having to work together. Build women up to work with men. Men can even help us to build up women. We need them to help us!”

For the average woman, however – whether in Monrovia or in remote areas lacking infrastructure and courts – she cannot depend on the formal legal system to address her immediate problems. As a matter of “legal culture”, she will habitually look for recourse elsewhere. Whether the legal system is up and functional and broadly accessible in five years or in fifteen years, she needs help *now*! Just as the young woman with a difficult pregnancy cannot wait for Liberia to have more OB/GYNs, the woman with a property dispute or an abusive husband cannot wait for the courts. One approach is to train paralegals to connect women to the court system. Some projects on paralegals have been initiated, and are reported in Part II of this report, in the mapping section on “who is doing what”.

Yet just as many women feel more comfortable with a traditional birth attendant who understands them than in a hospital or clinic that seems to cold and foreign, many women will not yet turn to courts – even if physically and financially accessible. There are, however, both traditional and innovative alternatives – and they are what often have meaning for many Liberian women. Since 2004, WIPNET has been establishing “Peace Huts” to address disputes, cases of rape or murder or domestic violence. WIPNET has 19 branches in 8 counties (while in the process of establishing a branch in the Southeast), including one in Montserrado near the airfield. WIPNET trains women in peacebuilding, after which

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<sup>21</sup> I was not able to meet with her, as she was not in Liberia during the time that I was there.

<sup>22</sup> Reportedly, the Ministry of G&D is also doing mediation clinics?!

they choose one of their group to serve as coordinator of their Peace Hut. They also include the Paramount Chief in their initial training. From 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., women are there in the Palava Hut – and if a case comes to them, they call the husband for discussion. If they cannot solve a problem, they then refer it to the chief. The women in the hut are already women leaders, but they also gain stature and leadership experience through the process. This practice has been changing the culture of silence, leading to more training and dialogue, and to more discussion. Some also make crafts while in the huts, and others gather for group farming, as a cooperative. WIPNET arranges exchange visits by which women from Nimba, for example, go to Bong County to share their experience. WIPNET representatives report that 19 branches are not enough, and that many villages want to join.

At the same time, WIPNET recognizes the possibilities and power of the courts. When police do not solve a crime and do not find evidence, the women of the Peace Hut start their own process. They are investigators, collectors and trusted custodians. The first was in Bong County, followed by Magibi, Lofa, Bomi, Gbapolu, Nimba and Grand Bassa. One year ago when the police said “no evidence” regarding a case, the Peace Hut women in Gbanga went into action. They gathered evidence and brought it to President Johnson Sirleaf, who referred it to the superintendent of courts – resulting in winning five cases.

Similarly, WOCAD notes that in Cape Mount, legal structure are lacking: “There are no courts, no medical facilities.” They are now working on some mediation approaches, working along iwht the local authorities, including the Paramount Chiefs. In one case of a significant dispute between two town chief, one Madingo and one Basso, WOCAD has supporting a “Community Healing Ceremony”. Each chief was required to “confess”, and the communities will be choosing a new chief – who reportedly is likely to be a woman.

### **WOMEN AND PEACEBUILDING**

Liberian women played an active role in bringing an end to the conflict, pushing for and insisting on peace.<sup>23</sup> Having suffered through the years of conflict, they are a determined force for peace – to prevent a return to the years of chaos and violence and destruction. From contributing their perspectives to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (see discussion of WONGOSOL’s UNIFEM-supported initiative in the mapping of women’s/gender programs) to a wide array of civil society initiatives, many are purposefully and actively contributing to establishing a peaceful society.

Regarding the Task Force for a new Constitution, women need and want to be involved – both present and ensuring that their perspectives and rights are included. AFELL and WONGOSOL are ready to poll women’s groups so that when the Task Force starts, they will know the issues to include.

A May 2008 “National Women’s Conference” resulted in a National Action Plan for 1325 (for the medium term needs, during “Peacemaking and Peacebuilding”) and a process to draft a National Gender Policy (long term).

WIPNET also has a Rural Women’s Peace Initiative that focuses on young women up to 30 years old. They have listening clubs for which they receive a radio, and then listen to news together and discuss it. This initiative is supported by the American Jewish World Service. UNDP has provided generators and televisions for some Peace Huts with which women may watch films and discuss them – such as a

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<sup>23</sup> See “Liberian Women Peacemakers,” a publication of the African Women and Peace Support Group, Africa World Press, as well as “Pray the Devil Back to Hell”.

recent film from Ethiopia. (Interestingly, they have not yet seen “Pray the Devil Back to Hell”, which captures some of their own activism, because they have been unable to obtain a copy.)

### ***Recommendations***

- Make bibliography available – and any who come across other documents should contribute
- Find and recognize serious scholarship, such as Caroline Bledsoe on Kpelle women, Mary Moran’s work around Harper.<sup>24</sup>
- Gain access to INGO localized gender assessments (e.g. IRC, Oxfam, NRC)
- Get input from local groups, e.g. FAWE, WOCAD and WIPNET

### ***Observations regarding the “big picture”: Piecing it all together***

While the first step in the gender assessment was to collect data, the more challenging but essential undertaking is to take a step back, and give thought to “what it all means”. Based on the above-reported information, what do we know about girls and women in Liberia? With regard to their health, they particularly suffer from early, frequent and complicated pregnancies; from difficulties gaining access to healthcare; and from the ongoing physical and emotional toll of gender-based violence. With regard to education and literacy, their extraordinarily low levels of capability undermine their ability to improve their economic situations. At the same time, some of the impediments for women are problems for women and men alike: lack of education and low levels of literacy, poor rural infrastructure ranging from roads to schools and clinics, and food insecurity among them. In the extreme circumstances of Liberia, the challenge for those intervening is to ensure that resources and opportunities reach men and women equally - as is further discussed in Part III regarding gender within USAID’s strategy and activities. Recognizing the needs of women and girls calls for constant care to ensure that programs reach and benefit girls along with boys, and women as well as men. Any programs to provide information or expertise have to take approaches that are not written and that are put into simplified terms.

At the same time, while women and girls very much need more economic opportunities and greater openings for public leadership, they are engines of activity making substantial contributions with what they have. Despite the extraordinarily hard lives that women in Liberia lead today, they are impressive agents of survival and re-building. From agricultural work in rural areas to petty trading in urban areas, women are using their limited resources and skills to provide for their families – from food to school fees. Women are assets, whose industry and determination require the resources with which to improve their own circumstances and those of their families.

Thus as anthropologist and Liberia specialist Mary Moran noted, when one considers how much work women do and how much responsibility they shoulder, the increasingly facile statement that Liberian women “are property” is a misconception. Yet economic opportunities and meeting basic needs of their families are critical: Discussions about GBV elicit responses about other issues – such as daughters without a safe place to go after school or fathers not supporting their children economically. In many instances now whether there are plays about marital disputes or violence, or when there are Palava Huts where women can turn for help, discussions lead to economic frustrations and the need for opportunities. Mary points out that the structural violence of economics is more compelling than rape.

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<sup>24</sup> In the right time and place, it would be interesting to support Liberian students who want to undertake research involving gender studies or analyses locally within Liberia.

## **Part II: Mapping of Resources and Initiatives Focused on Women or Gender Equality**

The purpose of this section is to identify who is doing what. The “who” includes the Government of Liberia (GoL), Liberian Civil Society, international NGOs, and donors – as well as the particular individuals responsible for women-targeted activities or gender mainstreaming. This section focuses on policies, laws, and campaigns; institutions; and programs.

While this is not an exhaustive mapping, it should lay a base that USAID may wish to supplement through future meetings and discussions. For ease of use by USAID staff, the mapping is divided by “sector” - recognizing that although this may result in some overlap in the total document, it enables those wanting to read just what relates to their work to read their section only. Further, anticipating users' interest in quick information, this section of the report is structured as a listing with annotations – but providing more depth where the topic is expected to generate some greater interest or need.

### **HEALTH**

For the near-term, UNFPA has been training traditional birth attendants. They have also started with assessments, to determine where to target, and to establish baselines and indicators. They are working in Margibi, Bomi, Lofa and Gbanga.

UNFPA is focused on adolescent girls, in part through “Gender Youth Clubs” in colleges. The project is managed by a UNFPA youth fellow. A project now in its inception phase will train peer educators who would then go back to their communities. With Danish funding, they have also spearheaded working with men, on advocacy that includes campaigning. They partner with AFELL for advocacy around legal aspects of GBV, have targeted legislators and the judiciary, and disseminated small messages through placards and radio and street shows. In a couple of weeks they will be measuring impacts as the project ends in June, 2009.

The UN Joint Programme on Food Security and Nutrition was signed in early 2009, has some funding by Government of Denmark, its key UN actors includes WFP. As it is primarily economic capacity, equipment and objectives, see section below on economic activities – but note that the Programme Management Unit is housed at GBV unit at MoG&D.

#### *Fistula and FGM*

UNFPA has been the lead agency on preventing and care related to fistula – in 3 counties. They have sent physicians and health assistants for training outside Liberia.

#### *HIV/AIDS*

UNIFEM is supporting Women Living with HIV and AIDS through the Network of Women Living with HIV and AIDS, capacity building for the network, and exposure to international players. UNIFEM is also supporting mainstreaming gender concerns into the National AIDS Commission with training and incorporating gender into the Commission’s plans.

*SEA: Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and SGBV: Sexual and Gender-Based Violence*

UNICEF has a Protection Unit within its SEA section to cover early marriage. (It falls within SEA because children cannot be deemed to give “consent”. They address customary practices, i.e. that in some places not know the law forbids marriage until age 18.)

**Initiatives to address Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV)**

- National SEA Awareness Campaign (July 2005)
- National Plan of Action for GBV (2006): Policy document identifying strategies for minimizing GBV in Liberia
- National GBV Task Force (est. 2006): Coordinating body for National Plan of Action on GBV, chaired by MoG&D, includes Liberian CSOs, INGOs, UN agencies with GoL
- Anti-Rape Campaign (launched Dec. 2007)
- Establishment of Criminal Court “E” (Feb. 2009): Covering trials of sexual offenses

The UN Joint Programme on SGBV (2008) addresses critical issues in the National GBV Action Plan, bringing together principally GoL and UN agencies with other partners – with partners sharing the lead on particular issues. The Swedes<sup>1</sup> have just given somewhere between \$2.5 and 3.0 million for implementation. The lead agency will be UNFPA, along with WHO, UNDP, UNIFEM, UNMIL taking leads on different aspects. The project will have 5 pillars: psychosocial, health, legal, security/protection and coordination. The Joint Programme coordinator is Madumita Sarkar, based at the Ministry of G&D and linking with the UN. (She has now been in Liberia nearly 18 months)

*Water and Sanitation*

CARE, with funding from the Howard Buffet Foundation, is focused on water and sanitation in Bong County – not defined as a women’s project, but primarily working with and benefiting women.

**EDUCATION**<sup>2</sup>

*ALP:*

- There is a revised curriculum not yet printed (told so by UNICEF, and saw proof-reading at IRC). Will use “Pool fund” to print it. Now includes life-skills (assertiveness, HIV/AIDS protection, hygiene, some re reproductive health) – not clear what or how about gender relations.
- UNICEF supports the Girls’ Education Unit at the Ministry of Education
- MoE chairs a bi-weekly meeting about ALP (co-chaired by UNICEF). UNICEF is now supporting about 350 schools – started with 96 schools back in 2004). Important for over-age

<sup>1</sup> The current Swedish rep is Anders Ostman, who has been in Liberia since 2006 and should remain until 2011. Erik Wallin has been SIDA’s Regional Advisor and National Program Advisor in Liberia, and will be in that position until Aug/Sept 2010. Gun Eriksson Skoog will be arriving Sept. 1, 2009 to focus on trade issues – but is quite interested in gender. (She asked whether USAID would share Part I of this report, to give her a summary for her start in Liberia.) The Swedes now have a new strategy in Liberia covering 2008-2013.

<sup>2</sup> Sources: UNICEF, FAWE, IRC, USAID’s education team

girls, to be with their peers. UNICEF reports that partners are pulling out of ALP because funding has ended. If UNICEF had money, they would pick up with those schools.

#### *LTTP, Teachers:*

- LTTP partners are AED, IRC and MCID (with the Ministry of Education)<sup>3</sup>. There are women participating in three counties (Bong, Nimba and Lofa) to be candidates for “C-certification”. Limited number of women qualified because they drop out for pregnancy or to be bread-winners.
- One informant who has been involved in the LTTP said that there is nothing within the pedagogy training regarding gender; nor anything regarding “life skills”. But according to LTTP, they are near changing that: There will be training *with gender issues* for principals, PTA representatives, district and community education officers. Gender is now included in the teacher-training section on psycho-social skills and related to childhood development. So it may not be in the section on “pedagogy”, but there is a section entitled “Education from a gender perspective.” They are in the process or pre-testing a new manual.<sup>4</sup>

#### *Early Childhood Development (ECD):*

A study was done in 2008 with OSIWA support and by Emily Vargas-Baron (formerly USAID/Education). The MoE has the study, but apparently needs technical assistance to start rolling out its program.

GEM/BEM: Camp for high school teenagers – started from girls’ education movement, but then added boys. UNICEF sent 2 young women and 2 young men from Liberia. In March, they launched a club, and a Training-of-Trainers workshop will go to schools and communities, focused on addressing peer pressure, HIV/AIDS, etc. (FAWE is part of this initiative, too.)

UNICEF with the Ministry of Education produced and disseminated a simplified version of Girls' Education Law (2005)

FAWE and Plan International launched a campaign on April 3 entitled “Learn without Fear” to stop violence against children (particularly girls) in schools.

#### *Communities and Education*

FAWE with Oxfam/GB just phased out (April 2009) a project organizing **girls’ clubs** where teachers served as supervisors and girls learned life skills and were sensitized to issues re SEA. The girls involved in clubs were getting better academic results. There have also been community girls education motivators (CGEM) going house-to-house to sensitize about the value of education. This resulted in more girls accessing school – and in the 12 schools covered, teen pregnancy rates dropped. The CGEM and club supervisors tracked girls’ school attendance. FAWE has work focused on role models for young women – reaching almost 1000 girls. Commonly, girls go to the *Sande* (bush schools), and are typically married when they come out and an older man has already paid a dowry.

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<sup>3</sup> It was reported – but there is no personal verification particularly as I did not meet with AED – that the AED program is mostly men and that they are not very sensitive to or supportive of women as trainers and gender sensitivity within the curriculum or approach. Not knowing this for sure, there may be an opportunity simply to bring the various LTTP players together to discuss the gender challenges and needs within the program.

<sup>4</sup> This initiative is headed by Fred Farwene.

The FAWE project changed what they learn in the *Sande*, and encouraged them to continue their education and be different. In one case, the CGEM and teacher went to the *Zoe* (woman head of the *Sande*) in Grand Bassa, took her gifts, and told her about the value of schools for girls – so she sent the word that girls should come back to school and attend the *Sande* only on weekends. In another case, in Bong County where many parents are farmers, they held meetings at night around a fire to discuss the importance of girls’ education – and the result was more girls in school. And when the CGEM and girls’ club supervisor learn that a girl is to be married early, they gather to stop it – such regarding one 14 year old girls who they took away from the arranged husband to get her back to school. FAWE has also organized “mothers’ clubs” for women, to empower them. They have given them seed money for economic activities (in Bensonville, they made quilts, and in Kendeja made traditional costumes for dancing, instruments and necklaces), and taught them life skills and encouraged girls’ education. FAWE reports that they key is to include the complete community, including men so that they understand the mothers’ clubs, and to have interventions – beyond talk.. They also ensure that there are life skills for girls and boys, or young women and young men, together – and “then when girls have gardens with small microfinance, the boys help!” In Buchanan, they worked with 400 girls, but the men were very involved and committed. FAWE’s work has been in 6 counties: Montserrado, Margibi, Grand Bassa, River Cess, Lofa and Bong.

World Food Programme (presumably related to their School Feeding programme) and the IRC are providing training for PTAs. PTAs have some gender focus – emphasizing the importance of girls’ education, the harm of traditional practices.

### **ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES AND AGRICULTURE**

#### *Employment and Training Programs (from/through the Ministry of Labor)*

**LEEP: Liberia Emergency Employment Program**, now in year 3 of 3 years, focused on work not skills – such as manual labor like sweeping. Ministry of Labor gave priority to ensure that women would be 30% of beneficiaries. There were, however, some jobs that had to go to men because women lacked skills or training – such as building and construction, plumbing, mechanics, intensive agriculture – while women did tailoring, baking and book-keeping. Reports generally are that it substantially favored men as beneficiaries.

**LEAP: Liberia Employment Action Program** will be the follow-on activity that should be ongoing. The World Bank notes that “most of the activities target youth” but that the “strategy does not have an explicit focus on women’s employment, nor does it appear to account for the differing employment needs of young men and women” and that UNIFEM and the ILO are “preparing a technical assistance program to help the government address gender issues in LEAP.” (World Bank WEE Gender Needs Assessment, p. 16)

**MoLAP: Ministry of Labor Apprenticeship Program** focuses on training for young men and women in transition from school. They will be attached to factories in short-term internships or “vacation jobs”. The MoL will keep sex-disaggregated data, but there was no indication of anticipating gender-related challenges or issues.

Regarding service learning, there is some knowledge because UNICEF and ILO provided training, but there is not yet any program within the Ministry of Labor by which to build skills for job-preparedness. See, however, the Joint Programme on Youth Employment and Empowerment.

According to Mr. Quoi at the Ministry of Labor, the MoL has two priorities: (1) A national campaign on literacy, to prepare people for employment<sup>5</sup> and (2) a strategy for women focusing on cooperatives (for self-sufficiency in food production) and microfinance with entrepreneurial skills training. They would use the “susu” (which are savings groups most used by women and overall common across all counties, with collection every month, and rotating that payment goes to one woman each month) or a financial club (by which pay dues, and then can borrow, like a credit union, and normally a mix of women and men): once women have some income, they can contribute to benefiting others.

UNDP is supporting the MoG&D to monitor implementation of **gender issues in Liberia's PRS**.

**Liberia Economic Empowerment of Adolescent Girls and Young Women Project:** The World Bank is supporting an Adolescent Girls Initiative with the MoG&D (signed August 2008). With about \$4.7 million from the Nike Foundation and Danida, and to address MDG 3 (women’s equality), it focuses on job skills and business development. In preparation, there was a labor market assessment and a vulnerability assessment. Structured as a pilot, the aim is to track carefully whether the skills result in increased incomes. There are four components: (1) job skills for AGs ages 16-26 (with a performance based contract, and bonus if after 6 months the AG participants are still economically active), (2) business development training for young women ages 18-26, (3) institutional support for the MoG&D, and (4) impact evaluation. They are just finalizing a contract for an Employers Advisory Group to identify sectors and partnerships with companies. Service providers will have 18 months to select participants, train them and mentor. The target is 3,500 adolescent girls in Greater Monrovia and Kakata who must be in MoG&D-selected communities, be literate, and be out of school one year. Training will include discussion of GBV and psychosocial issues. The key contact in the MoG&D is Emily Stanger (with whom I did not have a chance to meet, 06-751-394) who is the Ministry-World Bank liaison.

The **Joint UN Programme on Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment (Jt WEE Programme)** has now been signed and funds should become available in June 2009. UNIFEM will be the lead coordinating agency for the three-year project. Its 3 components are (1) supporting the development and coordination of gender sensitive policies (with MoG&D), (2) capacity-building for the MoG&D, MoL and civil society so they may effectively engage in and be accountable for gender sensitive programmes, and, finally, (3) support for implementation of “priority initiatives to empower women”. The last component will include micro-credit (for more detail, see the microfinance section below), support for women traders and SMEs, vocational skills development, a literacy campaign targeting women, and building hostels to enable young women to attend secondary schools.

The **Joint UN Programme for Employment and Empowerment of Young Women and Men in Liberia (JPYEE)** runs from January 2009 to December 2011, with an estimated budget of \$27.6 million dollars, and will be administered by UNICEF. It is to have five components: (1) Youth policy review and support to government and civil society, especially youth-led organizations, (2) Skills training for employment, (3) Facilitating the transition of young people to employment – including “mobile employment research and services ... in the shape of “employment caravans”, (4) Empowerment and social cohesion of young people – including life skills based gender sensitive sexual and reproductive health education and services, and a Liberia National Youth Volunteer Service Programme, and (5) Promoting decent work for youth in the informal economy and in agriculture – including facilitating access to business development services and financial services. There is explicit

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<sup>5</sup> As he promised, Mr. Quoi sent me a Concept Paper that sets forth real hopes for an intensive adult literacy program for women.

focus on gender inequalities and reaching young women: “Young women as a group face additional constraints because of their reproductive and care responsibilities and the increase of this burden due to the conflict. These additional burdens disempower young women economically in a patriarchal culture, which can lead to commercial sex work or becoming victims of other sexual exploitation and abuse.” (p. 7)

### Liberia Pilot Phase of **Goldman Sachs' 10,000 Women Certificate Program for Women**

**Entrepreneurs:** Implemented by CHF, they will provide business training to two cohorts of 30 women entrepreneurs in Liberia in July. Training will include management, accounting, planning and access to finance. There will be a team of business trainers (who are all men!) and a support team. The approach is to partner with Cuttington University and the Liberia Business Association to institutionalize the program for providing training in the future. CHF wants to create a demand for business development services. While the first cohorts attend with full scholarships, they expect that after they experience the value of the training, future trainees will be willing to pay. CHF sees the possibilities for job creation – in construction, healthcare or agriculture as examples.

While women from around Liberia will be welcome, it will require four months in Montserrado – for women who have a minimum of a high school degree, and already have a functioning business. (The Goldman Sachs criteria are that the women be underserved, and have business with growth potential!) Classes will be evenings and weekends for four months.

### *Microfinance*

“Launch of An Inclusive Financial Sector in Liberia” (2005-2009) was supported by UNCDF and UNDP with input from Cordaid, has been based in the Central Bank, and was designed to increase access of low income persons to financial resources. The total funding was \$1.25 million, supporting 2 lead MFIs (Liberty Finance and LEAP) and aiming to loan to 20,000, of whom at least 75% were to be women – and in fact 85% women from Liberty Finance, and 90% women from LEAP. They trained staff in NGOs and banks and government in microfinance; field interns in institutions. Starting amount is usually \$83, and there are about 10 loans of 4 months each from the group before a borrower graduates (to larger loan amount). Approximately 50% in Montserrado County of loans have been in Monrovia, where started. Key areas of economic activity with the financing have been palm oil, bitter ball, dried peppers and LOTS of dry goods. A next step will be “1,000/2,000”, of matching funds and training: if women save \$300, then they get \$900 – through LEED, Access Bank and EcoBank.

NOTE: There was a donors’ meeting in Germany in June 2008 re “social infrastructure”, and there will be a **Strategic Technical & Financial Partners’ meeting in Brussels in September 2009 to review microfinance needs in Liberia, and make sure that donors coordinate their funding.** They hope to have all EU members participating, the World Bank, Mastercard – and any donors or microfinance organizations who are interested. Aim eventually to have “One Stop Shop for Microfinance”.

The microfinance unit at the Central Bank is also training through the U. of Liberia: 3 month internships, 21 interns to 6 institutions (of which 80% have been absorbed into institutions as staff). With Cuttington University, they are offering a course for distant learners in evening classes – 53 students of which 30 had scholarships, and Cuttington made a profit on the certificate course. The first batch of graduates were 70% women and were strong; the second group is about 50% women and somewhat weaker.

Within the UN JP WEE Programme, UNDP unit with the Central Bank will manage the microfinance

section directly. Money for microfinance (\$400,000) will come through an Investment Committee. They will send the RFP, seeking services for rural microfinance 100% targeting women, to potential MFIs with track records who meet criteria – though expect mainly Liberty Finance and LEAP. Money will be moving by the end of the year. The Joint Programme will also support susu groups (village savings and loans/VLSA) of \$75,000 – in communities to be selected by the MoG&D. The idea is to organize and train women to mobilize their own savings, and one Liberian NGO will supervise. This is based on a Pilot in Paynesville for Rock Crushing that required \$5,000 for 25 women in each group. The sequencing therefore is (1) skills training and technical assistance, overseen by the MoG&D, (2) VSLAs, and (3) MFIs or EcoBank (with some microfinance).

Soros is committed to supporting BRAC in Liberia, starting in Jan 2009. Also Access Bank is interested in investment, and an IFAD/ADB large agriculture project wants to include microfinance for cooperatives and credit unions in rural areas.

There are also several small or pilot projects are: Micro-credit and skills training being provided to women in 7 community cooperative credit unions in 7 districts of Bong and Nimba counties; replicated in Lofa county from March 2008. Supported by the Japanese women in Development Fund (JWIDF) with \$245,000 and Government of Denmark with 4834,500 through UNDP and grant to Community Cooperative Credit Union. UNIFEM is also supporting one NGO's microfinance initiative because of a proposal they submitted. It is a small pilot project. And CARE is working with Village Savings & Loans within agriculture projects. The VSL promote savings groups ("susu").

WOCAD has a total of \$5,200 from Canadian CIDA through ECOWAS with which to support women in four districts of Cape Mount. Each has a cooperative, and aiming to empower women to help children – particularly female-headed households from husbands who died in the war. Loans are given to groups of 15 women in each district. In Phase I, they started economic activities such as soapmaking and tie-dying. They are just now into Phase II, having signed an agreement by which LBDI will monitor the groups' governance.

### *Agriculture*

UN Joint Programme on Food Security and Nutrition focuses primarily on economic capacity and equipment. Signed early in 2009, it has funding from Government of Denmark, and its key UN actors are WFP and FAO with UNIFEM. The programme has five objectives, to (1) increase women's ability and role to produce protein rich food source, establish poultry houses and fish ponds for women farmers, (2) provide infrastructure, equipment, and technology transfer centers to train women in post-harvest agro-processing, technologies to increase marketable surplus and post-harvest interventions, (3) training for women to participate and follow-up on food for progress for various cereals, (4) training for women to participate and profit from seed banks, and (5) increase capacity of women's farming cooperatives.

The World Bank has undertaken a gender and agriculture assessment, as a basis for a Gender and Agriculture Policy (A gender and agriculture specialist from DC was in Liberia in April.) There is nothing finalized at this point – but it is something to track.

Since 2007 and with about \$450,000, UNIFEM and the World Bank (along with FAO and UNESCO) have supported the "Value-Added Cassava Enterprise" project focused on cultivation and processing

with 10 communities in Nimba county.<sup>6</sup> Women have received better cuttings along with technical assistance advising to plant in mounds. While the project has been “challenging”, they have achieved increased yields. They have leased the land, giving better security and incentives for long-term investments. In the past, it could take a woman a month to process one bag of farina. Now a processing plant has been built with World Bank support but with locally fabricated equipment, a generator and UN supported security guards for 2 years. The products include farina, cassava flour, starch and the peels for animal food. The women have received training for using the processing plant, along with adult literacy (provided by UNESCO) and lectures/discussions about such topics as GBV. The project is supposed to include technical assistance for marketing, “to transform the intervention into a profitable enterprise), but UNIFEM is looking for a consultant. One possibility is whether the women may sell some of their product to the WFP for its school feeding program.

WOCAD has worked with women in Bomi, where approximately 300 women are cultivating cassava on 75 acres. There has been funding support for cuttings and stakes. Men have helped the women with brushing and all activities. (Note that men and women work together in Bomi, as compared with the SE where men only brush, and women do the planting.)

CARE has a couple of projects in Bong County, of which one is agriculture and food security. Since women are farmers there, it is a sort of women’s project. CARE has a proposal in the pipeline for a peri-urban agriculture project in greater Monrovia. Much will be for and with women, but they intend to try to reach out to involve adolescent boys.

#### **The Sirleaf Foundation**

With UNDP, the foundation surveyed market women to identify needs and problems – such as no health or sanitation facilities, or water. Based on the responses, the foundation has four key areas:

- (1) Infrastructure rehabilitation (market structure fixed or built, to include water but also health post with information/education): So far have worked on 11 markets in: Montserrado, Lofa, Bong, Grand Gedeh, Gbapolu and Nimba.
- (2) Microcredit: Have established some micro-credit facilities in Montserrado, Bong and Lofa.
- (3) Adult literacy (conflict prevented education for market women, who need literacy/numeracy): The adult literacy program should have just launched, at the end of May 2009 – also starting with a baseline assessment, followed by training of trainers to go to the 11 improved markets. The curriculum comes from merging two methods: Alfalet Liberia and Development Education Network Liberia (of which the latter includes curriculum on health and gender equality)
- (4) Early Childhood Development (for little children in the market with their mothers, need crèche nearby) – are talking with UNICEF about how to structure this.

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<sup>6</sup> The project is funded by the Gender Innovation Fund for Results-Based Initiatives (<http://go.worldbank.org/67U7KIZNSO>), started with baseline data and sample sizes of 252 members and 232 nonmembers, and should be completed by March 2010.

## Resources

In Ministry of Labor: Mr. Joseph Quoi (had 2 gender contacts, one male and one female, but woman has left for the US)

UNICEF has a unit focused on human trafficking and child labor (part of their Planning Division) that includes a gender desk.

Gender Task Force: MoL, MoG&D, NGNet (National Gender Net): Have identified areas of needs for women's empowerment but "still on the drawing board". Look at (1) women's empowerment through microfinance and a revolving fund (not yet launched) and (2) women in marketing, i.e. petty traders, with the Association of Market Women<sup>7</sup>.

"Integrating Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment Issues in the Economic Revitalization Pillar of Liberia PRSP: A Resource Pack", World Bank Gender Team, Nov. 2007

## **GOVERNANCE, CIVIL SOCIETY/MEDIA, RULE OF LAW AND PEACE-BUILDING**

### *Governance: Supporting Government's Gender Mainstreaming Capacities*

- The UN's mandate is to work with governments. UNIFEM is therefore **working with the Ministry of G&D**. (Their work together is mainly in four counties: Grand Gedeh, Grand Bassa, Nimba and River Gee)
- For MoG&D and MoJ: UNDP supports Ministries' personnel to develop **capacity to prosecute GBV cases**, establishing prosecution unit in Ministry of Justice, logistic and human resources for GBV unit in MoG&D to improve coordination around country.
- To construct and equip **Women and Children's Sections (WACPS) in all county Police headquarters** (UNDP) - for protection, within Ministry of Justice, for children in conflict with law; and to recruit more women for police (UNICEF)
- UNDP is building **capacity to handle women's issues sensitively and with confidentiality**: for staff of WACPS and Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, magistrates and court officials
- The National Democratic Institute (NDI) is **working specifically with the WLC** (as the legislature has not supported the caucus as it has supported committees, and there is a need to institutionalize and professionalize the caucus). In addition, NDI and WIPNET have taken members of the legislature to meet with constituents – and taken citizen to Monrovia to see democratic processes. They have also trained some women to be candidates.
- **FEMWISE** (2008, now completed): CHF worked with 90 women in 30 communities of Lofa country to **train local women to participate in decision-making processes and local leadership**. Funded by Initiative for Inclusive Society (Swanee Hunt, Hunt Alternatives) with one month's follow-on by Women's Campaign International.
- Beyond the Women's Caucus, there are issues regarding gender analyses for new legislation. UNDP did an assessment about how to improve legislative capacity, from which a primary

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<sup>7</sup> A reference to someone named Steven Gbokie.

recommendation was to build legislative core staff to ensure institutional memory after elections. There is therefore a “Joint Legislative Modernization Committee”, and the UN chairs a counterpart donors committee. As staff and members learn about conducting research and drafting legislation, there is a need (and opportunity) to ensure that they recognize gender dimensions – for real mainstreaming. The “modernization” means incorporating gender from the outset – including data collections, drafting laws cognizant of how they will apply to men and women, and anticipating potential gender biases within the implementing agencies responsible for ensuring the application of the law. There is an opportunity, in raising issues about gender analysis, to ensure that legislators look at how issues affect different demographic groups, such as women or girls. Liberians need legislation that really responds to needs – not theory.

- **The Fairness Bill:** UNIFEM is supporting the “Fairness Bill” aimed at establishing a minimum 30% quota for women in the legislature. Women legislators want to go to the counties, so that counties will tell their representatives in the legislature to vote for the law. In June, 2009 AFELL will spearhead consultations with male legislators – asking what needs to be done to get it passed. But AFELL expresses some doubts about the law, recognizing that it can be limiting, and that need women of quality and well as quantity. There are questions about how women can be ready so that the political parties want them.

### *Civil Society and Media*

**Women’s initiatives in civil society:** UNDP is supporting gender-based NGOs/CBOs through WONGOSOL. One interesting and impressive nonprofit organization is WOCAD, established in 2006, and focused on the “total well-being of rural women and children. They have five areas of activities: (1) economic, (2) skills, (3) healthcare, (4) empowering women, through microloans, and (5) advocacy and protecting women’s rights. The organization started in Cape Mount in Western Liberia, focusing particularly on protection and response to SGBV, documentation and reporting, and charity and relief.

- WONGOSOL has launched an awareness campaign regarding the African Union’s Gender Protocol (that provides regional legal recourse for discrimination against women). They are part of a 9-country coalition funded by DFID for five years.
- WOCAD focuses on awareness of human rights, including that within other programs.

**Supporting women journalists** There has been an earlier workshop and May 2009 follow-up, “Empowerment of media women in post-conflict Liberia”. It was a one-week practicum course by Bettina Ambach, funded through German Federal Foreign Office, “Aktion Afrika”.

Media for national campaigns against violence: UNMIL uses UNMIL radio to support the National Anti-Rape campaign and the National Campaign against SEA. WOCAD works in Bomi, where there are 4 dialects and, in the markets, Pidgin English. They produce materials with pictures, use songs (including one about rape) to gather people together and introduce an issue. For GBV, they want to do dramas regarding human rights – taking them from village to village with video screens. (They have already done one drama with Part I (the problem) and Part II (how to resolve) for UNHCR and IRC.)<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> I also heard from Mary Moran about her trip with the Carter Center, and a drama regarding violence that not only elicited discussion, but turned into an informal advisory process with women coming forward and asking the “panel” what they should do!

## *Preparing for Elections*

The UNMIL OGA will focus on civic and voter education, including the basics of how to choose who to support, what to look for, etc. They will target women, but also seek to build understanding by men of women candidates. Although in draw down, UNMIL will remain in remote areas so may reach far corners for elections. The OGA suggested that reaching women around the country will depend on collaboration with WONGOSOL, the Federation of Liberian Youth and the Rural Women's Network.

WONGOSOL wants to establish a strong monitoring group for the elections – to be able to report with as much care and legitimacy as international monitors. They do not see monitoring as being only a government function. Although they do not yet have funding, they intend to use cellphones and text messages for immediate reporting. They also see the process as a way to prepare women for more involvement and more leadership.

## *Rule of Law*

Through the MoG&D and with UNMIL/OGA support, the GoL is working to complete a National Gender Policy. It seems to be fairly advanced, but to my knowledge, they have not yet released a draft.

The GoL has been working for a year now to **prepare its CEDAW report – what is to be a regular report on compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women** but for Liberia will be their initial through third reports! The CEDAW report is the mechanism by which a government reports its compliance – thus indicating whether laws discriminate against women or fail to provide effective protections, and looking beyond the written law (*de jure*) to whether the laws are fully implemented and effective. The reporting requires inputs and collaboration from many different ministries – including the Ministries of Justice, Education and Labor. The preparatory process culminated with a 2-day mock session with two actual CEDAW judges in May, and the hearing that will take place in July.<sup>9</sup> Beyond government representatives who will attend, the MoG&D plans to take three representatives of civil society – one each from Muslim Women for Peace and Development, FAWE and AFELL.<sup>10</sup>

The US-funded Judicial Institute is training magistrates and developing curriculum (while UNFPA is training prosecutors for GBV). It is not known whether there is gender training for Magistrates – which is essential in order to ensure that the laws *as applied* are recognizing the circumstances of women and providing effective justice and protection.

## **Post-conflict triage, and extending the law to the average women: paralegals**

While the GoL and donor community are investing in the Justice Ministry and Courts, there are some other initiatives that may reach women and provide protection in the nearer term: Noting that most Liberian lawyers are in Montserrado, AFELL is now advocating for a paralegal system – so that they give women within their own communities basic knowledge of the law (comparable to community health workers). An international legal consortium in Sweden funded a 4-week study tour in South Africa for AFELL lawyers. The recruitment process will be that the community will know the criteria (a woman who can speak, has passion, and can analyze – but she need not be literate) and designate

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<sup>9</sup> Typically, too, there is a “shadow report” prepared by civil society – though the Minister of Gender and Development and UNIFEM apparently told civil society organizations that because the MoG&D sought their input, they did not “need to” submit a shadow report. This was a bit irregular, and was perhaps a missed opportunity for civil society.

<sup>10</sup> Note that WONGOSOL very much wants to be represented, not only to monitor what happens, but also for the training opportunities associated with the hearing. And AFELL hopes to send at least one other representative.

someone for training. The Government of Denmark is supporting them to train paralegals; and they have started with a Task Force to set up the curriculum, using books from South Africa with simplified manuals for community-based approaches. They will then work with the law schools for a training program. The UNMIL/OGA seems also interested in a paralegal system. Noting that only 10 of 350 magistrates in Liberia have a “first degree” (Bachelor’s), UNIFEM has looked to practice in Malawi where they have used paralegals or community legal officers, and wants to train a cohort to build onto and expand the capacity of the Liberian justice system. The Carter Center’s JPC (Justice and Peace Center) is reportedly training paralegals in Heupa (?), and working with traditional leaders through the Ministry of Internal Affairs.<sup>11</sup>

AFELL, with UNDP support, has **disseminated simplified versions of Inheritance Bill and Rape Bill** nationwide.

**Some Training has been provided:** World Bank gave a 3-day **workshop on “gender budgeting”** (attended by Ministry of Labor) – but now in limbo, waiting to see what comes next. Not sure whether will be anything within the MoL or at the national level. ILO gave a **workshop on gender mainstreaming and sensitivity** – which helped to eliminate misconceptions, such as understanding that the purpose of gender mainstreaming and women’s empowerment is not to disempower men, but rather to harmonize relations, and make sure men and women see each other as human beings! Also recognized the need for men to support women’s programs, which is a challenge. There is a next step because the Ministry of Labor must now go to commissioners and inspectors in the counties

### *Peacebuilding*

**UNMIL’s Office of the Gender Advisor (OGA):** From the DDR program to elections, UNMIL has focused on government capacity. The Gender Advisor and her team oversee gender mainstreaming in UNMIL’s civilian, military and police, and implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325.<sup>12</sup> They look at Rule of Law (state security and institutional reforms, justice sector and technical assistance) and Recovery/Governance (especially gender analysis within reforms). They have a Mission-wide gender plan with two sets of clients: (1) internal, i.e. military and UNMIL, focusing on SEA) and (2) external (with the MoG&D focused on the draft National Gender Policy, the 1325 National Action Plan, the National Action Plan on GBV, and CEDAW reporting and follow-up; and with women’s NGOs and leaders<sup>13</sup>). The OGA helped develop a gender policy for the Liberian police, and have now been asked by the GoL to help the Armed Forces of Liberia develop one. The OGA also focuses on Security Resolution 1820<sup>14</sup> within Liberia.<sup>15</sup> In addition, the OGA now intends to do more again with CSOs.

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<sup>11</sup> This is second-hand information, as I did not have the time to meet with John Hummel (06-452-022)

<sup>12</sup> “On 31 October 2000 the Security Council passed Security Council Resolution 1325, calling on governments – and the Security Council itself – to include women in negotiations and settlements with respect to conflict-resolution and peacebuilding. The resolution reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, and the need to implement fully international humanitarian and human rights law that protect the rights of women and girls during and after conflicts.”

<sup>13</sup> Note that the UNMIL gender advisor’s office helped to set up the umbrella organization of CBOs (WONGOSOL) and the Women’s Legislative Caucus (WLC).

<sup>14</sup> In 2008, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 1820 that noted that “rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity or a constitutive act with respect to genocide”. It also affirmed the Council’s intention, when establishing and renewing State-specific sanction regimes, to consider imposing “targeted and graduated” measures against warring factions who committed rape and other forms of violence against women and girls.

<sup>15</sup> For more information about the UNMIL Gender Advisor’s work, see the UNMIL website and the Office profile, Fact Sheet and Quarterly Reports.

**Liberian women and the TRC:** UNIFEM has supported a gender advisor to the TRC who will recommend gender language for each chapter as well as drafting a separate chapter to articulate the positions of women. UNIFEM has also supported training for the commissioners, a woman commissioner and community dialogues.

**Community Dialogues and Reconciliation Meetings:  
Evaluating and Re-Enforcing women's Participation in Transitional Justice and Governance”**

*“Women want: peace, peace & more peace!”*

*“The essence of the struggle is to give woman a voice.*

*Now, we must ensure space for women to speak – and be heard!”*

From Dec. 2008 to March 2009, WONGOSOL organized 4 dialogues so that women might have their say in, and influence the findings and recommendations of the TRC. They used story-telling, discussions, sharing experiences – and then dancing for a sort of healing ritual. Women stayed with other women in communities, not hotels – but found they needed childcare and more time for sharing stories. It has resulted in recommendations, county action plans and individual commitments. The final validation meeting was held on 18 May 2009.

Supported by UNIFEM, International Center for Transitional Justice, Urgent Action Fund and OSIWA

WIPNET receives support from UNIFEM for Peace Huts in Gbanga that provide safe haven or sanctuary for women and handle cases of domestic violence. WIPNET has also had funding from UNMIL (to spread information), NDI (regarding women’s political participation and decision-making), UNDP (supporting a Peace Hut, with video and generator so that women may watch and discuss documentaries) and ISIS-WECCE of Uganda as a partner.

**Two Concluding Observations**

As one would expect when there are resources, and when outsiders are working with local partners still gaining capacity and confidence, there are some **tensions**. First, there are tensions between international NGOs and local organizations. While UNMIL/OGA, the ABA and the Carter Center may do a lot relating to rule of law, local groups have expressed some frustration that international organizations “take our ideas”, “pick up our focus”, or “run away with our programs”. Second, there are tensions are between the Ministry of Gender & Development and Liberian women’s organizations. Each side talks about the need to “complement not compete”, but there are some uncertainties regarding the role of government and what civil society does in relation to it – particularly as watchdogs.

There is a need for more **communication and coordination**: As noted above, multiple organizations and donors are engaged in similar work – from reproductive health to cassava cultivation and microfinance. While there is plenty of need, it also is important to ensure that there is not redundancy, that organizations are not receiving double funding for their needs, and that synergies and linkages are well achieved. With a plethora of women-focused programs, it is essential that donors stay well apprised of respective activities.

## Part III: Gender Mainstreaming in USAID's Strategy and Portfolio

This section focuses on USAID's current and anticipated activities (following from the new Country Strategy), to identify how gender analysis and gender mainstreaming are mechanisms by which to improve inclusion of women, enhance programmatic results, and promote gender equality. As USAID's portfolio is extensive and time was limited, the following is illustrative with the expectation that examples will generate questions and interest for more extensive and more in-depth analysis.<sup>1</sup>

The internationally accepted definition of gender mainstreaming is articulated in Agreed Conclusions 1997/2 of the UN's Economic and Social Council:

*“...the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.”*

As was noted at the outset of this report, the first gender dimension of post-conflict reconstruction is the focus on women's particular needs. Yet women and girls live and work within social units – from families and schools to businesses and organizations – along with men and boys. Hence improving focusing the circumstances of women and girls requires understanding the gender-based roles and responsibilities established by culture and social practice. Gender-related expectations and behaviors often close off opportunities for girls and women to benefit from and contribute to society.

But whereas a person's “sex”, male or female, involves physical attributes, “gender” is mostly learned – and often eminently changeable. Changing gender roles typically requires gender analysis first – to understand who does what, on a local level (given differences by urban/rural, but also among “tribes” and religious groups, and between villages or communities). Looking at women through a gender lens, each challenge and each opportunity raises questions about how or why the situation involves the men and boys with whom women live and work. As this section illustrates, there are three challenges for mainstream programming: (1) Investigating whether, as designed and implemented, it is equitably and effectively reaching women and girls, (2) Identifying ways in which gender-based roles and responsibilities may either hinder or facilitate its activities and achievement of results, and (3) Determining whether there are ways in which improving communications and collaboration between men and women may not only improve program benefits for women, but also promote gender equality in their lives more broadly.

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<sup>1</sup> An LCIP gender assessment took two weeks, focusing on documents, observing work in the field, speaking with local implementing partners, and collaborating with staff to identify opportunities to strengthen their work through better understanding of and attention to gender. It culminated with a full-day, participatory workshop.

### Some Basic Gender-related Definitions

- Sex: Distinguishes males and females exclusively by biological characteristics
- Gender: A socio-cultural variable that refers to the comparative, relational or differential roles, responsibilities and activities of males and females. They are what a society or culture prescribes as proper roles, behaviors, personal identities, and relationships. They vary among and within societies – and over time.
- Gender balance: Looking at the numbers of women and men
- Gender equity: Fairness, that resources or policies treat males and females the same; that they have the same opportunities and access to resources.
- Gender equality: Not that men and women are the same, but that they are equally valued and respected

Recognizing that USAID staff have limited time for reading reports, this analysis is divided into three sections: (1) Cross-cutting issues that arise in nearly all sectors, (2) Comments relating to the Country Assistance Strategy Concept Paper, and (3) Sector-specific observations tracking USAID's four areas of work – Health, Education, EG/AG/Forestry, and D&G.

### SIX CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

*Participation: What does it mean?*

On the one hand, participation means determining who is physically present. One way to monitor mainstream programming is to “count heads”, ensuring that as many girls are in the classroom as boys; or women in a training program as men. By collecting sex-disaggregated data, it is possible to monitor for disparities of participation. If there are many fewer girls or women, that signals the need to analyze how recruitment practices or social pressures may limit their participation.

Yet in two ways that is not enough. First, there are times when the numbers may be equal, but participation is not. All too often, girls will be in a room, but not open their mouths – or if a woman speaks up among a room full of men, they take little heed of what she says. There are different levels of participation – what some describe as the ladder of participation: from the lowest level of simply

#### LADDER OF PARTICIPATION

Present+, speak, others listen and change thinking and actions, *and set the agenda*, i.e. initiate/lead ☺

Present+, speak, others listen and change thinking and actions, *and consulted regarding the agenda* (what is being discussed)

Present+, speak, others listen and change thinking *and actions*

Present+, speak, others listen *and affect their thinking*

Present+, speak, *and others listen*

Present+, *and speaking*

Invited into the room: *Present+*

Permitted into the room: *Present*

Not included at all

being present, to the highest level of participating so fully that one is part of setting the agenda itself.

Second, monitoring the heads in the room focuses more on inputs and outputs (how many of each in the classroom, for example) than on the outcomes or impacts. If women and men participate “equally” in an internship program, but the men end up with job offers and the women do not, then there has been a “differential impact” – and again, the program requires analysis to ensure that women gain the same benefits as the men.

### *Disseminating Information: How to reach women and girls effectively*

Efforts to inform people, relating to health issues like HIV/AIDS, job opportunities or elections, arise in all sectors. Too often, however, one medium is used – with the expectation that it will reach everyone equally well. Beyond the obvious, that written communications do not reach people who are illiterate (and often there are more illiterate women than men), there are also social practices: For example, who goes to the public places where there are posters? Culturally, do women listen to the radio as frequently as men? Do they have control over the dial if there is a soccer match broadcast at the same time as a health program? Do they have time to sit and listen if they are multi-tasking as they grind meal, tend to an infant and boil water? In fact, in post-conflict Angola, women typically got most of their information either just before or after church on Sundays, or at Thursday afternoon teas hosted by a minister’s wife. Among the Tuareg of Mali, women used the drums with songs to communicate new lessons about the dangers of HIV/AIDS.

Further, is one-time dissemination of information sufficient to ensure that women get it, understand it, and can use it? Often one-time, one-shot is not enough – and it is important to build in opportunities for women to repeat and discuss.

### *Is “Access” enough? What does it really entail?*

Objectives of health and education programs often include access – to clinics or to schools, for example. Similarly, rule of law programs focus on “access to justice”, often meaning access to courts. But there are differences between whether the “door is open” and whether an individual feels welcome and encouraged to “cross the threshold”. Thus building a facility and opening the doors to women may not be enough. Telling them that a school is for them may be insufficient if it lacks proper toilets or poses dangers of sexual harassment. Providing a special building for victims of SGBV may have good resources within, but may be too public a place for a woman to be comfortable being seen entering.

Even giving women access to agricultural extension agents, if the agents are male, may not be effective access if members of the community “whispering” whenever a woman is seen alone (in the fields) with a strange man. Gender-related culture, of what is “proper” or inappropriate, may undermine the intended access.

### *Transition Triage: Will normal approaches and support reach women and girls any time soon?*

Often the needs of women and girls are immediate and urgent – whether for healthcare in a difficult pregnancy or protection from an abusive spouse. Though long-term strategies call for proper training, institution-building, and sustainable systems, they often fail to provide the treatment or support that women need in the near-term. Thus there are times when women require extraordinary measures alongside the normal, strategic approaches. This sort of “triage” seems particularly important in post-conflict contexts where so many basic services and infrastructure is missing. While it is not ideal, there may be justification for training midwives to do “C-sections”, women with less than complete high school degrees to teach children, or groups of women to address marital abuse in a remote village.

*Are there situations where improving relations between women and men, i.e. communications, respect and collaboration, may enhance results – or have transformative impacts?*

Reproductive health programs and child nutrition programs have typically targeted women. If gender were only about reaching women, they are already successful. Yet giving information only to women means that they have to share and explain it to their husbands: why, for example, a pregnant woman and her infant get extra, fortified food, when others in the family are still hungry. Leaving it to women to have to justify can often set them up for abuse. Hence some objectives may be more effectively achieved either by providing parallel information to men, or by bringing men and women together to learn and discuss. Further, when culturally feasible (but not necessarily easy), programs that require young men and women to work together may model respect and collaboration for them to bring to their family practices.

*Gender Mainstreaming requires three steps: Observing, Analyzing and Innovating*

Effective gender mainstreaming starts with collecting data and asking questions – the quantitative and qualitative observations. For example, it is clear that there is a substantial disparity in Liberia in the numbers of male and female teachers. But just recognizing that accomplishes little. The next step, if current practices are resulting in disparities, is to analyze program design and implementation – to ask “Why?” The analysis is how one goes beyond recognizing the disparities to discovering their causes. Thus initial questions about women teachers might include whether recruitment practices were reaching them, or whether placement of a single woman in a remote village would be inappropriate by gender-role expectations or put her in any physical danger. Or, whether there simply are not enough women with basic high school background to be trained as teachers. Of course that, too, is not enough. The final issue – and the hard one – is innovating. The answers are not always apparent, and often require group or team thinking. The analysis leads to some possibilities: maybe placing two women teachers together in a remote village rather than one alone, or maybe recruiting women with less than high school education to teach the youngest children the basics or employing them as teacher assistants (as long as the man to whom they are assistants does not inappropriately exploit them!)

### **Paying Attention to the A, B, C's**

In areas of potential economic opportunity **women suffer from limited attention to the “A, B, C’s”:** assumptions, behaviors and context.

**A:** There are **assumptions** regarding what women can or cannot do – and without challenge, they preclude women’s participation.

**B:** There are **gender-related behaviors** that exclude women - both among Liberians and the donor/INGO community. “Traditional” gender-related norms of “propriety”, i.e. what women can do without generating “whispering” or suspicions (by husbands, brothers and fathers, but also by women in their communities), limit the ability of women and girls to engage in arenas of opportunity.

**C:** And **local contexts** around Liberia are significant – varying the behaviors and expectations according to the cultures of particular groups and the degree of isolation that has prevented knowledge of “modern” thinking and practices.

## **GENDER AND THE COUNTRY ASSISTANCE STRATEGY**

Regarding guidance for the strategy, there are opportunities to think about how “inclusive, sustainable growth” means including women and adolescent girls (the latter often left out as girls are within basic education, and somewhat older women having gained some control over their lives – but adolescent girls frequently the least empowered and the most burdened with new family responsibilities). Reaching the MDGs of course included MDG 3 of achieving gender equality. Insofar as the planning and execution of the CAS is predicated on partnership with “other stakeholders”, this is an opportunity to recognize and hear the positions of women.

Regarding Part VII (using selected tools and mechanisms), the commitment to support for and assistance from local organizations raises two issues: First, this should include concerted efforts to know of and work with women’s organizations. While not all women’s organizations may have formal sophistication, the often have the volunteerism and sweat equity that are evidence of real commitment. They may require capacity-building, but may also be very effective and powerful partners – for the present and for Liberia’s future. Second, in selecting partner organizations, one criterion and/or expected accomplishment should be gender balance and opportunity within the organization. This means that there is a mix of women and men in leadership, that they treat one another well, that they have zero tolerance for harassment and transactional sex, etc.

In terms of “closer relationships with other donor organizations,” each gender-related meeting generated express enthusiasm for having more collaboration with USAID. Issues relating to women and to gender may be one entry point, or one issue of common interest, by which to link more with the other donors – seeking to avoid duplication and to build on synergies.

Cross-sectoral complementarity may be further enhanced through attention to issues regarding women and involving gender: health messages in schools may be purposefully employed to build common responsibilities of girls and boys for family/children’s health, schools used for governance activities should have lighting and safety ensuring that women will be able to attend, rule of law reforms focused on women’s rights can purposefully engage men as allies.

Performance measuring should from the outset seek to monitor participation and outcomes for women and men. This should be a commitment of the new strategy – and to look beyond the numbers to real impacts and lessons-learned. One way is to expect each project to undertake a midterm gender assessment – even if internal and not requiring specialized expertise, to be sure that there is an expected time in the workplan to stop, take stock, and consider whether there is any need to modify approaches.

## **SECTOR-FOCUSED OBSERVATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

### **Health**

*Malaria programs* are only partly about the distributing nets because the critical factor is who sleeps under them. This requires understanding of the family unit. Who needs to get information about the importance and use of nets? Who typically sleeps where, i.e. what are sleeping arrangements and resulting possibilities within family: who shares bed/mattress? Who will make a final decision about who sleeps under the net?

*Family Planning and Reproductive Health:* As was noted above, family planning programs typically target women when family planning requires the knowledge and cooperation of men as well. There is a need to reach, engage, and inform men: “To succeed, we need to bring men into partnership.” More and more, programs are engaging men as well as women – sometimes together, sometimes separately, and sometimes separately followed by together.

*HIV/AIDS:* Preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS is very much about gender relations and power. Giving women information about the need to use condoms to protect themselves from transmission of HIV/AIDS or other STIs will not suffice if they lack power when with a man to convince him or insist. Information is often not enough, given the power of decision-making. And often it is not just a matter of a man and a woman – but a “big man” and a young woman. In the many cases in Liberia of “transactional sex”, a woman who needs the man and his money may not have the power or confidence to insist on protection.

*Water and Sanitation:* Any project would clearly start with understanding who is responsible for fetching the water – and thinking about her time and her safety. Knowing who will prepare or use water also determines who need to understand how to boil water, for example – but such practices also require then that someone fetch or purchase fuel for boiling. If a woman prepares the water, but her husband provides the fuel, both have to understand the importance of boiling – and he may have to work harder or spend more money to provide sufficient fuel.

USAID’s program refers to tracking the number of people who are trained to maintain and repair water systems. Absent sex-disaggregated data, one would not know whether men are typically or exclusively those to get the training. If so, what a mistake! Women, too, should have such skills – as there is no reason for them to become gender-stereotyped, such skills may become marketable sources of income, and if men migrate to large farms for cash crop employment or to urban areas, women need to know how to do repairs in their absence.

*Policy, Infrastructure and Services:* One drawback of focusing on women’s needs, and seeing them as victims, is that it tends to eclipse their agency and rational thinking. An illiterate woman may be wise; a poor woman may be industrious. One easy but critical step for and with women is to consult them. Often they have perspectives – including rational expectations and some fears or issues – to incorporate into planning. In terms of services, traditional gender relations in small villages may prevent women from going outside village. They may need permission, time, money, and transport. As was noted in Part I, there are also issues of whether women feel comfortable with new, “modern” services. A “client focus” would begin by consulting them about their preferences.

*Incorporate recognition of and attention to women’s physical and psychological traumas:* The “elephant in the room” when it comes to health care is the experiences from conflict. The number of women who were victims of sexual and gender-based violence, and the degree of violence, cannot be ignored. USAID partners should be attuned to these issues, and know of resources to which to refer women whose functioning and health may be impaired by the violence of their past.

## **Education**

In education, the ‘easy way’ to pay attention to gender is to count heads: of male and female students, teachers, principals, etc. While this may be telling, it can be unfortunate if it seems to ‘satisfy’ the expectations and substitute for more nuanced analysis – such as analyzing the content of curriculum or how teachers are treating girls in the classroom. For example, an arithmetic problem based on “bride-

price” surely is not necessary and reinforces practices subject to change.

There is also a need for recognizing gender-related problems, and addressing them. For example, if the Ministry of Education or local schools are expecting a pregnant student to drop out, or if there are no facilities to support a young mother’s continued education, attitudes and facilities require attention. The Ministry’s Education policies, whether explicit or *de facto* may have life-long impacts on teenage mothers.

### *Teachers/LTTP*

It is no secret in Liberia that there is a real problem recruiting women teachers. Sometimes, however, “gender neutral” requirements may have disparate impacts on women and men. Requiring a high school degree is not purposeful sex discrimination, but it may still eliminate many female applicants. Many are now suggesting that the post-conflict circumstances of Liberia call for unusual approaches, like the special training undertaken by the police.

At the same time, the challenge of finding women teachers in the near term may also call for ‘problem-solving’: Other than equity of opportunity (if women were available and did want to be teachers), why is it important to have women teachers? Perhaps there is the risk of starting and perpetuating gender stereotypes that teachers are men – or perhaps girls students need role models and mentors? If role models and mentors are the immediate issue, is there perhaps a way to provide them in the classroom apart from the teachers themselves – through a program to introduce impressive young Liberian women to students in schools?

As USAID focuses on the LTTP and training teachers, there are some possibly some real gender-related opportunities. With the right pedagogical training, teachers may model respect for the input and perspectives of girls in classroom – listening, appreciating, and discussing. In the long run, this may be important for democracy-building – for ensuring that girls grow up to have confidence to contribute to public debates and to take leadership, and to preclude a culture of allowing boys to deride or ignore girls’ contributions and leadership

### *Curriculum/ALP*

The challenge with the ALP is that it is not just about “reading, writing and ‘rithmetic”. Students whose education was disrupted by years of conflict and their experiences during it, need more sophisticated content appropriate to their age and experience. This can also be an opportunity, however – to introduce information relating to health or to economic activities. In fact, it was through an adult literacy course in Senegal that health subject matter included discussion of the health risks of FGC. Not set up to combat FGC, the program evolved as a result of the women in the course – who having discovered the dangers, began working to stop the procedures altogether. The *Tostan* project was a bottom-up initiative that grew out of age and gender-appropriate content.

Another issue is that children would normally gain some education from social structures like families and churches. Yet as a result of the conflict years, those systems for communicating life skills have often been lost. There are potentially young adults who do not know many simple things that they would have learned at home – whether something as simple as knowing that plants have roots and what they do, how to treat a bleeding cut, or how to treat older people with respect.

So-called “Life Skills” curricula are therefore important – but also an opportunity for boys to

understand situation and roles of girls; and visa versa. For young men and women to learn to communicate with one another, and to have practical information they will need for taking care of their families.

### *Infrastructure and Services*

As was discussed in the cross-cutting issues section, making sure that students can and will get education is complex – including availability, access and affordability. The issues vary according to rural/urban location, attitudes of families toward girls’ education, safety for girls, etc. In very poor families, girls are often needed to do work, generating food or some income, rather than going to school. If there are school fees, and if gendered division of responsibilities gives mothers the duty to pay them, the current circumstances of mothers (be they female-headed households or not) may preclude their having the resources to send them. A simple but critical issue for girls is whether there are separate, private latrines.

One fundamental issue for infrastructure and girls’ education is safety – particularly within the context of Liberia with the high incidence of gender-based violence and transactional sex. Facilities must be safe, as well as transport to them.

#### **Education-Related Opportunities to Promote Positive Gender Relations**

Community support and involvement for schools is one way to combine education, civic participation, and gender. PTAs typically engage mothers and fathers, women and men. In terms of educational quality, they can hold teachers accountable but also support them (including women teachers). They can also be forums for sharing information about health and gender. And they often provide women with leadership opportunities – as was noted in the World Food Programme’s policy requiring women in leadership positions for school feeding committees.

### ***Recommendation***

Incorporate a Role-Models component into school programs. This is one way to compensate for the limited number of female teachers. It may give girls something to which to aspire, and combat gender stereotypes by introducing “everyday” women in all sorts of jobs, such as agricultural extension agents, machine repairers or a carpentry teacher from LCIP. It might also introduce some historic figures, such as Milly Baker (earned a Master’s degree in animal husbandry from Cornell, and was a successful raiser of poultry), Rose Sambala (principal of Sambala school), Angie Brooks (only African woman to head the United Nations General Assembly), Janice Vani (taught at Cuttington University), Sister Mary Lorraine Brown (President of Stella Maris Polytechnic), and Christine Norman.<sup>2</sup> See also those profiled in Women as Peacemakers.

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<sup>2</sup> Thanks to John Gay for just some preliminary ideas!

## **Economic Well-Being and Income Generation**

As was noted in Part I, many women are already economically active – but are trapped at the lowest levels of subsistence. Whether rural women in agriculture, market women, or urban women in formal sector jobs, they face challenges gaining access to resources, working outside the gender roles and constraints of their community, and engaging in their activities safely. While it is possible, and often desirable, to establish projects that target women only, there are also many opportunities to ensure that women benefit fully from large project with major funding – such as the World Bank’s \$95 million infrastructure program. The following are some ideas stemming from USAID-related documents and discussions – but an additional tool would be “Integrating Gender Equality and Women’s Economic Empowerment Issues in the Economic Revitalization Pillar of Liberia PRSP: A Resource Pack” prepared by the World Bank Gender Team in November 2007.

### *Agriculture*

USAID’s partners should take care not to establish or perpetuate gender stereotypes. The sorts of work that women do, i.e. which crops or which work, vary among the counties of Liberia. There is little that is absolutely taboo or unchangeable. It is up to USAID and its partners to ensure that women may be involved in a range of roles within the timber, rubber and mining industries. Apart from physical strength, they have the ability to receive the same training as men - and to earn cash.

Women critically need extension services, small capital/microfinance, and access to land. A critical point for those lending technical assistance or managing land programs is to be sure not to introduce a gender bias that was not there before, i.e. not enabling or facilitating men to get their names on registration papers or deeds!

But it is in the value chain, where women grow but do not process, that they are foregoing opportunities to generate more income. Insofar as USAID’s partners focus on agribusiness or processing, it is important as a matter of equity but also economic growth that women benefit fully and effectively from technical assistance and access to equipment. If USAID and its partners work with “farmer groups, cooperatives and communities” it will be important to ensure that women are included and participate fully (as indicated in the Ladder of Participation above).

### *Forestry*

Reportedly, the Forestry Development Administration is mostly men – with women perhaps in administrative positions (and maybe one woman at a higher level). This poses a challenge – of how to get more women in to forestry, as park rangers and other tasks that do not require physical strength. Ensuring that a gender bias is not inadvertently established and perpetuated requires purposeful attention – to recruit women and to provide role models for young women.

It is always important to start with a gender analysis to understand who does what. Again, as stated above regarding agriculture, analyses must be local because there are local variations. Once know what women do, can work with them to develop their products. Also issues of gender stereotypes, and not necessarily accepting that cash crops, such as timber, are only for men. New contracts, new companies, and new practices are opportunities to include women along with men – and neither restore nor create gender stereotypes. Lastly, value chain analysis should look at whether men and/or women are within each link of the chain – and look at how they relate to one another. Information and negotiating power may determine where there are large shifts of profit inconsistent with the labor or

value- added.

### *Infrastructure: Road construction and Improvements*

These issues were addressed in the gender assessment for the LCIP project. Here, too, gender stereotypes are invidious – and men working as program officers and staff have a tendency to recruit and work with men. If the World Bank and the World Food Programme can insist on women workers with men, USAID can as well. As was noted in the World Bank assessment of Opportunities for Women’s Economic Empowerment in Liberia’s Infrastructure Project, a \$95 million dollar project results in “\$250,000-\$500,000 cash injection in areas served by the rural road”, which is “significant as there are so few income earning opportunities.” The findings regarding socio-economic impact note that road works are an “opportunity to acquire and develop skills”, are mechanisms for “community building amongst groups, ex-combats, returnees, IDPs, women, men and youth,” and have benefits for “women’s social empowerment: acquiring a voice, commanding respect.” When work is unskilled or semi-skilled, women can be part of it. Regarding local construction companies that are partners, standards for reliability should apply fairly to male businesses as well as female-headed businesses. USAID may take steps similar to those recommend for the World Bank: to “retrofit existing programs” by stipulating in all bidding documents and contracts that firm must not only offer equal employment opportunities to women and men, but also to provide incentives for women’s participation: childcare, literacy/numeracy classes, validation of on-the-job skill training.”

### *Energy*

Even energy programs can be important for women. They need to use it, and often are the customers who must pay for it. If energy programs focus on new technologies and/or train people to install and manage them, women should be included – those are valuable skills. And if the programs involve community decisions, women have positions regarding priorities.

## **Democratic Participation, Leadership and Influencing Decisions**

### *Civil society and CSO capacity-building*

- When selecting CSOs with whom to work, think about working with WONGOSOL to build the capacity of women's organizations
- Be aware of the commitment of women's organizations to be watchdogs, for corruption and for effective use of Liberia’s limited resources.
- Given women’s mobilization for peace, for elections and to contribute to the TRC, build on their experience and determination as social movement

### *Media*

- Ensure that training programs include women journalists (association, existing professionals, and also young women interested)
- Ensure that media are not transmitting gender stereotypes
- Enlist media to promote respect for women: Engage youth, media and role models
- Make sure to incorporate more than 3 traditional media, using songs, drama, etc.

- Ensure that all communications components are preceded by analysis and justified by well-grounded strategy.

#### *Elections preparations*

- Build on women's mobilization in the last elections
- Pay attention to women as voters, ensuring that they are *informed* voters
- Go beyond women to a gender perspective: recognizing that for women to be viable candidates, they need for men to vote for them as well as women
- Pay attention to “gender neutral” factors that may have disparate impacts: running for political office requires money, and not many women in rural areas have the requisite resources. Engage Liberians in considering how to be sure that the process is open to all who have valuable leadership skills.
- Recognize and support women in local leadership positions- whether already Paramount Chiefs or active mobilizers of other women in their region – so that they may move through the “pipeline” and into the national arena.

#### *Legislative Strengthening: Women's caucus, but also all members*

- Support work in the legislature for “modernization”, including capacity to ensure that research precedes the drafting of laws, and that the research includes attention to the needs of women, and how particular policies or laws will apply to women (as compared with men, or similarly to rural citizens as compared with urban, etc.)
- Support efforts for all members of the legislature to understand gender issues and respond to women constituents – both women members and men.
- Encourage and support the capacity of women legislators to build coalitions with men

#### *Rule of Law: Triage for immediate access to justice*

- Make sure that access to justice means more than access to courts, particularly as the courts cannot be viable support for many women in rural areas for many years to come.
- Insofar as the courts are functioning, ensure that Magistrates and Judges not only have gender training, but are monitored for gender bias.
- Support innovative ways to address “justice” – from community-based paralegals to Peace Huts. While “positive law” may come from government processes, people all around the world find guidance and support from other systems of “law” that have meaning for them. Apart from the long-term objectives emanating from educated Liberians in Monrovia, subject rule of law programs to a litmus test of whether they will help the “average woman”. If not, they may not help the average man, either – for now.

## **CROSS CUTTING RECOMMENDATIONS**

### ***(1) This is the time and opportunity to build gender-analysis capacity of USAID staff and partners***

USAID staff, and partners, could use some gender-related training in order to be able to “observe, analyze and innovate”. Training would “raise the bar” beyond collecting data that not analyzed, or providing the occasional “success story”.

Beyond a basic training workshop, there are opportunities to learn while analyzing existing work and collaborating with other donors and organizations. There two angles: (1) To hold sessions to discuss particular gender issues, such as communicating with women, that engage representatives from all sectors or (2) Hold sessions on particular sub-sector issues, such as land tenure or HIV/AIDS, and invite various organizations and partners to share experience regarding issues of women’s participation and gender equality within them.

### ***(2) Where there is so much focus in Liberia on women and on gender mainstreaming, it is important to coordinate with other donors and through the Ministry for Gender and Development.***

Consistent with USAID intentions to “pursue closer relationships with other donors,” would be participation in a Donors’ Gender Team (beyond the current UN team) or hosting “Brown bag” lunches with guest speakers from gender/women-related projects.

### ***(3) Work with related women’s groups or NGOs focused on women’s issues and engagement***

When one looks at women as “assets” rather than as victims, and when one recognizes the work that AFELL or WONGOSOL or WIPNET are undertaking, it is clear that they have expertise regarding their own country and communities. Though they may yet need capacity-building, one of effective way of building it is collaboration. It should be win-win!

Work together for design, as real collaboration with related women's groups. But beware taking not only information and perspectives, but also their work! Include them as working and therefore remunerated partners for transfer of knowledge and sustainability. When Liberian NGOs are partners and contributors along with international NGOs, the local groups should get resources as well as training and capacity-building.

### ***(4) Put some Gender Mainstreaming systems in place***

- Require sex-disaggregated data – but with analysis, and action when the data show disparities!!
- Encourage “success stories”
- Require monitoring and midterm assessments from partners, e.g. LCIP – but bote that extra steps require resources/budgeting

## Recommendation for a Women-focused Activity

### *The Foundations: What We Know about the Needs and Resources for Women in Liberia*

The first three sections of this report lay the foundations for identifying how USAID might target resources for a women-focused project. As a result of years of constant and increasingly brutal conflict, **both men and women both struggle with poverty exacerbated by low literacy and education and a paucity of resources**. Part I focuses on the “demand side”, and identifies four dimensions that distinguish women’s needs: (1) the incidence of those common factors is **greater among women than men**, (2) **women-particular post-conflict traumas**, particularly those relating to sexual and gender-based violence (recognizing, however, that men also were subject to some SGBV and a great deal of other trauma and violence as well), (3) **narrower space in which to pursue economic opportunities due to socially-grounded gender expectations**, such as what it is “appropriate” for women to do alone or solely with men, and (4) an increasingly **prevalent economic “currency” of transactional sex**. Another factor that puts women at a disadvantage is **project designs predicated on a “male model”** that does not work for female participants and beneficiaries.

Following that, Part II reports on the “supply side”: what the Government of Liberia, civil society, donors and international NGOs are doing to address women’s needs. This is important for USAID in two ways: to **know what is being done by others**, and therefore does not require USAID intervention, and to **recognize opportunities for linkages**. At the same time, however, the deficits and challenges are so great, that if a donor is providing adult literacy programs or microfinance for women in one part of the country, there are other localities where such resources are not yet provided.<sup>1</sup>

USAID, too, is part of the supply side already. While the third part of this report focuses on gender-related challenges in USAID’s strategy and activities, it recognizes where USAID programs already involve women and girls, while suggesting opportunities to do better: how some **adjusting practices may enhance the reach and quality of outcomes**. As women and girls are clearly among the beneficiaries within USAID’s health and education programs, USAID already is addressing critical needs like illiteracy and reproductive health. It is in the economic growth activities and democracy activities, however, where biases tend to persist. Agriculture assistance is critical in post-conflict Liberia, both for family food security and as a first step out of extreme poverty. Both cash crops and infrastructure promise greater incomes for those employed in those sectors but gender biases result in severe limitations to women’s inclusion.

### *The Problem: The Gap between Resources and Women Needing Them*

Given the demand side of what women need, and the supply side of what is being purposefully provided to women and what is included within USAID’s activities, the question is: **Where are the gaps?** Some of the most urgent gaps fall within the economic realm. An extraordinary number of Liberian women live their lives at the edge: barely surviving, and doing what they can to provide the most basic needs for themselves and their families. On a day-to-day basis, they struggle for food; those with some basic education seek ways to enhance their learning and skills; when a health problem arises, they have no resources upon which to rely. For most, therefore, survival depends on petty trade, subsistence agriculture; and too often, without any other options, transactional sex.

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<sup>1</sup> Time permitting, it would be good to map geographically who is providing which sort of assistance where – something that the MoG&D ought to tracking.

### An Illustration: What are Young Women's Options?

Angie is a young, 24 year old Liberian woman. She is alone: daughter of a single, teenage mother in Monrovia who died years ago; survivor of the conflict with her grandmother (and a female cousin), and when men demanded all her grandmother's savings and beat her in front of the granddaughters, they fled to Ghana; now, since her grandmother left to live in Atlanta with another daughter, without any family in Liberia; living in one room she rents with a family.

Nevertheless, Angie is studying social work at the African Episcopalean College in Monrovia. She is able to avoid illicit activities, particularly sex work, because of support from her mother's childhood friend, who was present at Angie's birth. The friend is in the United States, calls Angie regularly, and sends resources by Western Union.

During a conversation at a nice restaurant on Saturday night, two women enter who are dressed for business – to attract male customers. Angie uncomfortably notes that one is her school friend, who has made other choices that Angie herself has only barely been able to avoid. Yet: when asked what she will do upon completion of her studies, and how she will find a job, Angie is stumped – and has no family network to whom to turn. It does not take much to anticipate that to obtain an internship or job, she may again have to choose whether to engage in transactional sex.

What does she, and do other women like her, need? (1) Information about options, about how to enter the workforce and (2) Honest brokers who can place her in the position without requiring “payment”, be it sex or money.

On the positive side, however, there are increasingly programs and resources for women – particularly in the more densely populated (or “popular”) areas. The GoL and donors are addressing “women's economic empowerment” with microfinance, skills training and some limited agricultural programs.

But even as the resources may not be sufficient to meet all the needs, the flow of resources also poses major questions regarding absorptive capacity – and how to ensure effective linkages between resources and needs, between programs and beneficiaries. Many women are hard working and determined to generate what economic resources they possibly can, ready and willing to take realistic steps ahead from where they are now. Yet there is therefore a need for purposeful attention to **bridging the gap between the search for opportunities and resources**. For most women, **availability does not translate to access and affordability** because women face two hurdles: (1) *low capabilities* due to limited literacy, education and work experience, and (2) *knowledge of resources and possibilities*. Women cannot read and radio messages come and go quickly. The infrastructure that enables the flow of information – both physical and social conduits – are only very slowly coming back. In the greater Monrovia area, women believe they are without options. Women who turn to sex work to generate income may not want to choose that route, but absent knowledge of any alternatives, see no choice. Without information, women are not able to take advantage of some of the programs that already exist or are being launched: from literacy training, to job skills training, to infrastructure jobs and microfinance.

## *Outlines of a Targeted Approach: “If Women Know, Women Grow!”*

A USAID program, based in Monrovia but connecting with the MoG&D offices in the counties, would focus on **Information, Guidance, and Experience**. Some young women lack basic education/literacy – but there are programs providing training. Young women lack job preparation and experience – but some programs offer it. Many women engaged in small economic activities require some capital – but there are more and more micro-credit and savings programs. At the same time, there is real urgency to get women as teachers, police officers, midwives, agricultural extension agents, etc – and programs to enlist and prepare. What is missing? Brokering, or connecting information with those who need it.

One approach would be to establish a sort of one-stop shop of information brokering, referral and placement services for young women who are looking for options. It would be run by a couple of women’s NGOs, though with some connection or sponsorship by the Ministry of Gender and Development. The NGOs would have regular connections with the Ministry of Labor, Chamber of Commerce, and others. With training and guidance for the placement “counselors”, the NGOs would be prepared to refer women clients to education or training; or others to internships or to professional training programs.<sup>2</sup>

One possibility, for example, would be to focus on public works jobs that might be unskilled and low wages, but opportunities for income and to gain some skills. While this might provide some small wages, it would need more to promise more than temporary assistance. It would have to include some self-improvement, such as literacy and life skills training. Some of the work might be identified in relation to large infrastructure, such as roads or unskilled construction. With coaching, encouragement and brokering with the project/employer side, the project would work to break stereotypes.

Before sending women for internships or jobs, they would provide some “life skills” training (or refer them to existing programs) – and maybe provide some proper clothes if they need it. Before sending them for microfinance, they would know for which programs they might qualify.

But beyond the information and referrals, they would provide guidance and mentoring – a way for women not to be facing and trying to understand the labor market alone. One model is that of ‘job clubs’ by which people in a more normal and functioning labor market help one another to find their jobs – keeping up morale and sharing tips and information. In this case, they would be less focused on the formal sector, but still ways for women with common interests and aspirations to connect with and support one another. Such groups may also be opportunities to share and discuss information – whether about health issues or elections.

There might also be opportunities to introduce women who might work together – as demonstrated by savings groups or agricultural cooperatives, to establish women's cooperatives or small businesses. If, for example, women wanted to form teams or small businesses to work on infrastructure, the brokering/advisory service might identify resources to help them contract for some piece of the overall work – promising eventually some profit for the value-added of managing the work. This would be one way to support modest start-ups, and give some women additional experience in leadership and management. (See, for example, the Rock Crushers' story, in the Launching Microfinance Stories of Heros.)

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<sup>2</sup> One issue to address, however, is that when there are programs, logistics are often a problem for women: both the cost of housing and the gender-related “propriety” of their attending alone.

### *Project Principles*

- Must reach women “where they are”: engaged in survivalist activities in agriculture, marketing and petty trade – with the objective of moving women up, just one rung from where they are but knowing that some will keep on climbing!
- Women and adolescent girls are not helpless or weak victims. To the contrary they are strong, they are determined, they are doing “what they have to” to get by – for themselves and for their families
- Do not want to repeat or compete with what is already being done
- Programmatic support should enlist the women in Liberian society who are already working to create opportunities and to help their own; engaging what skills and determination they already have, but building their capacities
- Women need information and guidance in order not to face their economic challenges alone

Liberia is an unusual situation – where although women’s needs are urgent and pervasive, there are many resources targeting them. President Johnson Sirleaf has capitalized on two “opportunities”: the world paying attention to her as the first women President in Africa and attention-generating news regarding gender-based violence to attract major resources. Yet experience with the Kosovo Women’s Initiative was some years of major resources that then simply stopped – and capable, determined women were frustrated in their efforts then to generate even modest ongoing support. What would be unfortunate in Liberia would be if the current resources were not used effectively in the years of plenty, and were not to generate women as economic actors who would then hire other women and contribute to the economy. While the Ministry of Gender and Development should coordinate donors and programs at the macro level, there is a need to connect those resources at the lower, people-level. This is an area where USAID could help to establish independent organizations and systems, initially not-for-profit that would eventually become contractors to government, and would provide ongoing support for women needing information and connections with the labor market or economic resources.

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