

Liberia

Response to the Questionnaire to Governments on Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and the Outcome of the Twenty-Third Special Session of the General Assembly (2000)

PART I

Government commitment to Gender Mainstreaming dates back to 1994 when a gender unit, was established in the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs with the mandate inter alia to promote the mainstreaming of women and children's issues into development planning. The Women and Children Coordination Unit (WACCU) collaborated effectively with the donor agencies resulting in the creation of a National Gender Forum and the women NGOs Secretariat. The forum, which composed of all stakeholders involved in women related activities, was established in 1998. It serves as the national body responsible to provide guidelines to policy formulation and enactment on gender issues.

In September 1998, the National Women NGOs Secretariat was established to serve as a center for the collection and dissemination of information among women NGOs and act as conduit for directing and redirecting national rehabilitation and reconstructing resources to women's poverty alleviation projects and activities.

The Women and Children Coordination Unit also succeeded in establishing Gender Desk Offices (GDO) in each of the 18 line Ministries of Government. The GDO are to foster coordinated efforts, ensure appropriate strategic direction for the promotion of gender mainstreaming in the planning and budgeting processes at the sectoral level. The GDO also serve as members of the National Gender Forum. With assistance from the UNDP, and UNICEF, the WACCU work closely with the Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia (AFELL) which collaboration culminated in the ratification of the Convention on the Eradication of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, (CEDAW), signed into law by the President of Liberia on October 15, 1998 and printed into handbill for public information purposes.

Other achievements attained utilizing technical and financial assistance from the UNDP and UNIFEM include (a) the translation of the Beijing Platform for Action and (b) the preparation of the National Plan of Action (NPA) on the CEDAW and Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The translation of the NPA was carried out under the framework of the media Task Force of the National Gender Forum. The BPA was translated into simple Liberian English that is easily understood by ordinary Liberians.

A workshop was held on 14 October 1998 to review the draft translated script. The translation of the BPA into vernaculars is yet to be carried out. The Beijing Draft National Plan of Action (NPA) to address the discussion surrounding the implementation of the identified 10 original areas of the (NPA) was undertaken in 1999. The NPA was prepared under the framework of the National Gender Forum. The NPA is yet to be discussed at the policy level.

With the relative peace and security obtaining in the capital and a few other counties and in view of the widely held view that the rebel in certain parts of the country would be contained, the then National Patriotic Party (NPP) led Government undertook to prepare a five year Medium Term Plan for National Reconstruction and Development (NRDP) (2001-2006).

One of the essential goals of the NRDP was a poverty reduction strategy, which sought to improve the condition and standard of living of the population throughout the country. Essential elements of this strategy called for a reduction in the number of households living in conditions of poverty by 50% within the plan period.

The plan places particular emphasis on series of gender and development programs to promote gender equality. These programs among others include:

- (i) Increasing women's participation in policies and decision-making;
- (ii) curbing violence against women particularly FGM and rape;
- (iii) Gender training for all decision-makers;
- (iv) The strengthening of women and children institutions;
- (v) Improvement in the literacy rate among the female population to remove the prevailing imbalances;
- (vi) Removal of residual negative socio-cultural beliefs and practices, notably early marriage and female genital mutilations;
- (vii) Decentralization of reproductive health, natural child health and family planning services to the rural areas;
- (viii) Review of the legal and customary laws, which pose barriers to ownership of or access to land, capital, credit as well as the means of production.
- (ix) Empowerment of women through micro-financing enabling them to participate in market opportunities

Even though the Liberian Government did not fully implement this plan due to an increase in the intensity of the war, which had reached the capital in 2002 and engulfed the entire country in 2003; two of the programs were implemented.

The UNDP Gender Project did provide training for policy and decision-makers Legislators, and members of the Judiciary in the areas of gender mainstreaming, gender equality, and gender and development in 2001. An international gender specialist facilitated the training. This training helped to mainstream gender at the decision making level in government. It is expected that henceforth legislators and members of the judiciary will include gender concerns in the daily work thereby enhancing the promulgation of laws, which are gender sensitive. .

The Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia (AFELL) persistently engaged the National Legislature in substantive and results oriented dialogue urging them to eliminate a law which denies women the right to inherit the property of a husband or spouse upon their demise. With pressure mounted by the Ministry of Gender and Development, female legislators and continuing advocacy by the AFELL, the Legislature did pass the now famous Inheritance Bill in 2001 ending decades of discrimination against women. With the passage of the bill into law, women and girl children will now be able to inherit property of their diseased husband, fathers, etc. The

passage of the law does not only empower women but ends a cultural practice, which has discriminated against women for generations. The action of the legislature could promote women's active participation in the economic and political decision-making processes of the nation in view of their acquired property.

In April 2003, a country report on the Millennium Development Goals was prepared for Liberia. The MDG Report expresses Liberia's own commitment to the objectives of the MDG as adopted in 2000. It is evident that most of the objectives of the MDG will not be implemented in Liberia pending the attainment of security and the establishment of rule of law in all parts of the country.

PART II

1. WOMEN AND POVERTY

The 1998 Common Country Assessment reported that 80 percent of the population are living below the poverty line and 55 percent of them are experiencing abject poverty. UNDP Poverty Profile of Liberia of 2001 indicates that most of the poor are likely to be illiterate or have low educational attainment. Another UNDP publication – Poverty and Conflict in Liberia 2000 reports that 47.0% of female heads of households are without any formal education while 18.7% only received elementary education. With female represented at the bottom of the educational ladder, it is evident that there are more poor female-headed households than male heads of households in Liberia.

Moreover, information contained in the MDG report indicate that the poor in Liberia are primarily found in the rural areas, among households engaged in subsistence farming as the main source of livelihood. Most of the farmers are women and farming methods are rudimentary. Majority of the poor are therefore women.

Liberia has no institution and program specifically designed to address poverty. The Government did however; produce a good policy framework that could contribute to poverty reduction. The Government in its five year National Reconstruction and Development Plan (2001-2006) sought to create an environment conducive for poverty reducing growth and development. The government strategy is stated as follows:

- Accelerating the transition from reconstruction to sustainable development;
- Consolidating peace and reinforcing the democratization process as well as strengthening mechanisms for conflict prevention;
- Performing and developing the country's economic and social infrastructure in order to adequately support social and economic recovery.
- Creating the requisite enabling environment for private sector growth and development; and
- Pursuing broad-based development and poverty reduction.

Following the intervention of the international community and with an end to the conflict in sight, the Government in collaboration with the international community has now embarked on a set of strategic objectives aimed at the following:

- Establish governance institutions that promote the rule of law and respect for human rights;
- Restoration of productive capacity and, livelihoods with a particular focus on agriculture; and
- Lay the foundation for the rebuilding of Liberia and its infrastructure.

CONSTRAINTS AND GAPS

1. Shortage of financial resources for rural women;

2. Debt burden;
3. Fighters are yet to disarm; and
4. Resettlement of refugees and IDPs not yet achieved.

Lessons Learned

- The reduction of poverty in Liberia is hinged upon a successful implementation of the Accra Peace Agreement which calls for a complete disarmament of all fighting forces and a return to peace and normalcy.
- Conflict exacerbates poverty

2. WOMEN AND HEALTH

The available health and nutritional indicators for Liberia are among the worst in the world. It is estimated that less than 10% of Liberians have access to health care. The destruction of health care facilities, combined with low capacity of operating facilities has reduced access to basic health services and worsened the health situation in Liberia. Malaria and malnutrition continue to feature prominently as major causes of fatalities in children. HIV/AIDS continues to increase. Other major causes for fatalities are cholera, diarrhea, hypertension, pregnancy, accidents and tuberculosis.

Inadequate access to antenatal care, a high proportion of home deliveries (63%), lack of emergency obstetric care, and poor institutional status of pregnant women have all adversely affected maternal care. Prior to the outbreak of fighting in 2003, maternal mortality rates in Liberia were 578 per 100,000 live births – one of the highest in the world.

Malnutrition in Liberia is widespread: 39% of children under five are stunted, 26% underweight and 6% are severely wasted. High figures have been recorded in IDP camps and outside of the capital Monrovia. Micronutrient deficiencies are common among children and women.

CONSTRAINTS AND GAPS

- Inadequacy of resources
- Repatriation and resettlement of refugees and IDPs
- Due to the high rate of illiteracy in the country the awareness campaign on HIV/AIDS is not being heeded by a large section of the population
- Remunerations and incentives in the health sector are discouraging
- Harmful cultural practices such as FGM adversely affect the health of women.
- Violence against women, particularly rape.
- The unavailability and inaccessibility of free condoms.
- Inadequate coping mechanisms such as the lack of funds to acquire medical attention, and the lack of proper nutrition and poor housing in a mosquito infested environment.

Lessons learned

- There continues to be limited access to health care services

3. VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Even though statistics on gender-based violence is scarce, indications are that wife battering, female genital mutilation (FGM) and rape are the most common forms of violence meted against women in Liberia. While wife battering and FGM were frequent occurrences prior to the war, rape became more pronounced during the 14 years civil war.

Other forms of violence perpetuated against women include forced marriages, and forced conscription into the ranks of the rebel armies. Long-standing cultural practices in Liberia do allow for the parents of a girl child to select her future husband even if the girl does not love the man. During the war, women were forced to marry rebel fighters against their will. The rebels would threaten to kill the women if they refused to stay with them. Others were forced to cohabit with the rebels because of easy access to food.

Various women organizations have endeavored over the years to provide assistance to victims of gender based violence. One of such organization is the Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia (AFELL). AFELL advocates for the rights of women and provides free legal services to women. AFELL provides free legal services to female sex victims such as rape. AFELL also helps women who are being denied property rights because of their inability to seek legal redress. Another women organization is the NAWOCOL, which provided trauma counseling under its abused women and girls (AWAG) Project to war-affected women across the country.

CONSTRAINTS AND GAPS

1. The women NGOs providing protection for women lack adequate support;
2. Acute shortage of data on gender based violence.

Lessons learned

- There is an urgent need to increase support to the AFELL
- The restoration of peace and the rule of law could serve to abate the high rate of gender based violence.

4. WOMEN AND ARMED CONFLICT

Women in Liberia were not only forced to fight a war they did not start, they also contributed significantly to a search for peace. Being the most victims of the crisis, they began discussions with their counterparts in other Mano River Union Countries (who also became embroiled in the conflict by extension) in 1999 to stop the fighting in the Sub-region.

With technical support from the Liberia Country Office, the Femmes Africa Solidarity (FAS) facilitated a meeting of the women of the Mano River Union basin on May 1-13, 2003 in Abuja, Nigeria. This meeting was also held to build trust among the women and seek avenues to end the fighting in the Sub-region. It was also during this meeting that the Mano River Women Peace Network (MARWOPNET) was established, as a Sub-regional Women's Initiative to find lasting solution to the region's problems. Since then, the MARWOPNET has met with leaders of the

Sub-region, the ECOWAS, Foreign Ambassadors, heads of Institutional Organizations, Faction leaders, and other stakeholders to end the fighting in the Sub-region. Other actions adopted by the MARWOPNET and other women groups like the Women in Peace Building Network (WIPNET) to sensitize the leaders of the countries of the sub-region, in their quest for peace included sit-ins, media publicity and advocacy. The relative peace obtaining in the Sub-region can be attributed to various types of constructive engagements by the women of Liberia and the sub-region.

The National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) is working with the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) to maintain the peace in the aftermath of armed conflict which has plagued Liberia for 14 years and restore peace.

CONSTRAINTS AND GAPS

- Women groups lack adequate support;
- NGO Women are needed in Decision-making positions; and
- Low level of women's participation in peace negotiations.

Lessons Learned

- Women can be great peace makers if given the opportunity.
- The women provided the neutrality needed in the midst of simmering hostilities.
- Language differences can cause unnecessary delays in the quest for peace.
- Financing the travel of women groups to various venues was always a problem.

5. WOMEN AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The uncontrolled exploitation of Liberia's abundant resources and other human activities for the sustenance and survival of the population has over the years created environmental problems. Prominent among these problems are:

- i. Deforestation due to logging, shifting cultivation, firewood and charcoal production and the associated destruction of biodiversity through illegal hunting;
- ii. Pollution of surrounding rivers and streams, destruction of vegetation, habitat and forests through uncontrolled mining operation;
- iii. Marine and air pollution and
- iv. Problems associated with natural causes such as coastal erosion.

Environmental degradation of any kind impacts negatively on the livelihood of majority of the Liberian women who to a large extent, depend on the environment for a livelihood. In rural Liberia, women depend on fish as a protein supplement. Women in farming households wade the nearby rivers and creeks to catch fish to up-grade their food basket. Unfortunately fertilizers and pesticides from large scale modern agricultural establishments and chemicals used by miners are washed into the rivers and creeks when it rains. These chemicals and pollutants find their way into the food chain of the rural farming community.

The practice of shifting cultivation, indiscriminate logging and the felling of trees for charcoal exposes the top soil to erosion and therefore reduce the yield per acre. This affects the level of production of female subsistence farmers.

There is no comprehensive environmental policy and the necessary legislation that should go along with it. There are laws to protect the environment and activities relating to human settlements but they are fragmented. Moreover, there is no mechanism to enforce the laws and therefore they have no bearing on the society.

CONSTRAINT AND GAPS

- The capacity of the Ministry of Gender and Development is not strengthened to cope with demands of the environmental sector;
- Unemployment is very high making it difficult to control the mining sector in the short run;
- Shifting cultivation using slash and burn methods is an age old practice in Liberia, the shifts to other methods may be difficult.
- Inadequate resources.

Lessons learned

- There is a need to pay more attention to the environment.
- The Ministry of Gender will have to take the lead in prevailing upon Government to initiate steps to protect the environment in view of its negative impact on women.

6. WOMEN AND MEDIA

Even though the media in Liberia is constantly reporting cases of rape and other negative stereotypes, yet it has been used by women groups to their advantage. Women have occasionally turned to the media to enhance networking and advocacy. Female politicians also use the media to get their views across. Women groups are always on the radio discussing HIV/AIDS, disarmament and demobilization of female combatants, the status of female internally displaced persons and other programs that affect the well-being of women. The UNDP Gender project provided training in gender analysis to media personnel in 2000. These media personnel have grouped themselves into an association called the Gender Media Forum. They usually cover women programs even if they are held in remote places. There are many women journalists working in media houses, however nearly all of the media houses are owned and controlled by men.

Very few women own radios. The radios in the homes are usually the property of the husband who occasionally carries it around with him thus denying the woman the opportunity of listening to programs that relate to her. The advent of the war made things worse when fighters seized most personal belongings including radios. The vast majority of the population live in rural areas which are not accessible to many radio stations. Cable television is a rarity in Liberia and the exclusive domain of a few.

CONSTRAINTS AND GAPS

- A greater proportion of the females live in rural Liberia. Unfortunately, there are only two short-wave radios which do not even cover the entire country;
- Most women are illiterate and therefore can not comprehend the contents of the print media;
- In view of the extensive and systematic looting which characterized the war, very few women own radio or television sets.

Lessons Learned

- The ascendancy of women to the Legislature, the cabinet, and as head of political parties has forced the media to pay more attention to women's issues.
- Modern information, communication and technology is beyond the reach of most Liberia women.
- The media could be used as a medium to propel more women to positions of decision making.

7. THE GIRL CHILD

Although a gender profile has not been conducted in Liberia to ascertain the nature of the characteristic of the girl child vis-a-vis the boy child, there are visible indicators revealing discriminatory practice against the girl child in the pursuit of education, health, and general advancement. The girl child may not be allowed to enroll in a school due primarily to the inability of the parents to afford the tuition. Accordingly girls have a lower enrollment rate than boys in primary school. Girls net enrollment rate is 34.1% and boys is 61.4%.

Traditional practices such as the Sande society and early marriages do play havoc with girls education in Liberia. The Sande society is associated with the informal training of the girl child by women cultural elders in preparation for marriage. Such training takes up to three years depending on the tribe. Persistent and intense advocacy by civil society, women organizations and the Ministries of Gender and Development, and Information, Culture & Tourism could help to end the practice. Past Government, however, have been quite supportive of cultural practices for fear of alienating the tribal leaders and witch doctors commonly referred to as Zoes.

As indicated already, the dropout rate for girls is higher than for boys. In 2000/2002 boys drop out rate accounted for 9%, while girls drop out rate accounted for 11.0%. In most instances, poverty accentuated by the effects of the war and early exposure to sex are major factors for the high drop out rates among girls in school.

FAWE, a local NGO is already active in persuading girls to stay in school. The need for other civil society women groups to strengthen the process through the establishment of girls' clubs in the various schools to establish dialogue is imperative. The Government, UNICEF and FAWE are also involved in the following:

- Developing gender sensitive training materials and resources, including a focus on the girl child in IECD
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- Establishing a pilot program of 5 Girl Friendly Schools in various geographical and demographic settings to revitalize community ownership, increase awareness of educating girls, and further a full program of Life skills, gender role awareness, student centered teaching, and education for all in the community.
- A Girls' Education Newsletter has been established with FAWE that will produce a girl-written, girl-edited newspaper to support and disseminate information encouraging all girls to attend and stay in school.
- An intensive, country wide enrolment campaign will be held by the Ministry of Education and FAWE for the fall semester of school. This will be a coordinated effort in collaboration with UNICEF Information/Communications unit.

Government's policy as contained in the MTP (2001-2006) states that Government is committed to ensuring that all children receive a sound pre-first or early childhood education as being essential to the child's development. Under primary education Government intends to ensure that primary education shall be made available, free and compulsory starting in the year 2003 for all children within the framework of Universal Primary education (UPE).

CONSTRAINTS AND GAPS

- The post-war environment characterized by increased poverty, damaged infrastructure, and a general sense of hopelessness is not conducive for the advancement of the girl child;
- The present capacities of the Ministry of Gender & Development and the Women Organizations are inadequate for fostering the well-being of the girls child;
- The huge debt burden militates against poverty reduction strategies;
- Classes are over crowded and textbooks are expensive.

Lessons learned

- Poverty also impacts negatively on girls education.

8. HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN

The conflict in Liberia gave rise to widespread violation and abuse of women rights and international humanitarian law by all parties to the conflict. This include: deliberate and arbitrary killing; disappearances; torture; widespread rape and sexual violence against women and children; arbitrary arrest and detention, forced recruitment and use of child soldier; systematic and forced displacement; and indiscriminate targeting of civilians. There has also been a serious deterioration in the institutions responsible for protecting and promoting human rights. Most

Police Officers lack training and logistics; while the Judiciary suffers from corrupt practices and political interference.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was ratified by the National Legislature on September 29, 1998 and signed into law by the President of Liberia on October 15, 1998. The passage of the CEDAW into law seeks to promote the right of the woman. Another instrument which is very important in securing the rights of the woman is the Bill on the Devolution of Estates which was also passed into law.

In order to promote human rights in the country, the MTP sought to initiate the following measures:

Design sensitization programs and materials;
conduct sensitization training in the judiciary, Legislature, Executive and other agencies; and
conduct sensitization programs for the public of their human rights and basic liberties and how to defend them.

CONSTRAINTS AND GAPS

- Continued adherence to cultural practices which favors the male child;
- Continued female genital mutilation; and
- CEDAW has not been disseminated

Lessons Learned

- Not much has been achieved in the implementation of the CEDAW.
- Not many people are aware of the CEDAW.

9 EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF WOMEN

Even before the war, Liberia's educational sector had begun to experience a number of structural problems. These arose from a stagnating economy, dwindling budgetary allocations for the sector, declining teacher moral owing to erosion in their remunerations, coupled with prolonged salary arrears and poor maintenance of schools. In addition, the curriculum was not appropriately adapted to the development needs of the country. The war aggravated the situation with its heavy toil on educational infrastructure. Many teachers fled the country due to the war, while most of those presently in the system are of poor quality. Unequal access to school, which is discriminatory against girls, is one of the intractable problems of the education system; this continues to contribute to higher illiteracy rate among both girls and women in the country. In 2000/2002 boys enrollment rate increased from 19.3% to 20.3%; while girls enrollment rate dropped sharply from 18.7% to 14.5% during the same period. The proportion of pupils starting grade 1 and reaching grade 5 was 34.6% for boys while girls accounted for 26.6%.

Literacy rate for pupils' age 15-24 years old in 1997 in Liberia was 33.2% while boys accounted for 39.8% and girls 26.3%. Also, in 2002, literacy rate for pupils in the same age group was 20.0% for males and 14.7% for females.

At the tertiary level, the disparity in school enrollment between boys and girls is much more pronounced than at any other level in the country's educational system. A survey carried out by the Ministry of Education and the UNICEF revealed that only 27.6% of girls were enrolled at the tertiary level computed to 72.4% for boys. This implies that although women constitute more than half of the population of Liberia they are under represented in the literate population.

In its National Reconstruction and Development Program (2001-2006) (NRDP), the Government affirmed its commitment to ensuring that all children receive a sound pre-first or early childhood education; and that there will be made available free and compulsory primary education beginning in the year 2003.

The education sector is also a direct beneficiary of assistance from the UN agencies, and donors such as EU and USAID. The UNDP, EU, USAID are supporting the rehabilitation of schools and the provision of instructional materials. To buttress national efforts, the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) Liberia established in 1990 with UNDP support, is working with the MOE and other partners to reduce the current illiteracy rate among girls by 10% by 2005, and to reduce drop out rates among girls. Its activities include strategic advocacy, programmed development, as well as provision of scholarships to deserving female students and dropouts.

UNICEF supported the Ministry of Education in the Back to School Campaign which was launched in November 2003, beginning the process of returning children and teachers to schools. At the end of February 2004, more than 7,600 School-in-a-Box kits had been delivered to schools in 8 accessible counties, providing school supplies for more than 580,000 children. As part of this initiative, girls' education remains a high priority. UNICEF will promote Girl Friendly Schools, provide support to Girls clubs, and carry out an action oriented review of the reasons for low child enrolment in schools. It will also develop workable and sustainable approaches to address the gender disparity that now exists.

Government policy regarding secondary education is to develop a secondary school system that effectively provides for the needs, interests and abilities of students in the modern, scientific, technological and information society. The program of study at the Junior secondary school shall be focused to provide articulation between the elementary school and the more diversified senior high school work.

CONSTRAINTS AND GAPS

- A general lack of trained teachers
- Lack of female teachers to serve as role models;
- Inability to rehabilitate all of the schools facilities that were looted, vandalized and/or damaged as a result of years of civil crisis;
- Consolidation of the peace;
- Lack of incentive for staff;

Lessons learned

- Donors will have to continue to provide substantial assistance to the sector .
- Scholarships will have to be made available to deserving female students to mitigate the effects of poverty.

10. WOMEN AND THE ECONOMY

Women dominate production in the agricultural sector of the economy. Available statistics indicate that women are responsible for 80% of production in subsistence agriculture sector. Women however have poor access to resources and improved technologies. They are unable to secure land, credit, extension services and farming inputs. According to the 1999 Liberia Human Development Report, the government agricultural extension services which in principle are set up to serve all farmers, is male-oriented. Agriculture agents spend all their time mainly on large farms owned by males, rather than assist female farmers.

Women are also discriminated against in the provision of agricultural credit, thereby reducing their capacity to engage in production and earn income from sales. Over a twelve year period, (1980-1992); the principal agricultural credit entity, the Agriculture and Cooperative Development Bank (ACDB), gave only 10% of its loans to women, whilst men received the remaining 90% of loans.

Women are also prominent in the informal sector of the economy. While only 18.2 percent of male –headed households rely on informal sector business activities, 33.6% of female headed households indicated that the informal sector is their main source of support.

Even though the informal sector is not included in the Joint Needs Assessment Process, assistance to women groups in the informal sector has been provided in the form of micro-credit loans. These small loans have been channeled to the women groups by international and National NGOs, and the UNDP. Various local credit organizations commonly known as Susu Clubs also gave loans to women at marginal interest rates. One of the women groups, the Liberia Rural Women Association (LIRWA) created its own micro-credit scheme, which is presently operational. Various international and local NGOs also provide basic skills in baking, weaving, sewing, hair dressing, fish processing, business management skills etc.

With majority of the women in the agricultural sector, the Government policy on agriculture promulgated by the MTP is for the agricultural sector to be transformed from the agrarian economy into a modern diversified and productive economy, dominated by food processing, manufacturing and services that will strengthen food security and self-sufficiency. Government also seeks to ensure increased access to financing and market services as well as extension capacities and data quality.

CONSTRAINTS AND GAPS

- Inadequacy of assistance to the agriculture sector;
- Need for extensive infrastructure rehabilitation

- Market (domestic and international) for agricultural commodities;
- High level of illiteracy among women is a major impediment to advancement
- Lack of marketing services/skills
- Difficulty in accruing substantial land limits the productivity of the women.

Lessons learned

- Government does not seem to appreciate the level of contribution of the informal sector.
- Government's programme for the agricultural sector requires a large infusion of capital outlay.

11. WOMEN IN POWER AND DECISION MAKING

Long-standing discriminatory practices have given men more access to education and training than women in Liberia, explaining the fact that men are relatively more skilled than women. With their acquired skills, men have better access to high-income jobs.

Despite Liberia 1944 Right of Suffrage granted to women, they remain under-represented in governance at all levels as a result of their low educational attainments and socio-cultural gender biases. The number of women in positions of power have however been rising. According to the Beijing +5 Country Report and the NHDR, in 1998, women occupied 5% of legislative seats and 3% of ministerial and executive positions. In 2003, the number of women in parliament had risen to 11.1% while the share of women in wage employment in non-agricultural sector rose to 11.4%. Cultural practices akin to longstanding patriarchal values, which place the male child in a position of advantage, have to be dismantled. Many poor families confronted with the decision to utilize what meager resources are available to educate some of their children would opt for the male children. The girls are usually kept at home and taught to cook, weave, fish, farm, and introduced to the Sande Society where they are taught the rudiments of good housewife in preparation for an early marriage. In many instances the dowry received from the arranged marriage is used to provide for the education of the male child.

CONSTRAINTS AND GAPS

- High levels of poverty faces parents to send some of their children to school at the expense of the others;
- High levels of illiteracy;
- The 14 years conflict hindered the education of females;
- High debt reduces the amount of resources available for education;
- Lack of willingness to confront and eradicate cultural practices;
- Lack of effective implementation of CEDAW.

12. HIV/AIDS

The first confirmed case of AIDS was diagnosed in 1986 at the Curran Hospital in Zorzor, Lofa County. In 1992, 1071 primary tests were conducted mostly in Monrovia at the Catholic Hospital, 43 or 4% of the patients were positive. By end of 2002, the prevalence

rate had risen to 11 and 12%. In spite of awareness efforts, no appreciable level of behavioral change has occurred. Stigma and discrimination against people living with AIDS is common.

The youth and the women are the most affected groups as well as the mobile population. The increase has been fuelled by the civil crisis. The potential for an upsurge in the prevalence of HIV/AIDS does exist. The high incidence of poverty and massive movement of people, both internally and externally contribute to the spread of the epidemic.

Low education levels-particularly among women and the widespread acceptance of practices associated with the abuse of women, create an environment which, favors the rapid spread of the infection through sexual transmission. The rate of increase in women is three times more than in men, and women in the age group 15 to 19 are 5 to 6 times more affected than their male counterparts.

The National AIDS Control Program leads the fight against AIDS in Liberia. The five major action areas are:

1. Increasing the availability of counseling and testing
2. Provision and reliable information through education and mass media;
3. Prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted infections (which increase the risk of HIV transmission);
4. Epidemiological surveillance and
5. Efforts to improve the safety of transfused blood.

The National AIDS Control Programme is under funded and its action is severely constrained by the disastrous situation of the public health system as a whole. Most of the population has very limited access to health services and people living with HIV/AIDS have virtually no access to adequate care and treatment. With the support of the WHO, 34 surveillance sites have been established in the country and out of this number, 24 are functional. There are eight testing and counseling centers. These facilities need to be strengthened to provide the needed services.

The National AIDS Commission is in charge of leading the national effort against HIV/AIDS, however it has very little resources to carry out its responsibilities. The National AIDS Control Programme (NACP) is the Government body responsible under the Ministry of Health for the management and coordination of the HIV/AIDS activities. In addition, even within decision-making circles, HIV/AIDS is still often perceived purely as a health issue and there is a need to reinforce the multi-sectoral approach advocated by the Government and its partners.

A national aids policy has recently been drafted in collaboration with the government and other stakeholders, with UN support and should be submitted to the Parliament soonest for approval. The national AIDS policy needs to be backed up by a revised multi-sectoral strategy and action plan, the implementation of which would be monitored by the National AIDS Commission.

PART III

The National Patriotic Party (NPP) Government established the Ministry of Gender and Development in the year 2001. The Ministry seeks to among other things, develop a clear policy measure on gender equality and gender mainstreaming to foster national socio-economic development. The mandate of the Ministry is : to advise Government on all matters affecting development and welfare of women and children; mainstream gender in policy formulation and resource allocation; monitor and report on the impact of national policies and programmes on women and children; undertake periodic and comprehensive gender in development situational analysis, and specialized studies on women's concerns; monitor progress on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the CEDAW; create opportunities for women; encourage public education on gender issues particularly the Beijing Platform for Action; and support the strengthening of women organizations.

Implementation of the Ministry's programmes are constrained by its reduced capacity occasioned by the war, and the lack of adequate support from the Government whose revenue base declined considerably due to the war. Notwithstanding the problems, it collaborated effectively with various women organizations and successfully celebrated annual international women's events including International Women's Day and International Rural women's Day. The Ministry provides technical and administrative support to the civil society organizations. The Ministry is also involved in the operational activities of the various women organizations. The Ministry is usually represented in the working meetings of these organizations and provides needed advice on critical issues, and engages in conflict resolution within and amongst organizations. The Ministry also seeks donor assistance to build the capacity of these women NGOs. The Ministry collaborated with the AFELL and succeeded in the passage of the bill on the Devolution of Estates into law. The Ministry utilizing its connections in the Government facilitated the passage of the bill through constructive dialogue and networking. The Ministry also worked closely with AFELL in prosecuting perpetrators of violence against women and children, particularly rape. Another collaborative effort with AFELL led to the ratification and passage into law of the CEDAW.

Prior to the establishment of the Ministry of Gender and Development, gender issues were hardly ever considered as worthy of inclusion in national policies and programmes. Now the concerns of women are discussed at the highest decision making body of Government – the cabinet. The Ministry also engendered Government programmes and development instruments. For example the Millennium Development Goal Country Report specifically states that - the Government of Liberia expresses its commitment to the principles of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, and the 1990 World Summit Goals for children, and the CEDAW. The Government's MTP devoted a whole chapter (chapter 13) to gender concerns alone. The overall goal of the MTP was to eliminate structural gender biases in the development process and promulgate legislations that influence the creation of an enabling environment which directly increases women's abilities, empowerment and promote better quality life of women and children.

PART IV

In order to ensure that the Beijing Platform for Action is fully implemented, there is a need to strengthen relevant institutions. These include the Ministry of Gender and Development and women organizations which have been engaged in the struggle for the advancement of women. In view of the hostilities, which engulfed the capital city of Monrovia during the past two years, coupled with the looting which characterized the fighting, the capacities of the Ministry of Gender and Development and the various women organizations were completely eroded.

The National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) in collaboration with the United Nations and the World Bank designed a framework for the restoration of peace and the reconstruction of the country following 14 years of war. The framework entitled the Joint Needs Assessment envisages an assessment of the structure of government institutions/agencies, and the building of their capacities. The framework particularly aims to establish a fully functioning Ministry of Gender and Development and intends to mainstream gender in all line ministries and agencies.

HEALTH

In addressing the health needs of the country, the Joint Needs Assessment Program (2004-2005), has embarked on a program intended to restore the Primary Health Care System, that could deliver health care services across the country, and in particular to the under-served rural areas. Special attention will be given to HIV/AIDS. The strategy also includes institutional support to the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare; support to health programs, and the development of a national health master plan.

ENVIRONMENT

In the area of the environment, the Joint Needs Assessment seeks to address major environmental concerns during the period of transition (2004-2005). These include, the provision of safe drinking water; building the capacity of the Forestry Development Authority and the Environmental Protection Agency a review of existing environmental legislation, and the proper management of Liberia's forest to assist in the preservation and maintenance of biodiversity.

HUMAN RIGHTS

To promote the human rights of women, the Joint Needs Assessment provides for the protection at risk for civilians in Liberia particularly women and vulnerable groups during the transitional period. The program includes among others:

- Improved human rights and protection of civilians including women and children, through the deployment of a human rights monitoring presence throughout the country. Establishment of parallel community, driven protection and human rights monitoring mechanism, serving as preventive protection mechanisms;
- Special interventions to ensure equal access to education for girls and disabled children;
- Fully functioning administration of justice including an independent judiciary and a public service in conformity with international human rights standards in particular relating to the protection of women;

- Access to redress for victims of human rights violations through the establishment of a fully functional
- Independent National Human Rights Commission in accordance with the Davis Principles;
- Adequate government capacity to promote and protect human rights, including women's rights, through the strengthening of the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Gender & Development;
- Encouraging the organizational human rights and protection capacity of Liberia human rights, child welfare, and women's civil society organizations in order to create a culture of accountability.

EDUCATION

In the area of education the Joint Needs Assessment seeks to rehabilitate at least 25% of the primary and secondary schools in need; improve access to quality basic education by implementing back to school type programmes; encourage vocational training and relevant higher education; and define and implement a new policy in education that will serve Liberia for generations to come.

WOMEN AND THE ECONOMY

To facilitate women's full participation in the economy, The Joint Needs Assessment places priority on the provision of assistance to the agricultural sector to enhance food security and provide employment and incomes to rural farmers. The Joint Needs Assessment therefore seeks to reactivate the agriculture sector by providing:

- Seeds and tools for food production by more than 70,000 families
- Vegetable seeds and tuber planting materials for over 10,000 women
- Breeding livestock (20,000 chickens, 1,000 goats, 1,000 pigs, 200 cattle).
- Training of trainers initiated for capacity-building of field workers and farmer groups
- Vegetable gardens established at 50 schools and health feeding centers;
- Clearing of swamps that can be prepared immediately for food cultivation;
- Food/cash-for-work provided for under-brushing and imputes for harvesting of tree crops;
- 500 fishing families equipped; fish hatcheries and fish ponds rehabilitated;
- Four vocational schools refurnished, 10 artisan workshops and 100 blacksmiths equipped.
- Food security and market information system set up including rapid assessment of food supply and crop production and for community based agro-employment generation.
- Government capacity supported in coordination and policy formulation for agriculture;

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

In order to curb violence against women, the Joint Needs Assessment intends to establish community monitoring mechanisms and advocacy campaigns against all gender-based violence.

HIV/AIDS

A national AIDS policy has recently been drafted in collaboration with the government and other stakeholders, with UN support and should be submitted to the Parliament soonest for approval.

The national AIDS policy needs to be backed up by a revised multi-sectoral strategy and action plan, the implementation of which would be monitored by the National AIDS Commission.