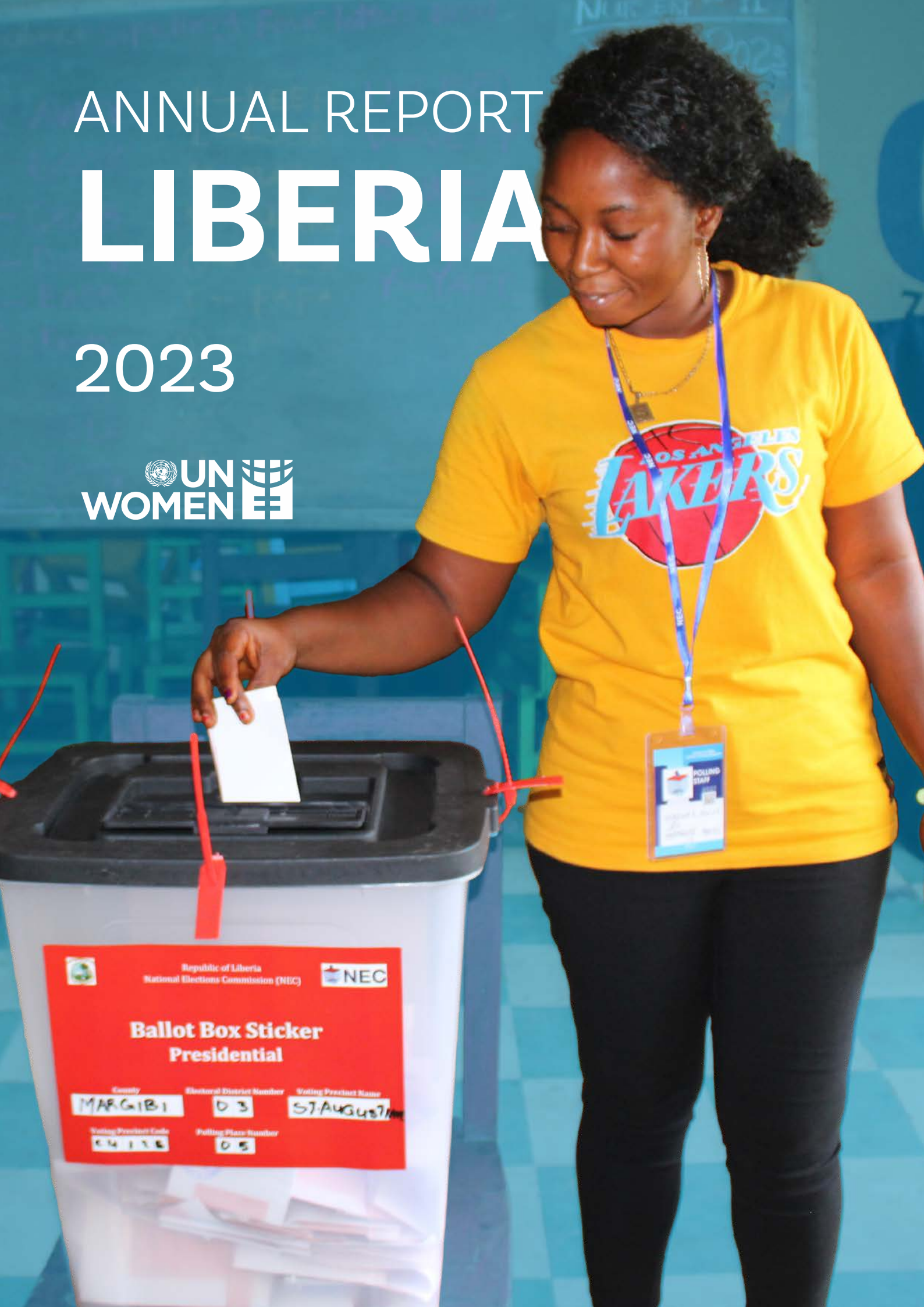


ANNUAL REPORT LIBERIA

2023



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2023 Annual Report

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Government
of Ireland
International
Development
Programme



**Spotlight
Initiative**
To eliminate violence
against women and girls



**SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT
GOALS**



Sweden
Sverige



**UN
WOMEN**

Abbreviations

CBO	Community-based organization
CSO	Civil society organization
D4WEE	Digital Inclusion for Women's Economic Empowerment
FGM	Female genital mutilation
GTG	Gender Theme Group
HIV/AIDS	Human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
LGBTIQ	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
ToT	Training of trainers
UFDUM	United Funding and Development for Underage Mothers
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNCT-SWAP	United Nations Country Team System-wide Action Plan
VAWG	Violence against women and girls
VAWIEP	Violence against women in elections and politics
VSLA	Village savings and loan association
WONGOSOL	Women Non-Governmental Organizations Secretariat of Liberia

Comfort Lamptey,
Country Representative,
UN Women Liberia.



Foreword

The year 2023 was a transformative period for the UN Women Liberia Country Office, marked by significant strides in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. Our collective efforts resulted in a broad spectrum of impactful achievements, underscoring our unwavering commitment to driving lasting change. As we reflect on the progress made, I present the 2023 annual report with a deep sense of accomplishment and gratitude.

In the arena of women's political participation and leadership, 2023 stood out as a pivotal moment, with Liberians exercising their democratic rights in electing a new president and a host of legislative representatives. UN Women, in collaboration with sister agencies, provided critical support to ensure a smooth and peaceful electoral process, fostering a safe environment for women's active participation.

We extend our congratulations to the newly elected leadership and celebrate the women who have stepped into positions of power. However, despite these advances, women's underrepresentation in governance remains a stark reality, compelling us to intensify efforts to amplify women's voices and achieve equitable representation.

Our partnerships with organizations such as the Organization for Women and Children and Sister Aid Liberia yielded tangible outcomes in strengthening capacities to combat violence against women in politics and enhance conflict resolution at the grassroots level. Targeted training programmes equipped aspiring women leaders with the tools necessary to navigate the political landscape, promoting inclusivity and diversity in decision-making spaces.

In parallel with these political advances, historic progress was also made in addressing violence against women and girls and eliminating harmful practices in Liberia. A monumental moment arrived on 6 February 2023, when the National Council of Chiefs and Elders of Liberia announced a nationwide ban on female genital mutilation, following years of advocacy. This landmark proclamation, made in Sonkay Town, Montserrado

County, reaffirms the country's collective commitment to eradicating harmful practices and protecting the dignity of women and girls.

To mark the 20th anniversary of the Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement, UN Women facilitated a national intergenerational dialogue on women's participation in the peace process. These dialogues revitalized partnerships with women's groups, including young women's groups, reaffirming their crucial role in sustaining peace in Liberia. To further support Liberia's women, peace and security agenda, we extended assistance to the Bureau of Corrections and Rehabilitation in adopting a gender policy and an accompanying five-year implementation plan. This initiative aims to ensure gender inclusivity and equity in policy frameworks, fostering gender-sensitive approaches within the justice system. In addition, we continued supporting Peace Huts – a vital platform for women's voices in peacebuilding, security, rule of law, and political and economic discussions – by providing grants to seven Peace Huts in six counties to enable them to implement sustainability plans.

In 2023, UN Women's commitment to women's economic empowerment reached new heights. Our collaboration with the Orange Foundation saw the Buy from Women platform fully operational, generating revenue and providing market access, financial services and training to over 1,200 women farmers and entrepreneurs across 17 cooperatives. Our digital inclusion efforts empowered 81 young women, while a strategic partnership with the Central Bank of Liberia promoted financial inclusion through digitized village savings and loan associations. We also increased access to renewable energy by providing solar products and training to rural women farmers. Finally, our advocacy for the Land Law further benefited 874 women by improving their access to credit, increased productivity and greater food security.

UN Women, as the lead of the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) Gender Theme Group, made significant contributions to gender equality across the United Nations system in Liberia. In 2023, we achieved a remarkable 93.3% score on the UNCT System-wide Action Plan Gender Equality Scorecard and received the highest Gender Equality Marker value of 3 for all joint programmes. These accomplishments reflect our pivotal role in fostering a cohesive One UN approach and integrating gender equality into UNCT initiatives.

Looking to the future, UN Women remains resolute in its partnerships with the Government of Liberia, civil society organizations and international partners to champion the rights and aspirations of women and girls. Together, we will continue to pave the way for a more just and equitable society.

We extend our deepest gratitude to our partners and donors, including the European Union, the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund, Orange Foundation, and the governments of Canada, Ireland and Sweden for their steadfast support. Your contributions are instrumental in transforming the lives of women and girls in Liberia, helping to build a brighter, more inclusive future for all.

Comfort Lamptey
Country Representative, UN Women Liberia

Our work in numbers

Summary of UN Women initiatives, achievements and beneficiaries

Legal services for women aspirants

Provided services during the candidate nomination process for the October 2023 general and presidential elections

44 women aspirants

Transformative Leadership for Gender Equality training

Trained participants to be transformative leaders and champions for gender equality

302 leaders and Peace Hut women

Training for electoral stakeholders

Trained participants on standard operating procedures regarding violence against women in elections and politics (VAWIEP)

153 stakeholders
(**66** women and **87** men)

Community mobilizers

Spread gender-responsive messages

250 community mobilizers
(**237** women and **13** men)

Buy from Women initiative

Generated US\$163,376.30 in revenue

1,200+ women farmers

Training for monitors and observers on VAWIEP

Trained participants on VAWIEP identification and reporting

51 monitors and observers
(**30** women and **21** men)

Digital literacy training

Trained participants in digital literacy to enable them to benefit from the digital economy

300 young women

VAWIEP protocol education

Educated participants on VAWIEP protocols

168 participants (**104** women and **64** men) from **22** political parties

Land law and business skills training

Equipped participants with knowledge and skills on land laws and business skills

874 women

Financial inclusion through Orange Money

Partnered with Orange Money to foster women's financial inclusion and empowerment

1,200+ rural women

Ban on FGM

Some counties completely banned FGM

Populations of **4** counties

Sexual and gender-based violence case tracking and reporting

CSOs tracked and reported instances of sexual and gender-based violence

Individuals involved in **68** cases

Alternative livelihoods for former FGM practitioners

Equipped participants with the means to embrace alternative livelihoods

800 former FGM practitioners

Climate-smart agriculture training

Trained participants in climate-smart agriculture

110 women traditional practitioners

Grants to grassroots organizations

Invested grants

55 grassroots organizations

Community awareness training sessions

Engaged in training on the comprehensive prevention strategy document and development of community action plans

1,554 women and **426** girls

Customary land mapping

Completed mapping, completed boundary harmonization and obtained land deeds

43 communities completed mapping and **8** obtained land deeds

Communication and knowledge products

Produced and shared 19 products with targeted stakeholders

Shared with **8** audience groups: government, donors, CSOs, the media, UN agencies, influencers, the UN Women West and Central Africa Regional Office and beneficiaries

Governance and political participation

The governance and women's political participation portfolio in the UN Women Liberia Country Office focused on strengthening laws, policies and institutions to promote women's participation and representation in elections and politics. The country office endeavoured to improve women's political participation through an aspirant or candidate training programme, by fostering an enabling environment for women's safe and free participation in politics and public life, and by supporting initiatives for the prevention and mitigation of violence against women in elections.

Our main strategies have included institutional strengthening through training and through the development of key institutional documents; collaboration through partnerships and networks; enhancing the capacities of key target groups, government actors, civil society organizations (CSOs) and the women's movement; the development and dissemination of knowledge products; and advocacy through radio and television programmes.

Liberia held its general and legislative elections in 2023. The numerical representation of women in the legislature had been maintained overall after the October 2023 elections, with no change at 10.7 per cent. This stability can be attributed to the historic victories of women in two counties: Grand Cape Mount and Grand Gedeh. Grand Cape Mount, a county that had never before elected a woman representative, now has three women representatives out of a total of four, while Grand Gedeh elected its first woman representative.

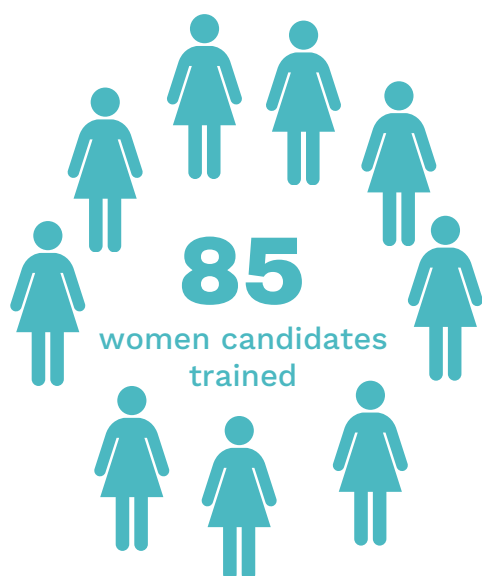


UN Women Country Representative Comfort Lamptey (middle) visits a polling centre in Margibi County run-off elections (Photo: UN Women Liberia)

Our key government partners, women's rights organizations and CSOs



Notable achievements



Campaign members trained



in 15
counties



- ✓ 85 women candidates and 217 campaign team members (133 women and 84 men) were equipped with knowledge and skills on how to run and participate in elections through UN Women's Political Leadership and Campaigning Training programme. This training was provided in the 15 counties of Liberia.
- ✓ 44 women aspirants received pro bono legal services during the candidate nomination process for the October 2023 presidential and legislative elections.
- ✓ 153 electoral stakeholders (66 women and 87 men) were trained in the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively implement the standard operating procedures for identifying and referring cases of violence against women in elections and politics (VAWIEP), working towards a more consistent and better-coordinated approach to addressing it.
- ✓ 51 monitors and observers (30 women and 21 men) from key institutions such as the Peacebuilding Office, the National Centre for Coordination of Response Mechanisms, the Liberia Election Observation Network, the Elections Coordinating Committee and the Women's Situation Room/Angie Brooks International Centre equipped observers with the skills to effectively identify, document and report VAWIEP throughout the electoral cycle.
- ✓ The UN Women Liberia Country Office supported the National Electoral Commission of Liberia in implementing its gender policy through capacity-building and technical support.
- ✓ 168 participants (104 women and 64 men) from 22 political parties targeted under the umbrella of the Interparty Consultative Committee collaborated on the

implementation of VAWIEP protocols and temporary special measures, including gender quotas, through their inclusion in political parties' internal documents.

- ✓ The capacity of 302 Peace Hut women and women leaders from CSOs, community-based organizations (CBOs) and other associations was enhanced through a training programme building on UN Women's Transformative Leadership for Gender Equality programme.
- ✓ UN Women took part in 14 relevant radio programmes, 8 with ECOWAS radio (broadcast on 10 community radio stations) and 6 episodes of the 'Women in Politics' radio programme on the Liberia Broadcasting System (national public radio) through Medica Liberia and POWER Liberia. These programmes worked to raise awareness of the rights of women to participate in politics, focusing on the issue of violence and intimidation against women candidates in elections and promoting inclusive political participation and gender-responsive civic and voter education.

14



radio programmes to raise awareness of women's rights in politics and inclusive political participation



The women's political participation and leadership team took part in radio programmes on ending violence against women in elections and politics and on the rights of women to participate in politics (Photo: UN Women Liberia)

- ✓ The UN Women Liberia Country Office supported the ‘Women, Let’s Move!’ caravan and advocacy tour of the 15 counties of Liberia. This tour involved district- and county-level dialogues that reached close to 30,000 individuals and fostered conversation on inclusive political participation and preventing violence against women in elections, as well as campaign activities in marketplaces that showcased women’s equal participation in public and political life. This was coordinated by the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection – in collaboration with the Coalition of Political Parties Women in Liberia, the National Election Commission, the Women Non-Governmental Organizations Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL), county authorities, women’s rights groups, CBOs and networks including rural women – to promote change in attitudes and to encourage women to get involved in electoral processes and both women and men to support women’s political participation in the 2023 elections.
- ✓ 250 community mobilizers (237 women and 13 men) made up of 214 Peace Hut women and rural women’s association staff and 36 staff from WONGOSOL network members (including staff from partner CBOs and CSOs) disseminated gender-responsive and women-targeted civil voters’ education messages through door-to-door engagement in nine counties: Bomi, Bong, Gbarpolu, Grand Bassa, Grand Cape Mount, Grand Gedeh, Lofa, Margibi and Nimba. These community mobilizers also engaged in meetings with young women leaders, women’s groups and heads of associations. Organizations that they engaged with included the Liberia Market Association, the Association of Women in Cross-Border Trade, the Rural Women’s Rights Structure and rural women’s associations.

Lessons learned

- ✓ Despite efforts to legislate for a 30 per cent mandatory gender quota and have political parties adopt voluntary quotas through a memorandum of understanding, there is still significant resistance from political parties to increasing the representation of women. Only 2 of 31 parties, alliances and coalitions met the quota, and they were smaller parties with fewer candidates. Party representatives, in media and other engagements, claimed that they could not find women willing to run; however, it is far more likely that little effort was made to identify and support women candidates due to patriarchal norms and bias in male-dominated political parties.
- ✓ It is important to engage and support women who aspire to political leadership early on, well in advance of election cycles. This approach allows for more comprehensive training, mentorship and networking opportunities, which can significantly enhance their chances of success in the political arena. Following the 2023 elections, the legislature welcomed six new female legislators, indicating the importance of working with aspirants so that they can compete effectively in the next election.

- ✓ There are few women in positions of power, and women's organizations and networks have limited power and influence over decision makers. The electoral reform effort has made significant gains because diverse actors share a broad interest in electoral reforms, including an interest in advocating for the gender quota. Building a broader coalition of women's organizations and networks, together with other CSOs and state actors interested in inclusive democratic governance, is more effective than advocating for temporary special measures (popularly known as affirmative action) for women. There is also a need to support partners in strategizing and re-strategizing at all stages of the process of reforming the law. This includes different approaches and tools for the two houses of the legislature and taking into account the executive branch.



National Election Commission Chairperson, Davidetta Browne-Lansanah (Photo: UN Women Liberia)

IMPACT STORY

UN Women and CSO partner to strengthen the capacities of women aspirants



Some newcomer and veteran women members of the legislature. UN Women and partners supported women candidates during the elections (Photo: UN Women Liberia)

Prior to the 2023 elections, UN Women collaborated with Sister Aid Liberia to empower women aspirants through political leadership and campaigning training. In the reporting year, a total of 168 individuals, including 85 women candidates and 121 campaign team members (76 women and 45 men), were targeted through this intervention. The training strengthened participants' skills in transformative leadership, communication, fundraising and campaign management. During the training, participants engaged in constituency mapping, researching their constituency's population and assessing potential support for their campaigns, and developed a campaign plan and budget to guide their election processes. After the October 2023 election, women's representation in the legislature was maintained at 10.7 per cent, with historic victories in Grand Cape Mount, where three out of four elected representatives were women, and Grand Gedeh, where the first woman representative was elected.

The women of the Putu Tiama Peace Hut celebrated the first woman elected representative for District 2, Grand Gedeh, Marie G. Jonson, after the 2023 election. Members of Representative Jonson's campaign team participated in the political leadership and campaigning training provided in Grand Gedeh in June 2023.

“There were a lot of lessons learned during the political campaign training, but the most specific one that impacted our election result was how to communicate your campaign message at the level of the electorates and avoiding false promises. This training has given us the first female representative of Grand Gedeh County since the founding of the county in 1964.”

Sunday S. Jolo, Representative Jonson's Campaign Manager

“The political campaign team training in Grand Gedeh was so resourceful. In fact, it is for the first time in District 2, Grand Gedeh, that our people have elected a female to the House of Representatives. We need more of this training to empower women in critical national and local decision-making processes. Thanks to UN Women and Sister Aid Liberia for reaching the county.”

Arthur Sholure, Representative Jonson's Assistant Campaign Manager

Evelyn Shaka, Chair of the Tiama Town Peace Hut, attributed this success to the transformative leadership knowledge gained over the past two years, which empowered women to actively participate in the democratic process: “We successfully engaged various women's groups, creating a conducive space for more women to gain awareness of their political rights. This active involvement contributed to the promotion of women's political representation and inclusion in the democratic process, aligning with the objectives of [UN Women's and the Government of Ireland's] Transformative Leadership and Community Engagement for Women's Political Participation project.” She also noted that engagement with local stakeholders changed the dynamics among the men, with some men acting as allies to increase women's participation in local governance. She said this had never been the case before in the county.



Discussion on the media's critical role in promoting gender-responsive reporting during elections in the digital age (Photo: UN Women Liberia)

Women's economic empowerment

In Liberia, the pursuit of gender equality and women's economic empowerment has seen remarkable progress through the collaborative efforts of UN Women and its diverse array of partners. UN Women has led impactful efforts by forming strategic partnerships with government bodies, CSOs and private sector entities to initiate transformative programmes. These initiatives work to eliminate systemic barriers and to promote sustainable development, especially in rural areas where women encounter significant challenges.

Buy from Women initiative

**generated a substantial
revenue of US\$163,376.30
in Lofa, Bong and Nimba
counties**



One of UN Women's initiatives in Liberia, the Buy from Women campaign developed in partnership with Orange Liberia, has ushered in a new era of economic empowerment for rural women. Through this initiative, over 1,200 women farmers have gained access to markets, financial services and comprehensive training, catalysing significant revenue generation and enhancing their financial inclusion.

UN Women has further empowered women to champion gender equality and resilience-building efforts within their communities. UN Women has partnered with the Central Bank of Liberia and Orange Liberia to train rural women farmers in village savings and loan association (VSLA) methodologies and in how to operate Orange Money for further financial resilience. The Liberia Country Office has likewise partnered with Orange Liberia for training programmes in adult literacy and business skills, and fostered additional strategic partnerships between women's organizations and other parties (including partnerships with the Central Bank of Liberia, the National Disaster Management Agency of Liberia, the National Adult Education Association of Liberia and others).



Training on applications of the Buy from Women platform (Photo: UN Women Liberia)

Looking ahead, UN Women remains steadfast in its commitment to advancing gender equality and women's economic empowerment in Liberia. Through ongoing research endeavours (such as the Digital Inclusion for Women's Economic Empowerment (D4WEE) feasibility study and input into UN Women's thematic evaluation on women in climate-resilient agriculture), policy advocacy initiatives (such as support for the implementation of Liberia's National Financial Inclusion Strategy) and the implementation of impactful projects (such as D4WEE and work with Sweden on women's economic empowerment in the country), UN Women continues to drive transformative change, propelling Liberia towards a future characterized by equity, prosperity and inclusion for all.

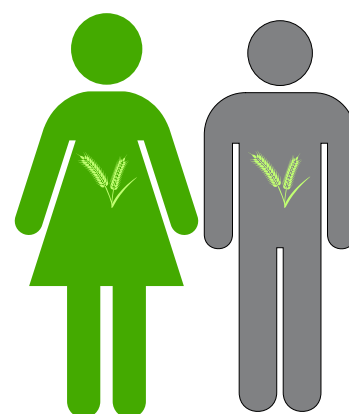
Notable achievements

- ✓ The collaboration between UN Women and Orange Liberia resulted in the successful implementation of the Buy from Women initiative. This initiative significantly empowered rural women farmers in Lofa, Bong and Nimba counties, generating a substantial revenue of US\$163,376.30. It directly benefited women farmers engaged in agriculture across 17 farming cooperatives, showcasing the transformative potential of strategic partnerships to address gender inequalities and promote sustainable development.
- ✓ In 2023, UN Women's partnership with the Orange Foundation for phase II of the D4WEE project focused on enhancing digital inclusion for women's education and skills development. This initiative targeted 35 young women and 46 older women, offering capacity-building on digital literacy, ensuring access to equipment and coding training, and fostering leadership in science, technology, engineering and mathematics and the digital economy.
- ✓ UN Women's support facilitated the successful implementation of the Land Law, benefiting 874 women in targeted counties. This led to their active involvement in land improvements, credit access and poverty reduction, contributing to improved agricultural productivity and local food security.



Market jamboree in Lofa County to promote the Buy from Women platform and link producers to markets (Photo: UN Women Liberia)

- ✓ Through UN Women's support, 874 rural women and youth farmers gained business development and management skills, resulting in successful businesses, expanded opportunities and increased employment. Access to finance through VSLAs empowered women with financial resources, reducing vulnerability to poverty. A credit sum totalling US\$37,500.00 (LRD\$7,275,000.00) was allocated to 17 farming cooperatives aimed at supporting women farmers. This initiative also resulted in the creation of at least 524 job opportunities, including roles such as Orange Energy agents and agribusiness entrepreneurs.
- ✓ More than 300 young women benefited from digital literacy training, enabling access to online resources and fostering personal growth and academic success. Capacity-building sessions on social media usage for HIV/AIDS prevention and on gender equality empowered women as change makers, in alignment with the government's Digital Economy Strategy.
- ✓ The integration of the Buy from Women platform with Orange Money facilitated seamless business transactions for over 1,200 rural women, resulting in their financial inclusion and empowerment. This initiative was aligned with the government's Digital Economy Strategy and showcased a holistic approach to women's economic empowerment in rural communities.



874

**rural women and youth
farmers gained
business development
and management skills**

Lessons learned

- ✓ The collaboration between UN Women and Orange Liberia underscores the transformative power of strategic partnerships in driving impactful initiatives. By pooling their strengths, technological expertise and financial resources, these entities were able to significantly enhance the reach and efficacy of projects such as the Buy from Women initiative.
- ✓ In addition, comprehensive training programmes encompassing e-commerce, financial literacy and disaster resilience have emerged as a cornerstone for women's sustainable economic empowerment. These holistic approaches address the multifaceted barriers faced by women, fostering their resilience and agency in the pursuit of economic independence.
- ✓ Moreover, engaging local organizations and communities has proven instrumental in tailoring initiatives to local contexts, thereby enhancing their relevance, acceptance and sustainability. By collaborating with grassroots entities, government agencies and CSOs, UN Women has been able to design interventions that resonate with the unique needs and priorities of rural women in Liberia.

IMPACT STORY

UN Women integrates digital technologies into women's economic empowerment programmes



Adult literacy class in Gbartala, Bong County (Photo: UN Women Liberia)

UN Women is implementing empowerment programmes such as digital literacy training enabling women to become Orange mobile money agents. More than 70 women have gained employment with Orange as agents, and 700 more are using and managing mobile money accounts following capacity-building training conducted in 2022.

The training programmes are set to benefit women in both rural and urban areas. Rural women are attending digital literacy classes at the two women's digital centres that were established at the Totota Peace Hut and the Gboinyee Tarr Town Peace Hut.

“At the digital centres, women are trained to use devices such as computers and tablets to access information, finances and market links. UN Women is working with the Orange Foundation to build the capacity of women entrepreneurs to leverage social media to advertise and market their products. Women are also taught literacy, numeracy, business skills and other women’s economic empowerment programmes”

**Ramon Garway, Women Economic Empowerment
Programme Manager for UN Women Liberia**

UN Women and the Orange Foundation are also piloting the innovative Buy from Women digital programme, a platform aimed at connecting women producers to climate-smart information and disaster risk reduction information, digital financial services and digital markets. At least 1,200 rural women in Liberia are set to benefit from this innovative digital inclusion project.



Orange Liberia donates tablets to the Liberia National Rural Women Structure in partnership with UN Women in order to enhance rural women’s digital literacy (Photo: UN Women Liberia)

In addition, UN Women has adopted innovative means of providing outreach and advisory services to rural farmers by using social media platforms such as WhatsApp to deploy knowledge products and provide technical assistance to more than 800 women and youth farmers through various farming cooperatives.

While progress is being made on using innovation and technology to empower women, some challenges exist. Most rural women are still uncomfortable using mobile money or mobile banking services because of perception issues.

“A typical rural woman feels more secure tying her money on a cloth than having it in her phone because she thinks she will lose her money if her phone goes missing. We are advising them that if one loses one’s phone, she can go back to retrieve the SIM card and recover her money. A lot needs to be done to correct the misconceptions and change the norms, attitudes and behaviours.

The majority of rural women are uncomfortable using mobile phones because of high levels of digital illiteracy. They prefer traditional approaches to access skills training, like teaching them how to read and write from a blackboard and having a training workshop and writing on a blackboard or writing on flipcharts, than actually using new technologies.

The other challenge is that internet access is not widely available in rural areas. Literacy levels are also low; some women cannot read and write. We are encouraging women who want to get into the technology sector to complete at least two levels of literacy and numerous skills classes before they start considering joining technology classes.”

Ramon Garway

However, the benefits of using technology outweigh the disadvantages. There is a need to scale up the pilot interventions being supported by UN Women so that more women can be reached and a more meaningful impact can be made.

Ending violence against women and girls

UN Women Liberia's work under the ending violence against women and girls (VAWG) pillar aims to ensure that women and girls in Liberia live a life free from violence and harmful practices. In collaboration with the Government of Liberia, CSOs and other stakeholders, UN Women works to create a conducive policy, institutional, social and community environment for prevention of and response to gender-based violence and harmful practices against women and girls.

Notable achievements



Traditional ceremonies to enforce the ban on FGM in Bong County, Liberia (Photo: UN Women Liberia)

✓ Declaration of a ban on female genital mutilation

A full ban on female genital mutilation (FGM) was declared by Chief Zanzan Karwor, the Chairperson of the National Council of Chiefs and Elders of Liberia, on 6 February 2023 as a bold step to end the harmful practice against women and girls in practising Liberian communities. The declaration of a ban on FGM called for Liberia to embrace the concept of 'initiation without mutilation', whereby young girls can undergo the cultural rites of passage into womanhood without being

subjected to FGM. The declaration also led to growing demands for FGM to be outlawed through the passage of the anti-FGM bill and for all stakeholders to act against FGM within their respective mandates. As part of the anti-FGM campaign, stakeholders are engaging with communities to enforce the ban at grassroots level. Four counties (Montserrado, Grand Cape Mount, Nimba and Bong) have already implemented the FGM ban through public events at which practitioners of FGM publicly surrendered implements and licences used in practising FGM.

✓ **Increased tracking of sexual and gender-based violence cases by CSOs supported by UN Women**

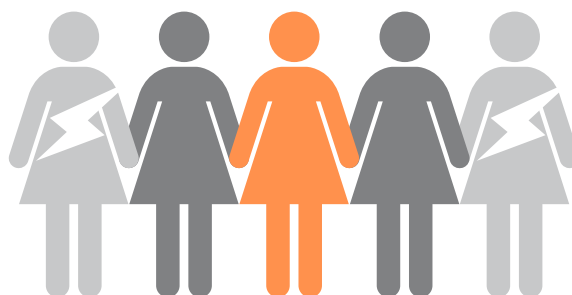
A total of 68 sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) cases were tracked and reported by CSOs, including 37 rape cases, 1 sodomy case, 21 domestic violence and physical assault cases, 8 cases of persistent non-support and 1 child trafficking case in 2023. By the end of the year, 40 of these cases (34 rape, 1 sodomy, 4 domestic violence and physical assault, 1 persistent non-support) had been sent to court and were awaiting trial; 3 alleged perpetrators of persistent non-support and 3 alleged perpetrators of domestic violence and assault were on the run from police arrest; and 2 alleged perpetrators of rape had been released on bail. Moreover, 19 cases, which include 14 cases of domestic violence and physical assaults, 4 cases of persistent non-support and 1 case of child trafficking, had been resolved in the interest of all parties, and 1 rape case had been tried and the perpetrator found guilty and sentenced to five years' imprisonment in Voinjama. In the lone child trafficking case, a young girl was resettled with her family back in Sierra Leone with support from Montserrado County's SGBV CSO Secretariat. It was reported that survivors in the 37 rape cases were alive and stable, except for one, who was undergoing serious medical attention in Monrovia. SGBV training and awareness activities had reached 5,900 community members by December 2023.

✓ **Alternative livelihood support for former traditional women leaders or zoes**

A total of 800 traditional women leaders and practitioners of FGM (or zoes) from 11 counties have abandoned the practice, found alternative sources of income (including agriculture, livestock and VSLA skills) and embraced the alternative rites of passage programme for the initiation of girls into womanhood without FGM. Of these women, 270 benefited from a training of trainers (ToT) session in VSLA skills. The training aimed

800

**traditional women leaders
and practitioners abandon
FGM in 11 counties**





Former FGM practitioners (traditional women leaders or zoes) hold a trade fair in Bong County as an alternative means of income generation (Photo: UN Women Liberia)

to improve the financial and business development skills of the participants; they were also supported with a post-training start-up micro-grant of US\$320 per county to kick-start the savings and loan process. VSLA groups were also provided with 32 VSLA toolkits (1 kit per group), each comprising a metal box, two top-security locks, a calculator, a ledger, 25 passbooks and a rubber bowl for counting money. VSLA groups have started processes for legal registration, and eight of these VSLAs have started the digitalization process. Each VSLA received technical support to prepare articles of incorporation for business registration upon completing the notarization process.

- ✓ An additional 110 former female FGM practitioners participated in ToT sessions on climate-smart agriculture in 3 counties, bringing together 10 participants from each of the 11 target counties. The 110 participants in the ToT sessions were assigned the task of passing the training on to a further 800 former practitioners of FGM, who have already started engaging in farming activities. At the end of the training, participants in the project from the 11 counties were provided with agricultural inputs, assorted agriculture tools and equipment, and seedlings for 22 farms (2 farms per county). Materials distributed to women farmers included cutlasses, hoes, shovels, rakes, water pump machines, fertilizers, cassava grinders, and packing and labelling machines and accessories. Farmers were also supported with complementary livestock of their choice, including chickens, goats, sheep, pigs and fish.
- ✓ Beneficiaries of livelihood opportunities also have greater access to alternative incomes and market opportunities to replace participation

in FGM as a source of income. A three-day trade fair was organized and took place in Gbarnga City, Bong County, where Muslim women zoes and other women zoes from Bong showcased handicrafts produced since they stopped practising FGM. The trade fair was organized in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture; the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection; the Ministry of Internal Affairs; the National Council of Chiefs and Elders of Liberia; and Liberia Crusaders for Peace. During this trade fair, female zoes were able to showcase their new sources of income, including produce such as plantains, pumpkins and palm oil; animal products such as sawa milk and honey; and crafts such as tie-dyed fabrics, slippers, lappers, bags, soaps, photo frames and more. Goods were also exhibited and sold under the slogan 'Invest to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls' at the One UN building during an event to commemorate the role of Women's Human Rights Defenders Day during the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence.

Enhancing legislation for the protection of women and girls against FGM

A bill entitled 'Act Prohibiting Female Genital Mutilation 2022', calling for an end to FGM by criminalizing this harmful traditional practice, was submitted by the then Deputy Speaker (and current Speaker) of the House of Representatives, Councillor Jonathan Fonati Koffa, and is currently before the House Committee for review and recommendations. UN Women held several advocacy meetings in 2023 with legislators and the Deputy Speaker to push for the passage of the bill, including during the visit of the UN Women Goodwill Ambassador for Africa on FGM and after the declaration of a ban on FGM by traditional leaders. The process to finalize the harmonization of two FGM bills has started and is expected to be completed under the new administration.

Investment in grassroots organizations to address VAWG

A total of 55 grassroots women's rights organizations benefited from grants to support their advocacy, service delivery and prevention work on fighting SGBV and harmful practices and their promotion of sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Community awareness for the prevention of SGBV

A total of 1,554 women, 426 girls, 1,183 men and 399 boys from the 50 project communities that had earlier benefited from training on a comprehensive prevention strategy document and the development of community action plans are themselves rolling out simplified strategy documents and supporting other communities to develop action plans. Their goal is to ensure community involvement in the prevention of SGBV and harmful traditional practices and



Dialogue with legislators: UN Women meets with House of Representatives Speaker J. Fonati Koffa in one of many engagements with lawmakers to advocate for a law against FGM (Photo: UN Women Liberia)

to refer SGBV cases to service providers. These beneficiaries are grouped into 50 community action groups to conduct awareness-raising and sensitization activities; 20 community SGBV taskforces have been formed to report SGBV and harmful practice cases to local authorities and service providers.

✓ Engaging men in SGBV prevention

255



community men's champions from the 5 spotlight initiative project counties (Nimba, Lofa, Cape Mount, Montserrado and Grand Gedeh) are leading men's involvement in advocacy campaigns

The 33 men's networks established in 2022 have increased the number of members to 255 community men's champions from the five Spotlight Initiative project counties (Nimba, Lofa, Cape Mount, Montserrado and Grand Gedeh). Male champions and existing networks are leading men's involvement in advocacy campaigns to promote gender-equitable norms, attitudes and behaviour and the promotion of sexual and reproductive health and rights. A total of 54 community and public awareness campaigns were conducted in 2023 on social norms and toxic masculinity with students and other men in 54 communities.

✓ Enhancing accountability for ending VAWG

A total of 32 women's rights groups and 68 relevant CSOs, whose capacity on accountability mechanisms has been enhanced in previous years, have jointly contributed to the development of shadow reports on matters relevant to the Commission on the Status of Women and the Universal Periodic Review. These organizations have also networked with other CSOs in a South-South online exchange organized to enable sharing of experiences and lessons learned on inclusive advocacy on issues affecting groups facing or most at risk of discrimination and violence.

✓ Increased capacity of media practitioners to report objectively on SGBV and harmful practices

Activities were undertaken to increase the capacity of 40 journalists from various media institutions to report objectively on FGM and SGBV as part of a campaign to break taboos. These journalists were trained in raising awareness through the dissemination of information, stories and statistics related to SGBV; challenging dominant gender stereotypes to instead portray women and girls in diverse roles; breaking away from harmful stereotypes and reporting accurately, safely and respectfully to avoid victim blaming and sensationalism; and ultimately working towards promoting gender equality. In December 2023, over 40 news stories on FGM had been published in newspapers in Liberia during the year, a notable contrast to periods when FGM was a taboo, and journalists were targeted by threats or even had to flee the country when they attempted to report on FGM. Radio stations have also started broadcasting on FGM.

Lessons learned

- ✓ One key lesson learned is that, while all partnerships are vital in the process of preventing and responding to VAWG, the success of interventions depends on engaging government institutions. Partnerships with government institutions played an instrumental role in securing political buy-in and the commitment of national authorities, including high-level influential authorities, to invest more in efforts to end VAWG in the country. Notably, the Liberian government, through its line ministries led by the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, facilitated interactions with traditional leaders on banning the practice of FGM.
- ✓ Increased engagement and collaboration with grassroots and youth organizations increased the spread of information and raised awareness on SGBV prevention and

harmful practice prevention in hard-to-reach communities. These organizations carried out advocacy and lobbied for legal redress in SGBV cases at the local and county levels, working alongside CSO secretariats. Implementing interventions focused on raising awareness and sensitization of communities on negative social norms, harmful practices and other social and gender inequalities against women, girls and marginalized groups (including LGBTIQ communities) was difficult but possible through the work of grassroots organizations. Strengthening existing community structures and setting up new ones in locations where they do not yet exist is highly recommended for future interventions, focusing on a bottom-up approach for a greater impact on the lives of women and girls when addressing issues of change in social norms.



The process of eliminating FGM is going more smoothly in the four counties (Montserrado, Nimba, Bong and Grand Cape Mount) where alternative livelihood programmes for traditional female leaders were intensified. This is linked to the fact that the issues of SGBV and harmful practices are complex and require targeted investments to address the root causes: gender inequalities and deep-rooted detrimental social norms. Interventions aimed at tackling women's poverty, low literacy levels and access to essential services, as well as at raising community awareness, have significantly contributed to convincing female zoes to abandon FGM practices, especially in counties with vocational and heritage centres, where they are taught new skills. These interventions need to be sustained to help ensure that the practice is completely abolished.

IMPACT STORY

Prevention strategy showcases the potential rewards of investing in girls' education

Meki Kamara, the National Gender Coordinator for United Funding and Development for Underage Mothers (UFDUM), shares a compelling story of her organization's impactful efforts to prevent VAWG in Liberia.

The story unfolds as a beacon of hope and change – a journey marked by resilience, community engagement and positive transformation. Serving as an implementing partner of UN Women under the European Union, United Nations and Government of Liberia Spotlight Initiative, UFDUM received funding to roll out a groundbreaking comprehensive strategy to prevent all forms of gender-based violence in Liberia.

Rolled out in five counties (Grand Cape Mount, Montserrado, Nimba, Lofa and Grand Gedeh), the prevention strategy aimed to raise community awareness and encourage community action to prevent SGBV, including the harmful practices of child marriage and FGM.



Engagement with community members and stakeholders in Foya, Lofa County. One community member voluntarily interpreted the messages on the simplified comprehensive SGBV prevention strategy while Meki explained the messages (Photo: UN Women Liberia)



Training conducted by Meki with community stakeholders and community action groups (Ambassadors for Change) in New Kru Town community in Montserrado County (Photo: UN Women Liberia)

Ms. Kamara explains that the strategy focuses on direct community engagement and simplifying complex issues to convey clear messages about physical abuse, denial of girls' right to education, FGM practices and accusations of witchcraft against women. This approach created a ripple effect, empowering both communities and governments to prevent and respond to SGBV effectively.

The impact of the prevention strategy has been transformative. Ms. Kamara recounts witnessing communities, initially unaware of the issues affecting them, starting to respond positively to awareness campaigns. In areas where child marriage was normalized, the intervention brought about a change in mindsets. Parents who had once believed that early marriage was in the best interest of their daughters now understood the importance of girls' education. The strategy also tackled the deep-rooted cultural practice of FGM, gradually making parents and communities understand how harmful it is. Through the tireless efforts of organizations such as UFDUM, community awareness of women's and girls' human rights is growing, and outdated practices are being challenged.

Through compelling examples presented to them – such as Liberia's having produced the first female president in Africa, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf – parents have shifted their mindsets towards prioritizing education for their daughters. The prevention strategy showcased the potential rewards of investing in a girl's education.

A remarkable achievement that resonates deeply is the official closure of bush schools in the Spotlight Initiative counties. This milestone, achieved through advocacy, community awareness and collaboration with traditional leaders, signifies a pivotal step towards eliminating harmful practices.

Despite such successes, challenges persist. Ms. Kamara points to significant gaps in funding, especially in remote areas where messages struggle to reach communities. Economic hardship exacerbates gender-based violence, with girls being abused in exchange for school fees. To address these challenges, UFDUM continues to work closely with communities through established structures, engaging with other CSOs and coordinating efforts with the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection.

Ms. Kamara urges the public, media institutions and women's and girls' groups, as well as men's and boys' groups, to join forces in conducting massive awareness campaigns. The call extends to the government, which must ensure the adoption and full implementation of laws and policies to protect women's rights, particularly the adoption of the anti-FGM bill to fully eliminate this practice from all the FGM-practising counties.

Liberia stands as a testament to the power of investing in prevention to build a safer and more equitable future for women and girls. The achievements made represent a beacon of hope, transformation and change.



Engagement with members of the established school clubs on the importance of effectively implementing the comprehensive SGBV prevention strategy in order to end gender-based violence and all other forms of intersectional discrimination against women and girls in schools and in communities (Photo: UN Women Liberia)

Women, peace and security

The work of UN Women Liberia under the women, peace and security pillar aims to promote sustained peace and inclusive and sustainable growth and development by strengthening formal and informal institutions to provide access to effective, equitable justice and security services, promote and protect human rights, and strengthen social cohesion and reconciliation. The programmes associated with this pillar help to incorporate gender concerns into national peacebuilding processes and key security institutions. The pillar works to empower the national government, through its key line ministries, to implement critical legal and policy frameworks to support ongoing peacebuilding processes. It facilitates the government's efforts to ensure compliance with the international treaties and protocols to which it has committed, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Maputo Protocol and United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. Through the women, peace and security pillar, UN Women has been supporting women to set up Peace Huts in their communities to enhance women's participation in peacebuilding and to empower them economically.



A Peace Hut meeting in Maryland County (Photo: UN Women Liberia)

Notable achievements



A town hall meeting in Grand Cape Mount County, where women are discussing community land dispute management modalities (Photo: UN Women Liberia)

- ✓ Rural women in Nimba, Sinoe, Maryland and Grand Cape Mount counties now have easy access to land-related services and are participating in land governance and dispute resolution activities at the local community level. This is evident through the establishment of county and district land offices and land boards that provide land-related services to rural communities.
- ✓ UN Women Peace Huts have moved closer to financial stability through the implementation of relevant plans. With seed funding from UN Women, these Peace Huts have invested in several business ventures through which they have begun to generate funding for their operations.
- ✓ County land offices and county land boards have enhanced capacities and put procedures and systems in place to formalize customary land rights in a way that reflects the rights and needs of all community members, including women and youth. As a result of this enhanced capacity, and using modern tools such as the Global Positioning System, 43 communities completed the mapping of their customary land, and subsequent boundary harmonization processes and confirmatory surveys, while 8 communities obtained land deeds.

43

communities completed the mapping of their customary land, boundary harmonization processes and confirmatory surveys



8

communities obtained land deeds



- ✓ A gender policy covering the Bureau of Corrections and Rehabilitation and an accompanying five-year implementation plan were developed and adopted. This policy was reviewed by a wide range of stakeholders, including CSOs, women's rights advocates and experts from the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, and it provides a framework for mainstreaming gender issues in the bureau.
- ✓ Unmarried female personnel in the Armed Forces of Liberia can now exercise their right to bear children due to the revocation of the policy that barred unmarried female soldiers from getting pregnant. In addition, soldiers in this category can now benefit from maternity leave, which was not the case previously. This is a result of sustained advocacy by the Gender and Social Inclusion Department, with technical support from UN Women.



Lessons learned

- ✓ The involvement of women in local land dispute resolution mechanisms increases the confidence of women to take their complaints to these bodies for redress. It also yields significant results and dismantles community stereotypes that work against women's participation in land issues.
- ✓ Liberia, like most post-conflict countries, operates its security institutions in extreme secrecy and, in most instances, refuses to open these institutions to the public and international organizations. Therefore, it is a good practice to ensure the full involvement of the leadership of these institutions from the very beginning of project design to ensure ownership and sustainability.

Armed Forces of Liberia gender policy awareness-raising session in Lofa military barracks (Photo: UN Women Liberia)

IMPACT STORY

Land management committees help resolve land conflicts in communities in Maryland County

Hodo Allison, Town Chief of Gbolobo Town in Maryland County, explains that the joint project Enhancing Peace and Social Cohesion through the Promotion of Equitable Access to and Use of Land for Rural Women in Conflict-prone Communities and Concession Areas supports peace, unity and development among the people of the town, while gender equality, women's inclusion and land dispute resolution are becoming realities of everyday life.

According to him, the town has had no respite from land conflicts, particularly in the post-war years, and the people have felt the brunt of what he calls "a big problem that was dividing us".

“Land conflict was a big issue here. Whenever it arose people used to rush there and fighting would erupt and it was not easy. But now we have a land management committee set up by UN Women and partners; whenever there is a land conflict, the committee investigates it and amicably solves the problem. We thank the UN for this project.”

Hodo Allison, Town Chief of Gbolobo Town in Maryland County

“In the past, the old land law did not include us women, but the new land rights law that was passed in September 2018 allows us (women) and youth to be a part of land discussions.”

Ms. Patricia Dennis, resident of Flumpa in Nimba County

UN system coordination on gender equality



A Gender Theme Group retreat in Margibi County, attended by One UN and Government of Liberia representatives (Photo: UN Women Liberia)

UN Women in Liberia has a vital triple mandate of coordination, normative change and operational support. Its primary objective is to foster positive change for Liberian women through coordinating all stakeholders in the country, implementing and facilitating operational mechanisms that proactively promote gender equality and women's empowerment, and positively affecting normative attitudes regarding women and girls. As part of its coordination efforts, UN Women worked closely with and actively supported the United Nations Country Team (UNCT), playing a pivotal role in promoting a cohesive One UN approach.

Through the Gender Theme Group (GTG), UN Women promoted interagency coordination and information-sharing among various UN agencies and other stakeholders, including government bodies, CSOs and other development partners. UN Women Liberia, working closely with the UN Resident Coordinator and the GTG, rolled out the United Nations Country Team System-wide Action Plan (UNCT-SWAP) Gender Equality Scorecard assessment and produced the Gender Equality Scorecard annual review report, thus fostering learning and preventing duplication of efforts. The report made clear recommendations aimed at enhancing gender mainstreaming. In addition, UN Women Liberia worked closely with the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection to establish gender-responsive mechanisms at both the national and local levels, thereby furthering the cause of gender equality and women's empowerment through coordinated action.

Notable achievements

UN Women, under its UN coordination mandate, spearheads the UNCT GTG Secretariat, driving the coordination of gender equality and women's empowerment activities in Liberia. This includes overseeing meetings, joint retreats and advocacy events.

✓ A comprehensive review of the UNCT-SWAP Gender Equality Scorecard 2023 – led by UN Women with support from the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund and the UN Resident Coordinator – showcased remarkable progress. An impressive 93.3 per cent of performance indicators scored “meets or exceeds minimum requirements”, reflecting a substantial improvement.

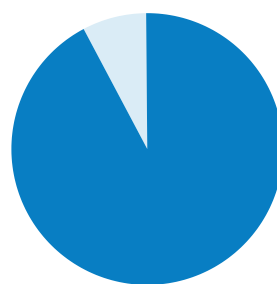
✓ In 2023, all 12 joint programmes implemented by the UNCT achieved the highest Gender Equality Marker value of 3, a significant increase on previous years. This milestone underscores the effective integration of gender equality into UNCT programmes, largely attributed to UN Women's leadership.

✓ Noteworthy advancements were identified in the 2023 UNCT-SWAP Gender Equality Scorecard review report, particularly on three performance indicators: gender mainstreaming capacities, leadership for gender equality and engagement with CSOs.

✓ A key event held at the One UN Liberia Pan African Plaza building underscored a



UN Women Liberia Country Representative Comfort Lamptey offering words of encouragement to an inmate in Liberia Central Prison (Photo: UN Women Liberia)



93.3%

of performance indicators scored “meets or exceeds minimum requirements” for the UNCT-SWAP Gender Equality Scorecard 2023 – led by UN Women



commitment to human rights and combating SGBV. The event featured impactful speeches, a panel discussion, recognition of human rights organizations and a poignant tribute to victims of SGBV through the lighting of candles of hope.

- ✓ In addition, a visit to Monrovia Central Prison facilitated meaningful interactions between UN staff, led by Resident Coordinator Christine Umutoni, and female inmates. Discussions centred on human rights, with the presentation of assorted gift items to support the inmates.



One UN visits women inmates at Monrovia Central Prison (Photo: UN Women Liberia)

Lessons learned

The planning and execution of the One UN GTG 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence event demonstrated the effectiveness of a joint programming approach. Inter-agency planning ensured the timely completion of all activities and presented a unified message.

IMPACT STORY

One UN GTG enhances joint programming

On 6 December 2023, Liberia experienced a landmark moment in its fight against SGBV. Led by the GTG and UN Women, in collaboration with the Resident Coordinator's Office and the Spotlight Initiative project, 350 stakeholders convened in Monrovia. Representatives from the Government of Liberia, CSOs, diplomatic corps and the UN joined hands in a unified stand against SGBV during the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence event.

Set against the backdrop of the One UN Liberia Pan African Plaza building compound, the event featured powerful speeches, panel discussions and the honouring of human rights champions. A special engagement took place at Monrovia Central Prison, where UN staff led discussions with female inmates on human rights, accompanied by gestures of compassion through gift distribution.



One UN visits women inmates and holds discussions with them (Photo: UN Women Liberia)

The impact of this collective effort extended beyond rhetoric, sparking awareness and prompting dialogue within the prison walls. The seamless collaboration among agencies showcased the transformative power of unified action. As the event concluded, the GTG emerged strengthened, ready to foster enduring collaboration in Liberia's ongoing fight against SGBV.



2023 Annual Report

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Government
of Ireland
International
Development
Programme



**Spotlight
Initiative**
To eliminate violence
against women and girls



**SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT
GOALS**



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