



LIBERIA

Country Gender Equality Profile

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Preface: Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection

Gender inequality and the marginalization of women in Liberia are perpetuated by socio-cultural norms, values, and perceptions that support male dominance and the subordination of women. Women and men, girls and boys, have been ascribed different roles and positions in society, and the latter often limits women's participation in socio-economic and political spheres. This has caused women to face multiple obstacles such as access to justice, rape, domestic violence and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage, limited access to finance and market, and low representation of women in leadership and governance, teenage pregnancy amongst others. These inequalities have hindered land rights, ownership, access and control of resources, gender-responsive economic growth and development.

This Country Gender Equality Profile (CGEP) should be used as a tool to provide a timely and effective understanding of the current operating context in relation to gender equality for both national and international partners. By providing an in-depth analysis, the CGEP will enhance the understanding of differences in the conditions, needs, participation rates, access to resources and development, control of assets, decision-making powers between girls, women, boys and men in their assigned gender roles. It is important to understand these differences to ensure policies, plans and programs formulated and designed have the potential to address gender inequalities and discrimination where needed in order to benefit equally girls, women, boys and men.

On behalf of the Government of Liberia, I would like to extend our utmost thanks to our national and international partners especially the UN Women, UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA and OHCHR, among many others, for the financial and technical support graciously provided, making this document an actuality. I would particularly like to express special thanks to the Deputy Minister for Research, Planning and Policy, Mr. Hassan A. Karneh, and his Assistant, Roosevelt S. Klafleh who led this process on behalf of the Ministry along with their technical team. We are grateful for their professional expertise provided by the national and international consultants, who worked diligently to develop this national document.

I would like to let you all know that your respective contributions to the development of this national document are far-reaching—particularly in the context of national advancement. At this point, the Government of Liberia looks forward to a sustainably collaborative and systemic approach in addressing issues of gender inequalities in Liberia.

Williametta E. Saydee Tarr
Minister



Preface: UN Women

Gender Inequalities in Liberia give rise to unequal gender power relations, lack of access to basic and productive services, underrepresentation in governance systems, lack of access to legal and judiciary services. Limited participation of women in all aspects of life often contributes to poor development results characterized by poor performance in most development indicators. Adolescent girls especially, continue to experience various forms of deprivations (harmful traditional practices, child marriage/ teenage pregnancy and gender norms) which often affect their capability to realize their full potential in life. Despite some important gains for women after the war in terms of improved access to education, strengthened economic roles and greater involvement in political and social spaces, the situation and status has not improved for most women, particularly those in rural areas in the post conflict period. Despite women constituting 49% of the population, development indices are negative for women compared to men. Gender inequalities cut over all circles of life in Liberia, and women are disproportionately represented in all areas of employment. This Country Gender Equality Profile (CGEP) is the result of a comprehensive gender analysis of the situation of women and men in Liberia, which should be used to guide cooperation programmes in Liberia. The CGEP is a tool to provide a timely and effective understanding of the current operating context in relation to gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) to national and international partners. By providing an in-depth analysis, the CGEP will enhance the understanding of differences in the conditions, needs, participation rates, access to resources and development, control of assets, decision-making powers between girls/women, boys/men, non-binaries, and sexual minorities in their assigned gender roles. It is important to understand these differences in Liberia to ensure that actions funded by the Government of Liberia, development partners, civil society organizations tackle gender inequalities and discrimination.

On behalf of UNWOMEN, I would like to thank the GoL, through the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection for their level of commitment and ownership and special thanks to our development partners, African Development Bank Group, European Union Delegation, and the Embassy of Sweden for the financial and technical support in developing the CGEP for Liberia. My recognition goes also to our UN Sister agencies UNDP, UNFPA, OHCHR and UNICEF for their contributions. I also want to thank the entire team in Data-Pop Alliance for the arduous work in the preparation of the material for this document. I look forward to a collaborative engagement in addressing gender inequality issues in Liberia.

Marie Goreth Nizigama
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Abbreviations and Acronyms

AFELL	Association of Female Lawyers in Liberia
AIDS	Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
ANC	Antenatal care
BPfA	Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action
CAADP	Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Program
CCGAP	Climate Change Gender Action Plan
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CGEP	Country Gender Equality Profile
CLMDC	Community Land Management and Development Committees
COPD	Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease of 2019
CPC	County Peace Committee
CSC	County Service Center
CSO	Civil society organization
CTDC	Counter Trafficking Data Collaborative
CUPPADL	Citizens United to Promote Peace & Democracy in Liberia
DDRR	Disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation, and reintegration
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
DPA	Data-Pop Alliance
DPC	District Peace Committee
DV	Domestic violence
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
EU	European Union
EVD	Ebola virus disease
FGM	Female genital mutilation
GBV	Gender-based violence
GDP	Gross domestic product
GEWE	Gender equality and women's empowerment
GoL	Government of Liberia
GRBP	Gender Responsive Planning and Budget Policy
HFPMS	High-Frequency Phone Monitoring Survey
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
HPV	Human papillomavirus

ICT	Information and communications technology
IDP	Internally displaced person
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMNCI	Integrated management of neonatal and childhood illnesses
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IPV	Intimate partner violence
ITN	Insecticide-treated nets
IUD	Intrauterine device
LASIP	Liberia Agriculture Sector Investment Program
LESSP	Liberia Energy Sector Support Program
LGBTI+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex
LISGIS	Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services
LLA	Liberia Land Authority
LNP	Liberian National Police
LURD	Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy
LWI	Liberian Women’s Initiative
MoA	Ministry of Agriculture
MoD	Ministry of National Defense
MoCI	Ministry of Commerce and Industry
MoE	Ministry of Education
MFDP	Ministry of Finance and Development Planning
MFI	Microfinance institutions
MGCSP	Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection
MoH	Ministry of Health
MIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs
MIC	Middle-income country
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MoL	Ministry of Labor
MME	Ministry of Mines and Energy
MPT	Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications

MPW	Ministry of Public Works
MoT	Ministry of Transport
MoYS	Ministry of Youth and Sports
NACCEL	National Council of Chiefs and Elders of Liberia
NAP	National Action Plan
NAPWPS	National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security
NCSC	National Civil Society Council of Liberia
NFIS	National Financial Inclusion Strategy
NGO	Non-Governmental organization
NHSWPP	National Health and Social Welfare Policy and Plan
NVE	Norwegian Water Resources and Energy Directorate
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PAPD	Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PTSD	Post-traumatic stress disorder
RWA	Rural Women’s Association
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
SMEs	Small and medium-sized enterprises
SMWF	Sirleaf Market Women’s Fund
SOGI	Sexual orientation and gender identity
SPACOC	Special Presidential Advisory Committee on Coronavirus
SRH	Sexual and reproductive health
SRHR	Sexual and reproductive health and rights
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
STEM	Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics
STI	Sexually transmitted infection
UN	United Nations
UNCT	United Nations country team
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UNSCR 1325	United Nations Security Council Resolution on Women, Peace and Security
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VAW	Violence against women
WANEP	West Africa Network for Peacebuilding
WBG	World Bank Group
WHO	World Health Organization
WIPNET	Women in Peacebuilding Network
WLMAP	Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace
WONGOSOL	Women’s NGO Secretariat of Liberia
WPS	Women, peace, and security

Executive Summary

The Country Gender Equality Profile (CGEP) represents an important guide to assess the existing situation regarding women's empowerment and gender equality in Liberia. The Government of Liberia (GoL), through the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSP), has enacted several commitments to diminish unacceptable inequalities between women and men. However, gender disparities persist at all levels, and deeply entrenched attitudes continue to reinforce the lack of opportunities, marginalize women in public and private spheres, and hinder their possibilities to attain a dignified life. Hence, the CGEP has been instrumentalized to guide the MGCSP, the UN Women, the European Union (EU), the African Development Bank, the Government of Sweden, civil society, and other development partners in assisting the GoL to integrate and mainstream gender issues to promote gender-responsive policies and programming in Liberia.

The CGEP uses an evidence-based policymaking approach in order to provide recommendations and key entry points to improve the state of gender equality in Liberia. The underlying assumption that policy decisions based on evidence produce better outcomes is at the cornerstone of this report. Hence, the CGEP may be used by the MGCSP as a backing document for an exhaustive evaluation of past and current strategies that have been deployed by the GoL, including policies and laws that have sought to mitigate gender inequalities rooted in the country's history. The CGEP should also be used for the purpose of strengthening advocacy efforts to improve accountability in terms of public budget usage; address the lack of reliable data to evaluate gender-focused programs and policies; and increase the interest of policymakers and public managers to gender mainstream their plans of action.

Institutional Framework. The evolution of the international institutional framework for gender equality in Liberia has expanded considerably in the last few decades. The protagonism and the advocacy of women during the civil wars led to a greater visibility of women's rights and gender equality in Liberia; as well as general gender mainstreaming, have had a considerable impact in this process; resulting in the inclusion of gender-related international frameworks in the efforts to advance gender equality in the country.

One of the most important instruments that has shaped the institutional framework on gender in Liberia is the UN Security Council Resolution on Women, Peace and Security (UNSCR 1325), which recognizes the disproportionate impact of violent conflict on women and girls as well as their critical role in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. However, there are important and complex challenges that have hampered the implementation of this framework, which are related to the lack of knowledge of gender and its importance for policy-making, deficient gender-responsive budgets, and lack of financial resources for the correct and efficient implementation of the policies within the different branches of the State.

Legal Framework. The legal framework for gender equality in Liberia is set in a complex judicial system in which both statutory and customary law and practices coexist and interact. The Constitution of Liberia, amended in 1986, establishes a framework for the State of Liberia to promote the realization of social justice and increase citizens' access to political and economic participation, and Article 11 cristalyzes the principle of no discrimination in these processes. However, despite efforts to eliminate gender gaps in legislation, there are provisions that still discriminate against women. Another key challenge is the participation of women in the judicial system as there is a shortage of female judges and qualified female legal practitioners.

Representation of Women in Decision-Making: Macro-level. The representation of Liberian women in decision-making processes has evolved throughout the country's history. The post-conflict situation and peacebuilding processes are particularly relevant, in that during this time, the most visible milestone took place: Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was elected president in 2005 and 2011. These events marked a transformation in the legal frameworks, leading to the inclusion of women in Liberia's political and economic realms. However, women's political participation is far from reaching parity in government positions, political representation bodies, and political processes. In 2020, women represented only 20 of the 118 eligible candidates in the Special Senate Elections.

Women and Health. The health sector in Liberia was one of the most affected by the two civil wars; it was severely disrupted due to the unavailability of medical supplies, the fleeing of health workers, and the destruction of health facilities. The mass destruction left by the conflict created a problematic scenario for the country in which health issues were going unattended to. Only 51 of the 293 public health facilities remained operational and only 30 physicians stayed in the country to serve a population of over three million. The country slowly recovered from this situation and started building a more stable health system. However, during the unprecedented Ebola Virus Disease crisis, the fragility of the health system was once again exposed. Currently, Liberia has improved many of its health indicators and although it still experiences trouble addressing issues such as maternal mortality rates and teenage pregnancy, the Ministry of Health and the Government of Liberia are pushing forward different initiatives to improve healthcare in the country.

Women and Education. The civil wars and consequent economic crises have led to the persistence of obstacles for girls and women's access and participation in education. The high proportion of the population who have not had access to education or who only attained primary education is considerable, which has meant high levels of illiteracy for women and girls. This increases when disaggregating by wealth and by residence, as girls and women from low economic backgrounds or from rural areas are more likely to have lower levels of education. At the same time, the participation of women in the education sector is low, often limited to teaching positions in primary education due to several structural barriers such as the low levels of literacy and precarious working conditions.

Gender and Cultural Norms. Liberia is marked by traditional gender norms that are deeply rooted in the dynamics of social power relations. These norms are also connected to the larger structures of power in politics, economy, and religion, affecting the everyday lives of women and girls in numerous ways. Child marriage is a practice deeply rooted in traditional norms, and even though advances have been made due to political will and campaigns, it still affects Liberian girls throughout the country, especially in rural areas. Wealth and education gaps are also critical factors, as the median age for first marriage and intercourse decreases with lower economic status and educational trajectory. This leads to a scenario in which girls and women's lives are profoundly affected by

the cultural norms that dictate their role in society. These norms also affect children and the relationship between spouses, as the use of violence to discipline children and to punish women is a widely used practice by men. Lastly, the role of religion is key in the construction of these cultural norms, affecting the structure and type of relationships women have within families and communities.

Women's Participation in Decision-Making: Micro-level. Liberian women are becoming more vocal in decision-making processes at the household level. Husbands have shown more open-minded attitudes towards their wives in decisions made in the household, and there has been a broader socialization of the importance of women being present for these decisions. Given that women have claimed additional space in the public sphere because of increased access to education and the opportunity to have their own cash earnings, their bargaining power in the household has also increased. However, traditional cultural norms continue to limit the power of women as they aspire to become equal partners in household decision-making processes.

Women and Financial Services. Since the end of the civil war in 2003, Liberia has been promoting the development of the financial sector, which is key for girls and women since their access to financial services is an important step towards advancing gender equality and protecting their rights. However, there are several constraints that inhibit women's demand for, and ability to use, financial services and products in Liberia. Even though some policies have been implemented to address gender barriers, there are critical obstacles to accessing commercial banking and mobile banking services. Thus, many women rely on informal financial services and grassroots village associations, limited by intrahousehold decision-making, high levels of illiteracy, societal norms, division of labor, and life cycle needs.¹⁷⁷ This results in an unequal gap between men and women in the financial sector, hindering poverty eradication, inclusive economic growth, and empowerment.

Women and The Formal Economy. Liberian women's participation in the formal market is strongly influenced by the educational opportunities they had access to during their childhood and adolescent years as well as societal expectations which restrict women's roles and participation in certain spheres of life. Unpaid domestic work is an obstacle to women's greater participation in

the formal market since most of their time is dedicated to such tasks, limiting their opportunities to obtain paid employment. Additionally, the programs adopted for developing skills and competencies in the post-conflict scenario focus mainly on young male ex-combatants. Thus, women enter the labor market from an unequal footing. At the same time, the labor market also has its own weaknesses, as it is strongly marked by the wage gap, and women's work is mainly oriented towards agriculture and services.

Women and The Informal Economy. The role of women in the Liberian economy has been crucial to the country's development. However, their participation takes place within a framework of various disadvantages, including the lack of financial and health protections that characterize the informal sector, where women make up the largest part of the labor force. Their involvement in this sector has been vital during and after the civil wars, throughout which women were and have been a driving force of the economy. Yet, the precarious working conditions that characterize the informal economy hinder women's opportunities and living conditions. Despite recent efforts, many challenges remain in terms of recognizing and protecting female informal workers, as well as eliminating corruption and other factors which impede women transitioning from the informal to formal sector of the economy.

Women, Post-Conflict and Peacebuilding. In Liberia, peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery have been central aspects of the efforts aimed at the stabilization, development, and prosperity of the country, but key challenges remain in addressing the complex causes of the conflict. Liberian women championed advocacy and peacebuilding processes; yet, the implementation of policies based on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 did not break with default assumptions about gender and the view of women as only victims of the conflict. Thus, Liberian women have appealed to their networks to address the post-conflict context and expand their agency in peacebuilding processes.

Women and Agriculture. Agriculture represents one of the most important sectors of Liberia's economy and it provides the main source of livelihood for the majority of the population. The two civil wars led to a highly vulnerable situation in terms of food insecurity. To address this situation, the GoL has led many strategies and initiatives to empower the production of small-

scale farmers and provide guarantees for the agricultural sector. In terms of employment in the sector, 70 percent of the workforce in Liberia derive a portion of their cash income from an agriculture-related activity. However, women's participation in the sector has decreased during the past years as the sales and service sector continued growing. Still, women are mainly responsible for food crop production, marketing, and trading, despite the different challenges they face in the sector in terms of employment vulnerability. Due to the lack of organization and officiality of land titles and deeds, land ownership continues to be one of the greatest challenges women face in order to achieve equality in the sector.

Women and Infrastructure. Access to public infrastructure and facilities have been shown to have a positive impact on women and their households, as access to essential services supports their upward social mobility and reduces the gender gap. However, Liberia's infrastructure is in critical condition following the civil conflicts and health crises, which has placed the nation in a difficult situation. Liberia scored 14.53 in the Africa Infrastructure Development Index (AIDI) in 2020, a low score considering the polar extremes in scores: Seychelles scored 96.83 and Somalia, 5.53. This complex scenario is burdened by the limited extent to which women are involved in infrastructure planning, as well as the lack of gender-sensitive infrastructure policies at the national level. The nexus between women and public services in Liberia also encompasses involvement in so-called peace infrastructures.

Women and Energy. Equal access to clean and renewable energy sources, as well as the participation of women in the energy sector are key objectives that would contribute to the empowerment of women and protection of their human rights. Yet, in Liberia, they are characterized by considerable gender gaps. At the macro-level, there is a limited participation of women in the field of energy and an absence of concrete policies to advance women's inclusion in this sector. Additionally, limited data impedes a more detailed analysis of the state of gender equality in the energy sector and understanding which areas need specific training to improve representation of women in decision-making processes. At the micro-level, access to electricity and the type of cooking energy used in households pose a challenge for women and girls, leading to multiple disadvantages in terms of health, living standards, and educational advancement.

Women's Entrepreneurship and Economic Empowerment.

The equal and independent participation of women in the economy is an essential prerequisite to the empowerment and well-being of women, their families, and their communities. In Liberia, as has been previously addressed, the participation of women in the economy is characterized by a prevalence in the informal sector and reliance on informal financial services, both of which lead to unstable and precarious living conditions. Lack of access to social protections and financial services illustrate a dire scenario for the inclusion of women in the economic sector. Even though there is a rise in women entrepreneurs, there are important challenges that hinder the establishment and management of their enterprises. At the same time, for the small proportion of women who participate in the formal economy, there are difficulties in their career trajectories as well as inclusion in decision-making bodies, as cultural norms often dictate the work environment.

Women and Technical and Vocational Education Training.

Occupational gender segregation prevents the economic progress of Liberian women as well as their personal and professional development, depriving the nation of women's professional and intellectual potential. Given that many technical and vocational education and training (TVET) areas are dominated by male participation, equal participation in diverse professional sectors is an essential requirement for Liberia's economic recovery and development.

Women, The Environment and Climate Change. Liberia is located in the center of the Upper Guinea Rainforest Region, along the West Coast of Africa. Similar to other countries forming this region, Liberia is highly vulnerable to climate change because sea levels are expected to continue increasing in the upcoming years, and Liberia's coastline hosts about 58 percent of the country's population and livelihoods. Furthermore, the country heavily depends on agriculture, forestry and fisheries — economic activities that are frequently affected by environmental shocks. When employing a gender lens, it becomes clear that Liberian women are highly vulnerable to environmental hazards. One of the key challenges of climate variability for women is water stress. Liberian women and girls have the primary of managing household water supplies, sanitation, and health; however, lack of sex-disaggregated data on water stress, as well as other types of climate change effects limits further analysis to identify the magnitude of this issue.

Gender-based Violence and Human Trafficking. Gender-based violence continues to be one of the most widespread forms of abuse and inequality in Liberia. Violence is also intertwined with deeply entrenched traditional gender norms, which reinforces FGM as a common practice among some ethnic groups in the country. Almost half of the female population between 15 - 49 years old have experienced physical, sexual, or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner throughout some part of their lives. The legacy of this type of violence is largely attributed to the context of the civil war, in which combatant groups committed violence against women. Although 20 years have passed since the end of the last civil war and various stakeholders (government, international organizations, civil society, and women's groups) continue to create strategies and allocate efforts to fight this long-lasting problem, GBV persists as one of the major issues reinforcing gender inequality in Liberia.

Women, Migration and Displacement. Post-conflict Liberia has faced challenges posed by Sub-Saharan Africa's migration flows: thousands of Liberian refugees and migrants have returned to the country; migrants and refugees from neighboring countries have arrived in Liberia; and the number of internally displaced persons has increased due to disasters and other conflicts. All of these factors have produced new concerns regarding the protection of these communities, especially women and girls.

Women, COVID-19 and Other Epidemics' Impact, Response and Recovery Implications. In March 2014, Liberia was hit by the Ebola Virus Disease and its subsequent epidemic. In total, 10,678 cases of Ebola and 4,808 deaths were reported in Liberia. At the time, the country was still undergoing a process of reconstructing their health system and had limited capabilities to respond to daily health needs. Six years later, Liberia reported its first case of COVID-19. Despite still having many limitations in its health sector, because of the lessons learned responding to EVD and the improved capabilities brought forth by governmental and international organization-supported programs, the country was far more prepared and praised for its quick response

Introduction

As of 2020, Liberia had a population of 5.05 million, 49.7 percent being female, and 50.3 percent being male.¹ There are 16 major ethnic groups in the country and over 20 indigenous languages are commonly used.² Liberia is bordered by Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Côte d'Ivoire, and its capital is Monrovia. In territorial terms, the country is divided into 15 counties with Montserrado, Nimba, and Bong having the highest concentration of females — 50.8 percent, 50.2 percent, and 50.6 percent, respectively.³ Yet, despite Liberia's abundant natural wealth — it is rich in iron ore, diamonds, gold, fertile soil, fisheries, and forestry⁴ — the country is among the world's poorest.

Liberia is a presidential representative democratic republic with a multi-party system. The political and economic configuration of the country has undergone transformative events over the last 50 years. It was founded in 1847 by freed American slaves and was the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to proclaim its independence.⁵ Because of its pioneering role in the wave of struggles for independence across Africa, Liberia has played a key and active role in international affairs. The country encouraged the establishment of Pan-Africanism⁶ and helped fund the Organization of African Unity, in addition to being a strong critic of the South African apartheid regime.⁷ However, much of the progressive and empowering role that Liberia played in the international arena was not translated into its internal political and economic situation.

During the period preceding Liberia's first civil war, political power was concentrated essentially in urban spaces, relegating most infrastructure and basic services to the capital city of Monrovia and a few other cities, which fueled uneven development and provoked a major dichotomy between urban and rural areas.⁸ In 1979, the country enjoyed a marked increase in economic growth due to a hike in world petroleum prices. However, with the 1980 coup d'état and later the onset of the first civil war, the economy collapsed and inflicted an especially devastating toll on the poor.⁹ Between 1987 and 1995, Liberia's GDP had shrunk by 90 percent, and as a result, it became one of the poorest and least developed countries in the world. Liberia experienced its first civil war from 1989 to 1997, and the second from 1999 to 2003. The drivers of conflict

were numerous, with underlying social and economic inequalities, paired with widespread corruption and nepotism, playing an important factor.¹⁰ The first civil war was one of Africa's bloodiest conflicts in the post-independence era — more than 200,000 people died and a million people were displaced into refugee camps in neighboring countries.¹¹ The two civil wars suppressed economic activity and destroyed vital infrastructure in Liberia, including electricity lines, roads, water and sewage systems, and education centers.¹²

Women and girls suffered the worst consequences from the 14 years of a brutal civil war and subsequent economic crises. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that during the civil war, 82 percent of the female population was subjected to multiple forms of violence, while 77 percent experienced sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).¹³ The high incidences of sexual violence did not decrease after the end of the conflict and abuse rates remain critically high, while also affecting women's participation in the labour market to this day.¹⁴ During the early stages of post-war reconstruction, men often refused to leave their home fearing to be mistaken for rebels of a different faction —and thus face reprisals— increasing women's burdens and vulnerability as they had to brave war zones in search of food and water.¹⁵ In terms of education, although school enrollment has improved in the past five years, literacy rates for older women who lived their childhood during the armed conflict are extremely low. The vast destruction of education centers kept many women from receiving basic education and becoming literate.¹⁶

A peace agreement in 2003 led to democratic elections in 2005, in which Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf was elected as the first female head of state in Africa, marking a historic milestone for Liberia. Although a female administration has brought about important breakthroughs from a gender perspective, such as the institution of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to address the causes and crimes of the civil war, and specifically sexual crimes against women,¹⁷ new setbacks ended up jeopardizing the progress that had been made for women. In 2014, Liberia was also one of the hardest-hit countries by the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) crisis, which disproportionately affected women as they

had to care for sick family members, putting themselves at greater risk and often losing their lives or livelihoods.¹⁸

Recent democratic governments in Liberia have made considerable efforts to improve the realization of women's and girls' rights and advance gender equality. President George Weah's administration has shown commitment toward this goal by launching the five-year Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development (PAPD), which is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) including the gender-specific targets identified therein. However, due to the country's long history of discrimination against women, there are still several existing structural barriers hindering women's participation in all spheres of public life and activities and preventing them from reaching their full potential.¹⁹

Purpose of the Country Gender Equality Profile

The following six sections provide a brief analysis of how the state of gender equality in Liberia remains fragile, and is a topic that requires attention, commitment, and collective endeavor. As part of increasing efforts to break away from this reality and eliminate all forms of gender-based discrimination, the Country Gender Equality Profile (CGEP) represents an important guide to assess the existing situation regarding women's empowerment and gender equality in Liberia. The Government of Liberia (GoL), through the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSP), has enacted several commitments to diminish unacceptable inequalities between women and men. However, gender disparities persist at all levels, and deeply entrenched attitudes continue to reinforce the lack of opportunities, marginalize women in public and private spheres, and hinder their possibilities to attain a dignified life. Hence, the CGEP has been instrumentalized to guide the MGCSP, the UN Women, the European Union (EU), the African Development Bank, the Government of Sweden, civil society, and other development partners in assisting the GoL to integrate and mainstream gender issues to promote gender-responsive policies and programming in Liberia.

The need to promote women's human rights and gender equality in Liberia is stipulated according to the mission and values set forth by the four core actors who commissioned the CGEP: UN Women, the African Development Bank, the European Union, and Sweden.

The first actor, UN Women, is grounded in the vision of equality enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations

and works for the elimination of discrimination against women and girls, the empowerment of women, and the achievement of equality between women and men as partners and beneficiaries of development, human rights, humanitarian action, peace, and security. Through this vision, UN Women's goal in Liberia is to promote women's human rights and gender equality, focusing on five corporate priority areas: increasing women's leadership and political participation; enhancing women's economic empowerment; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; advancing women's rights to live in a world free from violence; and promoting gender-responsive budgeting and governance.

Similarly, the second actor, the African Development Bank, has been a strong ally in the fight for women's rights in the continent and has recently approved a new Gender Strategy for 2021-2025: "Investing in Africa's women to accelerate inclusive growth." This strategy seeks to strengthen the Bank's commitment to reach gender equality and women and girls' empowerment in Africa through three pillars: empowering women through access to finance and markets; accelerating job creation for women through skills enhancement; and increasing women's access to social services through infrastructure.

Likewise, the European Union established the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, where they present policy objectives and actions which aim to make significant progress by 2025 towards ending gender-based violence; challenging gender stereotypes; closing gender gaps in the labor market; achieving equal participation across different sectors of the economy; addressing the gender pay and pension gaps; closing the gender care gap; and achieving gender balance in decision-making and in politics. Additionally, the EU has adopted its third Gender Action Plan (GAP) III 2021-2025, "An Ambitious Agenda for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in EU External Action". GAP III includes 6 Thematic Areas, with several objectives and indicators each, including: 1) freedom from all forms of gender-based violence; 2) promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights; 3) promoting economic, social rights, empowering girls and women; 4) promoting equal participation and leadership; 5) integrating the women, peace, and security agenda; and 6) green transition and digitalization. The implementation of GAP III and regular reporting is mandatory for all EU delegations worldwide, including the EU delegation in Liberia.

Finally, Sweden's feminist foreign policy aims towards ensuring that men and women have equal rights and equal power to shape their futures. Gender equality is seen both as a goal and as a means for achieving the Swedish Government's foreign policy objectives which includes: 1) full enjoyment of human rights; 2) freedom from physical, psychological, and sexual violence; 3) participation in prevention and resolution of conflicts, and post-conflict peacebuilding; 4) political participation and influence in all areas of society; 5) economic rights and empowerment; and 6) sexual and reproductive health and rights.

The CGEP was written by Data-Pop Alliance's (DPA) technical team comprised of Emmanuel Letouzé, Anna Carolina Spinardi, Sara Ortiz, Berenice Fernandez Nieto, Elena Maffioletti Arratia, and national consultants Laura Golakeh, Alex Dukuly, and Julius Lekpeh. Technical coordination, guidance, and quality assurance support were provided by Ricardo Fuentes-Nieva, Lead Technical Advisor of the project, Zinnya del Villar, Chief of Data Science (DPA), and Alina Sotolongo and Agustina Pérez Mirianco, Data Science Officers (DPA). In recent years, DPA has developed several projects with international actors and stakeholders that aim to strengthen data ecosystems and insight to fight gender inequalities and disparities globally. The project also benefited from operational support from Sangeeta Thapa (UN Women Deputy Country Representative), Straven Willie (UN Women), Hon. Hassan Karneh (Deputy Minister for Research, Planning and Policy), Hon. Roosevelt S. Klafleh (Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection), and Director Anthony Borlay (Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection).

The CGEP uses an evidence-based policymaking approach in order to provide recommendations and key entry points to improve the state of gender equality in Liberia. The underlying assumption that policy decisions based on evidence produce better outcomes is at the cornerstone of this report. Hence, the CGEP may be used by the MGCSF as a backing document for an exhaustive evaluation of past and current strategies that have been deployed by the GoL, including policies and laws that have sought to mitigate gender inequalities rooted in the country's history. The CGEP should also be used for the purpose of strengthening advocacy efforts to improve accountability in terms of public budget usage; address the lack of reliable data to evaluate gender-focused programs and policies; and increase the interest of policymakers and public managers to gender mainstream their plans of action.

Methodology and Structure of the Country Gender Equality Profile

The methodology adopted in this project is based on a mixed-methods approach. Scholars openly advocate that neither quantitative nor qualitative methods are sufficient by themselves to capture details of a research problem.²⁰ Hence, mixing, comparing, and integrating both methodologies allow projects to achieve a more sophisticated outcome.²¹

The CGEP describes and analyses the current situation in Liberia based on international norms and standards, including the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BDPfA)²², while accounting for the country's existing legislation and policies.

The evaluation methodology adopted to the construction of the CGEP provided a comprehensive and thorough guide to the development of a holistic and robust analysis of gender equality and women's empowerment issues in Liberia. The mixed-methods methodology adopted for data collection and analysis has been combined in two convergent yet parallel phases. In the convergent parallel approach, the researcher collects both quantitative and qualitative data roughly at the same time, undertakes the analysis of each data separately, and then compares and/or integrates the results.²³

In terms of application and utilization of qualitative methods, in order to explore and document the major issues affecting the state of gender equality in Liberia through a cross-cutting and sectoral analysis, substantial document analysis and review of key literature were employed. Regarding the literature review on gender equality in Liberia, an extensive list of documents was compiled, ranging from non-governmental international organizations policy papers to governmental documents, and from academic articles to blog posts. DPA's team mapped a total of 260 sources. Having gathered the aforementioned list of documents, a detailed analysis was conducted in which key statistics and main findings were identified and extracted to guide the authors in identifying the main trends in terms of inequalities and gender advancements in Liberia from the end of the last civil war to the present day. These trends point towards a general overview of how gender is represented in each sector, and the gaps, challenges, and persistent difficulties that Liberia faces in its pursuit of gender equality.

In terms of the application and utilization of quantitative research, the process of mapping and selecting indicators to be included in the CGEP of Liberia has been developed in three phases. First, indicators used in previous CGEP reports were analyzed and cataloged. Second, the team mapped the indicators used in the 1) 2019-20 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) of Liberia; 2) UN Women's Minimum Set of Gender Statistics; 3) AfDB Socio Economic Database 1960-2021; 4) World Bank Open Data; and 5) the OCHA Humanitarian Data Exchanged, and matched them with both gender-relevant SDG indicators as well as the previously selected areas of study for the CGEP of Liberia. Third, a new filter and analytical review of these indicators allowed for the establishment of a final list of indicators. This final filter consisted mainly of recommendations provided by the local team of national consultants whose contextualized insight contributed to selecting the most valuable indicators.

Limitations

This report is constrained by three main limitations with regard to data. Firstly, data availability. According to UN Women, "as of December 2020, only 41% of indicators needed to monitor the SDGs from a gender perspective were available, with gaps in key areas."²⁴ This issue translated into partial or missing information that the authors were not able to access and integrate into the analysis of some of the sections produced in this report. Secondly, when data was available, accessing it required extensive research by scanning through multiple national and international databases, due to a lack of centralized and/or open national data sources. This has hindered comparability between indicators in terms of methodology, timeframes, and restrained potentially relevant disaggregations. Lastly, given that the last official census is from 2008, the DHS 2019-20 survey was the most updated and disaggregated database available. As a survey, the DHS is based on a sample of the population. Thus, limitations in terms of sampling errors and disaggregation representativeness may arise. As a consequence of these constraints, this report only presents a descriptive analysis of the indicators.



The State of Gender Equality in Liberia

1.1. Political Context

In recent years, the development of institutional and legal frameworks has led to significant changes advancing women's rights, opportunities, and equal representation in decision-making activities. This first section details these advances and the remaining gender equality challenges by outlining international and national institutional frameworks for gender equality and women's rights in Liberia; by analyzing the legal framework and gender-sensitive laws; the role of civil society organizations; and the participation at the macro-level sphere of decision-making.

1.1.1. Institutional Framework

The institutional framework refers to international and national instruments which guide the government's actions to achieve gender equality in Liberia, which includes gender as a cross-sectoral issue in different apparatus for the development of the population's well-being.

International Institutional Framework

The evolution of the institutional framework for gender equality in Liberia has expanded considerably in the last few decades, with the accession of gender-related obligations emanating from a wide array of treaties, resolutions, protocols, and other international instruments. Even though the first advancements were observed before the civil wars, it is the activism and advocacy of women's rights and feminist associations during the conflict that led to greater visibility of women's rights and gender equality in Liberia. This, along with general gender mainstreaming and the human rights "cascade,"²⁵ resulted in the inclusion of multiple gender-related obligations that emerged from international instruments.

The country ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1984; Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1993 (as well as the their optional protocols); International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and their Families in 2004; Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa in 2008 (Maputo Protocol); and Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2012.²⁶ All

these international and regional instruments include fundamental obligations for the State in protecting the rights of women and girls against social, cultural, political, and economic inequalities, and as such, are key aspects of the international institutional framework of Liberia.

The country has also approved specific gender equality policies through their involvement in international commitments such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), which drives the global agenda for women's empowerment, participation, and gender equality in all dimensions of society,²⁷ and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which incorporates a cross-cutting understanding of gender in all of the SDGs established in 2015, as well as specific emphasis on gender equality through SDG number 5.²⁸ At the same time, Liberia has also integrated the ECOWAS Strategic Framework for Strengthening Child Protection Systems and its Strategic Action Plan, an important step for the protection of girls in the country.²⁹ The obligation to reach specific goals through these agendas boosts data collection efforts and the analysis of progress made within Liberian society to close the gender gap and achieve gender equality, thereby reinforcing gender as a cross-sectoral issue.

There are also important international declarations and principles which guide the fulfilment of the government's international obligations to gender equality, such as the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1993, and the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa, adopted at the African Union Summit in 2004.³⁰

However, one of the most important instruments that has shaped the institutional framework on gender in Liberia is the UN Security Council Resolution on Women, Peace and Security (UNSCR 1325), which recognizes the disproportionate impact of violent conflict on women and girls as well as their critical role in conflict resolution and peacebuilding.³¹ While the Liberian institutional framework incorporates a majority of the international instruments regarding gender, it follows two violent civil wars in which women and girls were both victims and agents of relief and recovery; as such, reconstruction and peacebuilding processes must include the active participation of women and girls. This has been further institutionalized by the

incorporation of The Dakar Declaration and ECOWAS Plan of Action for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 and 1820 in West Africa (2010), which recognizes the issue of conflict-related sexual violence as a matter of international peace and security.³²

All of these international instruments which guide and frame the actions of the Liberian state have been key to the progression of gender equality and the protection of the rights of women and girls. Therefore, in order to reach these goals, the instruments have been integrated into Liberia's national actions.

Table 1.1. Relevant international treaties adopted, ratified, and signed by the Government of Liberia

Treaty	Adoption of Treaty	Signature	Ratification / Accession / Succession
Geneva Conventions	1949	-	29 Mar. 1954
Statutes of the International Criminal Court	1998	-	24 Sept. 2004
United Nations			
Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide	1948	11 Dec. 1984	20 Jun 1950
Convention Against Discrimination in Education	1962	-	17 May 1962
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR)	1966	18 April 1867	22 Sept. 2004
Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights aiming to the abolition of the death penalty (CCPR-OP2-DP)	1989	-	16 Sept. 2005
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR)	1966	18 April 1867	22 Sept. 2004
International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD)	1966	-	5 Nov.1976
Convention on the Non-Applicability of Statutory limitations to War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity	1968	-	16 Sept. 2005
International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid	1973	-	5 Nov. 1976
The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Violence against Women (CEDAW)	1979	-	17 Jul. 1984
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW-OP)	1999	22 Sept. 2004	-
Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT)	1984	-	22 Sept. 2004
Optional Protocol of the Convention against Torture (CAT-OP)	2002	-	22 Sept. 2004
Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)	1989	26 April 1990	4 June 1993
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (CRC-OP-AC)	2000	22 Sept. 2004	-
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children child prostitution and child pornography (CRC-OP-SC)	2000	22 Sept. 2004	-
International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (CMW)	1990	22 Sept. 2004	-
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)	2007	30 March 2007	26 July 2012
African Union			
Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa	1969	10 Sept. 1969	1 Oct. 1971
African Charter on Human and People's Rights	1981	4 Aug. 1982	-
Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa	2003	-	14 Dec. 2007
African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child	1990	12 May 1992	01 Aug. 2007
African Youth Charter	2006	18 June 2008	-
African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance	2007	18 June 2008	23 Feb. 2014

International Labour Organization			
Abolition of Forced Labour Convention	1957	-	25 May 1962
Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention	1958	-	22 Jul. 1959
Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention	1999	-	2 Jun. 2003

Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from OHCHR (n.d.), African Union Commission (n.d.), ILO (n.d.), & International Committee of the Red Cross (n.d). Data retrieved on 08-07-2021.

National Institutional Framework

The Liberian state is divided into the executive, legislative, and judiciary branches, and the institutional framework refers to the actions and plans that are to be implemented by the executive branch — specifically, the 19 ministries that compose the government of Liberia. The Gender and Development Act of 2001 established and defined the institutional mandate of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, which is the main governmental body for promoting gender equality, women’s advancement, and children’s welfare in Liberia.

The National Gender Policy implemented in 2010 is one of the first national policies which puts forward the issue of gender as its main objective, aiming to “promote gender equitable, socio-economic development and improve national capacities for enhanced gender mainstreaming in the national development processes.”³³ Recently reviewed for the 2018-2022 period through a participative process, this policy is the point of reference of the MGCSP’s work and coordination with all governmental and state institutions, civil society, and other stakeholders. At the same time, it is the Women’s Empowerment Division within the MGCSP that is responsible for the coordination of “all women’s empowerment and political participation in decision-making processes programs at the local and national levels,”³⁴ highlighting the importance of the MGCSP in the institutional framework.

In line with the objective of gender mainstreaming, the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning developed the Gender Responsive Planning and Budget Policy (GRPB) for 2019-2023, which requires every governmental institution to design a gender responsive budgeting framework and evaluate the impact of public expenditure on gender equality.³⁵ Moreover, Liberia has a multiplicity of policies, programs, and National Action Plans that address specific aspects of gender in the country.

Liberia’s civil wars led to the implementation of a series of policies focused on reconciliation and peacebuilding, in which the role and participation of women was key. Even though they were initially excluded from the creation

and implementation of disarmament and reconstruction policies, women’s advocacy actions ultimately contributed to the peacebuilding processes, proving their role as a pivotal component to achieving peace, security, and development in Liberia.³⁶

The first Liberian National Action Plan for the Implementation of the UN Resolution 1325 was implemented from 2009 to 2013, and in 2013 the Strategic Roadmap for National Healing, Peacebuilding, and Reconciliation was announced, which sunsets in 2030.³⁷ In 2019, the NAP for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 was revised, and a new plan was announced for 2019-2023. At the same time, focus has been given to gender in security, with programs such as Gender Units in all security institutions, ministries, and agencies, and Peace Huts, providing a safe space for women in rural communities to discuss issues that plague them, especially related to conflict resolution.³⁸ All of these NAPs and policies — advocated by women’s grassroots organizations, supported by development partners, and implemented by the MGCSP — aim to provide “economic, social, and security policies to empower women and girls to participate fully and effectively in Liberia’s peace building, reconstruction, recovery and development processes”.³⁹

GVB and human trafficking in Liberia have been a focus for policymaking since the end of the civil wars, as the effects they have on women and girls are major obstacles for the protection of their rights and for reaching gender equality. Since 2016, the National Action Plan on the Prevention and Management of SGBV in Liberia has been in effect, with Phase III of the plan currently in action, covering the period from 2018 to 2023.⁴⁰ The third phase is focused on the prevention of GBV in local communities. There are more specific institutional policies which aim to investigate, sanction, and give reparations to GBV, such as the National Sexual and Gender Based Violence Taskforce.⁴¹ Led by the MGCSP and composed of other ministries, agencies, local and international NGOs, relevant UN entities, and development partners, the taskforce is complemented by the work of the Women and Children’s Protection Section of the Ministry of Justice and SGBV Crimes Units across

14 counties. Regarding the issue of human trafficking, a revised National Action Plan to implement the 2005 Anti-Human Trafficking Act was announced in 2018.⁴²

Development has also been at the center of the GoL’s efforts since the end of the civil war, which aim to improve the lives and economic prosperity of the Liberian population. It is with this objective in mind that the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development 2018–2023 was designed and is now being implemented, focusing on “addressing the basic needs of Liberians for income security, better access to basic services, and greater opportunities for self-improvement in an enabling environment that is inclusive and stable.”⁴³

Other relevant policies, plans and programs which aim to address gender inequalities and protect the rights of women and girls are focused on specific dimensions such as health, economic empowerment, the environment, and vulnerable groups (see Table 1.2). These policies are crucial parts of the coordinated efforts implemented by the MGCSP to advance gender equality in Liberia.

Table 1.2. Other relevant policies, plans, and programs

Health	Economic Empowerment and Rural and Agricultural Sector
Goal: To improve the accessibility, quality, and transparency of the health services for women and girls in Liberia. ⁴⁴	Goal: To improve the economic empowerment of women in Liberia, while considering the role of women in efforts for sustainable development.
1. Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn Child, and Adolescent Health Policy (2016–2020)	1. The National Rural Women Headquarters, the Joint Program on Rural Women Economic Empowerment (2015-2018)
2. The National Health and Social Welfare Plan (2011–2021)	2. The Economic Empowerment of Adolescent Girls and Young Women Program ⁴⁵
3. The National HIV and AIDS Strategic Plan	3. Women’s Entrepreneurship for Sustainable Energy Program ⁴⁶
4. The Liberia National Family Planning Costed Implementation Plan	4. The National Financial Inclusion Strategy (NFIS) (2020-2024) developed by the Central Bank of Liberia to further girls and women’s (from ages 15 and over) access to financial services by 50 percent in 2024 ⁴⁷
5. The Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Program	-

Source: Elaborated by the authors

Lastly, the protection of groups in situations of vulnerability is key to overcoming gender inequalities and addressing the specific realities of people whose identities are often at an intersection of inequalities. Since the development and implementation of Liberia’s peacebuilding efforts, most of the focus has been on the protection of children and youth: the implementation of the National Child Welfare and Protection Policy in 2011 and revision of the youth policy from 2012 to 2017.⁴⁸ Regarding the protection of other groups in situations of vulnerability, one of the major advancements has been in policies aimed at people with disabilities, with the declaration of the first National Plan for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in 2018 for a five-year period of implementation.⁴⁹

Institutional Frameworks in Practice

Although Liberia has adopted a wide range of different programs and policies aimed at addressing gender inequalities, the implementation of these initiatives at the institutional level faces complex challenges. While each NAP and policy may face specific obstacles regarding their implementation, general patterns have been identified by different studies in terms of deficient gender-responsive budgets, lack of financial resources, and the lack of knowledge on gender and its importance in policy making.

The “Capacity Needs Assessment of Justice and Security Institutions on Prevention, Protection and Response to SGVB, HTP and Violence Against Women and Girls,” carried out by the Liberia Spotlight Initiative in collaboration with the UN and EU, highlights the fact that while some institutions have adequate knowledge and skills related to SGVB, “they lack logistical support to perform their duties.”⁵⁰ The analysis of nine key institutions shows that the personnel working in these domains possess limited knowledge on aspects such as gender lens, human rights and women’s human rights, as well as CEDAW and gender policies. Their acquired knowledge and skills have mainly been made possible through the support of international organizations and development partners.

The Spotlight Initiative’s Country Program Document accentuates the fact that, as a consequence of an inadequate budget allocation, “institutional capacities and mechanisms largely remain weak and incapable,”⁵¹ and gender-responsive planning and budget policies have not been achieved in key institutions for gender-related issues. Moreover, most of the institutions are still constrained by the “lack of resources to implement most of the provisions”⁵²

emanating from the Beijing +25 Action Plan. These gaps in organizational capacities have been identified in all relevant institutions in regard to the implementation of the national framework on gender equality.

These institutional challenges, as well as the lack of public confidence and trust in government structures, have greatly hindered the efforts of the MGSCP to comply with international obligations to ensure the protection of girls' and women's rights, and has obstaculized the adequate implementation of the institutional framework for gender equality in Liberia.

1.1.2. Legal Framework

The legal framework for gender equality in Liberia is set in a complex judicial system in which both statutory and customary law and practices coexist and interact. The colonial settlers established an Anglo-American Common Law model which, at its inception, governed the State and the "civilized" communities, while a codified customary law governed the so-called native tribes.⁵³ While this distinction has since been eliminated, it has permeated into the Liberian judicial system, affecting access to, and satisfaction with, the legal system in the country.

The Interaction between Statutory and Customary Law

Customary law is an umbrella term for "a set of mechanisms providing an alternative to the formal statutory justice system for different segments of the population,"⁵⁴ and they can vary depending on the community's religion, ethnic background, and geographical, social, and economic context. However, the most fundamental pillar of customary law in Liberia is based on the objective of establishing a restorative process that can ensure community cohesion and prevent future disturbances to peace and harmony in a community.⁵⁵ The Constitution of Liberia, amended in 1986, recognizes the relevance of customary law in the judicial system and legitimizes "the existence and operation of customary courts in the hinterland"⁵⁶ as conflict resolution mechanisms. The recognition and legitimacy granted to customary law are particularly relevant in the aftermath of the two civil wars, as most of the statutory judicial infrastructure was decimated.

Nonetheless, the fact that the two judicial systems coexist in the country does not necessarily mean that they are complementary, as there can be contradictions in terms of what is considered lawful, especially depending on the particularities of each case and context. This situation

not only exists in Liberia, but also throughout most of the continent as well; indeed, judicial harmonization poses notable challenges, namely cultural tensions between groups. Thus, while bearing in mind that the process of merging the judicial systems may prevent cultural tensions, there has been a particular prioritization of democratic dialogue between groups to establish common understandings.⁵⁷

Gender in Judicial Systems

Both statutory and customary laws have traditionally been rooted in patriarchal structures that have prevented the inclusion of provisions on gender equality and the protection of women and girls' rights; conversely, there are laws that favor men in both the statutory and customary legal systems, such as marriage laws that are influenced by cultural and traditional practices.⁵⁸ One of the main challenges to addressing gender inequality in Liberia is the need to transform both statutory and customary mechanisms into gender-sensitive judicial systems. This means that both judicial systems need to establish democratic dialogues that effectively protect women and strengthen social cohesion through the equal participation of women in their communities. The empowerment of women in both judicial systems and their participation in democratic dialogues and legislative processes is essential for addressing gender inequalities in Liberia.⁵⁹

Gender-Sensitive Statutory Laws

Gender-sensitive legislation is a fundamental part of mainstreaming gender considerations, and it refers to "the integration of a gender perspective into all components of the legislative process"⁶⁰ in order to achieve gender equality.⁶¹ This includes the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of laws. This type of legislation is based on a comprehensive analysis of the status quo from a gender perspective and potential gender-differentiated impacts of the law on target groups, as well as the inclusion of gender-focused considerations and gender-sensitive indicators.⁶² This understanding of gender-sensitive legislation is central to the analysis of the statutory laws of the country.

The Constitution of Liberia establishes a framework for the government's promotion of unity, liberty, stability, equality, justice, human rights, along with social, economic, and political advancement of society, irrespective of gender and for posterity. It empowers policymakers in Liberia to enact

laws that realize social justice and increase citizens’ access to political and economic participation. According to Article 11, all persons, irrespective of ethnic background, race, sex, creed, place of origin or political opinion, are entitled to the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual.

However, certain pieces of legislation have discriminated against women in overt ways, especially laws that deal with the private sphere.⁶³ Despite efforts to eliminate gender gaps in legislation (see Table 1.3), provisions that discriminate against women persist. This can be seen in the laws that affect women’s work after having children, the opportunities for women starting and running a business, female ownership of property and inheritance, and laws that affect women’s pensions.⁶⁴

Table 1.3. Important Gender-Related Laws

Name of Law	Year	Brief Description
The Decedents Estate Law	1973	Accords equal rights to customary wives, both sons and daughters have the same rights to inherit land and non-land assets.
Alien and Nationality Law	1973	Women are provided the same rights as men to acquire, change, or retain their nationality, whether single or married.
Customary Marriage Law	1998	Brought formal recognition to customary marriages.
Education Law	2002	Free and compulsory education for all.
Public Health Law	2010	Equality of opportunity and treatment.
Children’s Law	2011	Comprehensively covers children’s rights, prohibiting child marriage, discrimination, and all forms of violence against children.
Decent Work Law	2015	Promotes the fundamental rights of workers and prohibits discrimination of any kind within the workplace.
Rape Law	2017	Defines rape and age of consent. Makes rape an unbailable offense and provides resources for victims and witness protection.
Land Rights Act	2018	Ensures equal access and equal protection with respect to land ownership.
Domestic Violence Law	2019	Makes domestic violence—including physical or mental abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, and exploitation—a serious crime against the individual and society.

Source: Elaborated by the authors

Women’s Access to and Participation in the Judicial System

The gender gap in the judicial system can also be seen in women’s access to, and participation in, legal institutions. There is a shortage of female judges and qualified female legal practitioners in the statutory judiciary system; in the Supreme Court, only two out of five judges are female, only four of the 15 judicial circuit courts have female judges, and there are only five female magistrates in the 15 counties. To address both the absence of gender-sensitive laws and to advocate for the promotion, protection, and advancement of the rights of women and children, the Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia was formed.

Box 1.1. Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in the Judicial System

SGBV was widespread during the civil wars, affecting a considerable proportion of the population. The issue is thus a salient phenomenon in Liberian society and must be addressed by the judicial system.

Indeed, there is consensus at the national level to reform the justice system and commit to addressing this complex issue. In 2008, the Liberian Legislature revised Title 17 of the Liberian Code of Law to establish a Sexual Offenses Court known as Criminal Court E to tackle SGBV. In 2009, The Ministry of Justice established the Sexual and Gender-Based Violent Crimes Unit, in order to provide rapid investigative and prosecutorial responses to complaints of rape and other sexual offenses against children. The MGCSF, with support from its partners, has developed an Anti-Rape Road Map to tackle the recent surge in sexual violence cases in the country, especially against children. Likewise, gender-sensitive laws such as the Domestic Violence Act have advanced the country’s legal framework by establishing domestic violence as a criminal offense.

However, due to social and cultural perceptions, as well as difficulties in accessing the statutory system, SGBV in Liberia is heavily underreported and the conviction rate is low. For example, in a study on how Liberians from Nimba county navigate choices in the plural judicial system to address GBV cases, it was concluded that in the absence of a viable justice sector – due to distances and costs – people are forced to weigh several social and community concerns. Specifically, many women would prefer to pursue justice through the statutory legal system “if it

functioned the way it was intended”⁶⁵ and they could access it; but when faced with the dysfunctionalities of the system and peer pressure, women turn instead to the customary system. Despite this, some contextual factors lead both men and women to prefer the statutory system, such as when considering the type of offence, the sexual maturity of the victim, and the offender’s communal affiliation.⁶⁶

Thus, despite efforts to address legal and institutional gaps in the elimination of SGBV, challenges regarding the access and implementation of these policies remain.

1.1.3. Civil Society

The structure and workings of civil society in Liberia is rich and diverse. Latest figures from 2017 indicate over 1,500 formal organizations registered under the umbrella of the National Civil Society Council of Liberia (NCSCCL), as well as numerous other informal organizations.⁶⁷ The work of civil society organizations became more visible during and after the Liberian civil wars, when women’s organizations championed peacebuilding and an end of violence.

The Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET) flourished as a result of the initiative and perseverance of thousands of women across the country during the conflict as they pioneered the emergence of women’s organizations. An example of this is the Gbowee Peace Foundation Africa, founded by the Liberian activist and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Leymah Gbowee to provide younger generations with more educational and leadership opportunities.⁶⁸ Thus, many women’s CSOs have continued to play an important role in fostering peace and advancing gender equality in the country.

To further build the capacity of women’s organizations, the Women’s NGO Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL) was established as the institutional apparatus for coordinating the activities of more than 100 women’s organizations, and to gather local women together to formulate and present their independent views on government issues directly affecting Liberian women.⁶⁹ Their role as coordinators of different women’s organizations can be seen in their campaigns and advocacy efforts for women’s rights, such as the Parallel Report for Beijing+25, coordinated by WONGOSOL with contributions from leading women-focused NGOs and CSOs.⁷⁰

Table 1.4. Relevant Women’s NGOs and CSOs in Liberia

Relevant Women's NGOs and CSOs in Liberia	
Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia (AFELL)	Children Development Alliance for Women
Coalition of Women Against Gender Based Violence in Liberia (COWAIL)	Community Sustainable Development Organization (COSDO)
Formidable Initiative for Women and Girls (FIFWG)	Kids Educational Engagement Project
Liberia Initiative for Empowerment	Liberian Women Empowerment Network (LIWEN)
Liberia Women Media Action Committee (LIWOMAC)	Liberia Women National Political Forum (LWNPF)
Organization for Women and Children (ORWOCH/ NOPSWECO)	Paramount Young Women Initiative (PAYOWI)
Sister “4” Sister international	Society for Women Against AIDS in Liberia (SWAA- L)
United Muslim Women Advocacy and Empowerment Organization	West Point Women for Health & Dev. Org. (WPWHDO)
Women & Youth Wings ECOWAS Citizen Union of Liberia	Women Advocacy on WASH Initiative (WOAWIN)
Women and Children Initiatives Inc. (WCI)	Women Education and Dev. Organization-Liberia (WEDOL)
Women Initiative for Sustainable Agriculture	Women in Peacebuilding Network
Women Rights and Gender Justice	Yapugeanma women Inc.

Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from WONGOSOL (2019).

However, there are complex challenges for the work and sustainability of CSOs in the country, which significantly affect women’s initiatives in civil society. Even though there has been significant progress in establishing an environment hospitable to CSOs there are still issues regarding the fragmentation of the legal framework and requirements to establish formal CSOs that render many initiatives without recognition or resources.⁷¹ Moreover, the capacity of CSOs in Liberia is generally weak as organizations are underfunded, donor-reliant, and have limited human resources. The region where CSOs are

based is an especially important factor that affects their capacities. For example, CSOs based in Monrovia tend to have higher access to skilled staff and financial and technological resources compared to those in peri-urban and rural areas.⁷² These situations can lead to the dilution of the mission and objectives of CSOs as they attempt to prioritize donors, which can then hinder sustainable efforts to address gender inequalities.⁷³

Given the importance of CSOs as intermediaries between citizens and the government – because they possess the trust of the community, valuable networks, and skills to mobilize citizens to action – it is critical to reinforce capacity building efforts. In light of this, an Accord was signed between the Government and CSOs in 2016 to ensure a hospitable environment for civil society organizations to operate, as well as broaden the opportunities for CSOs to participate in governance and peacebuilding processes and activities.⁷⁴ However, the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the resources and capacities of CSOs is still unmapped, and new complex challenges further impede the work of women’s organizations in their efforts to address gender inequality.

1.1.4. Women’s Representation in Decision-Making: Macro-level

Data highlights: *Sex-disaggregated data on women’s representation in decision-making at the macro-level is available with some relevant and updated indicators. However, it covers mainly topics related to the political and business-related domains, and they are made accessible through a few sources (primarily, the World Bank and the ILO). More disaggregated and comprehensive information in terms of access to opportunities and specific challenges (including gender-based violence in politics) is needed to further understand the dynamics of women’s representation in macro-level decision-making.*

Post-conflict Scenario

During and after the conflict, Liberian women have been present yet also invisibilized. They gained international attention mainly through peace movements, becoming agents of change who led peacebuilding and national reconciliation processes.⁷⁵ Participation and empowerment in the post-conflict scenario led to the foundation of CSOs and feminist movements that seek

to establish peace, encourage national reconstruction, and achieve gender equality. One of the most prominent figures in these efforts is activist Leymah Gbowee, but perhaps the figure who most embodies political empowerment is Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.⁷⁶

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Female Leadership

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf won Liberia’s elections in a democratic process in 2005, thereby becoming the first female president on the African continent. Her victory and subsequent re-election materialized women’s struggles at the national level.⁷⁷ Also, despite the patriarchal structures that persist nationwide, the elections marked a social and political transition toward greater participation of women in decision-making processes.

The media’s representation of Sirleaf’s image reflects much of the reluctance that persists in society when a woman “transgresses” traditionally assigned roles. The narrative around Sirleaf consisted of her role as a mother or grandmother and her roles within the sphere of her personal life, which is not the case with media analysis of male political figures.⁷⁸

Sirleaf’s political career is a testament to the difficulties faced by women in Liberia. Sirleaf faced challenges and persecution in her political career during the Samuel Doe administration. However, once elected, the most significant result of her mandate was the Charles Taylor War Crimes Trial at The Hague. The national support for Sirleaf was due to social discontent over the violence, instability, and poverty that previous administrations had failed to resolve, and that left the country devastated after two civil wars.⁷⁹

Women’s leadership in Liberia is not limited to the figure of Sirleaf. During the negotiations with the rebels during the civil war, personalities such as Ruth Sando Perry played an important role.⁸⁰ This appropriation of spaces transcends the political sphere and moves into organized civil society, education, and the economy. Therefore, women’s empowerment is not conditional on Sirleaf’s ascension to power. Instead, Sirleaf is the expression of women’s empowerment.

However, the parity in legislative bodies remains a challenge. Relevant efforts began during Sirleaf’s term in office; Sirleaf considered women as necessary in the leadership of key government agencies.⁸¹ According to 2018 figures, the Women’s Power Score was 63.7, where 200 represents gender parity.⁸² According to Liberia’s overall

gender index in various sectors from 2014 to 2018, political empowerment also has the lowest scores (see Table 1.5).⁸³

Table 1.5. Liberia’s Global Gender Index Ranks for Several Sectors (2014-2018)

Indicator Score (Rank)	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Economic Opportunity and Participation	0.64 (94)	0.62 (99)	0.61 (103)	0.70 (58)	0.73 (41)
Political Empowerment	0.21 (46)	0.22 (47)	0.23 (46)	0.24 (45)	0.24 (47)
Overall (Global Index)	0.65 (111)	0.65 (112)	0.65 (114)	0.67 (107)	0.68 (96)

Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Masitoh (2020) [Original source: Index, 2018 and Forum 2018]

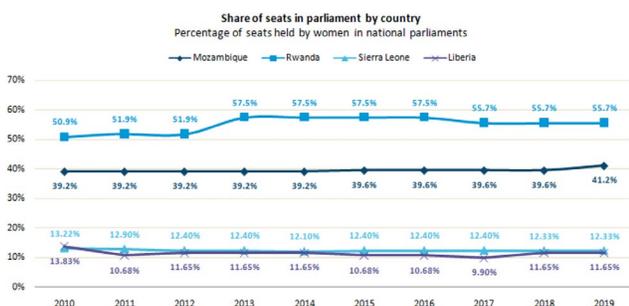
Political Participation

Despite the achievements accomplished, women’s political participation is far from reaching parity in government positions, representative bodies, and political processes.

According to 2014 figures, about 10 percent fewer women registered to vote than men; 14 percent fewer women voted in the 2014 Senate elections; and 17 percent fewer women participated in campaign activities.⁸⁴ In addition, women currently hold 15.8 percent of cabinet positions, comprise 24.5 percent of deputy minister positions, and 25.9 percent of assistant ministers.⁸⁵ Of the 15 counties, three have a female superintendent and of the 30 mayoral positions, only ten are held by women.⁸⁶

Compared to other countries such as Mozambique, Sierra Leone, and Rwanda, Liberia has a stable but low quota of women in parliament. As can be observed in Graph 1.1, Liberia’s levels are the lowest compared to the aforementioned countries.

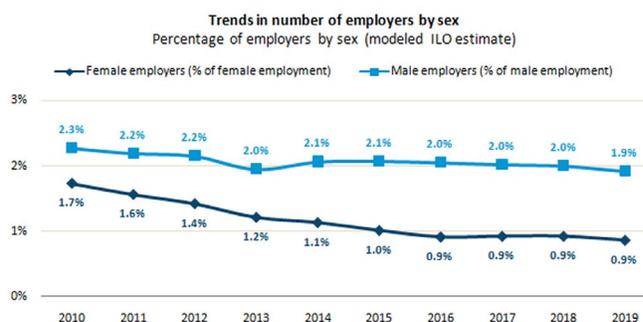
Graph 1.1. Share of seats in parliament by country



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from OCHA (n.d.) Data retrieved on 2021-06-17 [Original source: The World Bank].

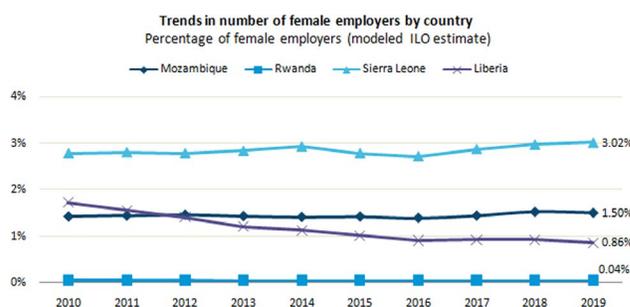
In addition to not fulfilling the academic requirements for various job positions, sexism and discrimination are barriers to greater female participation in decision-making positions. When these factors are combined, women’s participation is hampered. Graph 1.2 below shows how the percentage of female employers steadily declined between 2010 and 2016. Graph 1.3 shows the significance of this drop in Liberia’s female employers compared to the stability enjoyed by Mozambique, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone.

Graph 1.2. Trends in number of employers by sex



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from OCHA (n.d.). Data retrieved on 2021-06-17 [Original source: International Labour Organization (ILO)].

Graph 1.3. Trends in number of female employers by country



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from OCHA (n.d.). Data retrieved on 2021-06-17 [Original source: International Labour Organization (ILO)].

When considering the two most recent presidential administrations, that of Charles Taylor (1997-2003) and Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf (2005-2018), the overall participation of women is low, particularly positions such as county superintendent and senator. However, during Sirleaf’s mandate, there is an increase of more than 200 percent in the number of women, especially in cabinet and agency roles (see Table 1.6).

Table 1.6. Female Positions within the Presidential Administrations of Charles Taylor and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

Position	Taylor Number	Johnson Sirleaf Number	Difference
President	0	1	1
Vice President	0	0	0
Speaker of the House of Representatives	0	0	0
Chief Justice	2	0	2
President Pro Tempore of the Senate	0	0	0
Senator	0	1	1
Representatives	0	3	3
Associate Justices	0	2	2
Cabinet Ministers	8	17	9
County Superintendents	1	2	1
Agencies	1	13	12
Total	12	39	27

Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Sylla (2020)

Recent figures show that women’s representation and participation in Liberian politics remains low. In 2020, only 20 of the 118 eligible candidates in the Special Senate Elections were women, and only one had been certified. Recently, the National Elections Commission proposed an Electoral Reform Bill, requesting the approval of an amendment to sections 4.5.1 A, B, C, D, and E to institute an enforceable 30 percent minimum gender quota on

candidate lists and in the leadership of political parties and coalitions.⁸⁷ Approval of the bill would exemplify a significant achievement for Liberia and Weah’s presidential mandate; in fact, Weah has repeatedly expressed his commitment to gender equality.⁸⁸

Challenges

Future challenges for Liberian women’s macro-level participation include: 1) education (according to 2018 figures, only one in three women are literate); 2) discrimination and sexism in the work environment; 3) the need to promote a gender-conscious agenda in both rural and urban areas; and 4) COVID-19 economic recovery plans that do not overshadow gender equality and women’s political participation.⁸⁹

Women’s education is an essential factor in ensuring greater female participation in Liberia’s political dynamics. It also requires programs that involve young female students in government bodies and political processes.⁹⁰ Supporting and encouraging girls and young women in school will shape the leaders of tomorrow.

Another critical challenge is transforming workplace culture and eradicating sexism and discrimination faced by women in positions of power in the workplace. Such behavior hinders and discourages women’s participation in decision-making processes. A gender-transformative agenda must be promoted in both urban and rural spaces.

Therefore, the implementation of a gender quota should be accelerated during this period to guarantee that women can participate and ultimately designate issues such as gender equality, economic empowerment, and education, among others, as pressing matters to be addressed within the post-COVID-19 political agenda.⁹¹

1.2. Social-cultural Context

During the last few decades, Liberian women and girls have begun to enjoy stronger protection of their rights, thanks in part to evolving social and cultural norms. This second section details these changes and the remaining challenges by analyzing the current state of women’s access to health and education, the main ways in which cultural norms shape and reinforce gender inequality, and women’s participation in micro-level decision-making.

1.2.1 Women and Health

Data highlights: Sex-disaggregated data on healthcare access and other relevant issues is comprehensive, exhaustive, reliable and updated. The main indicators used to provide an overview of the state of women and health in Liberia are provided by the DHS 2019-20.

Healthcare in Liberia

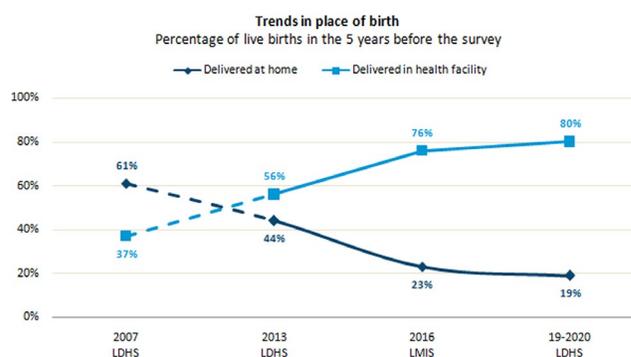
After the conflict ceased and the reconstruction period began, in 2006, the Ministry of Health (MoH) set out to construct a National Health Policy and a National Health Plan for 2007-2011. Subsequently, the MoH created the National Health and Social Welfare Policy and Plan (NHSWPP) 2011-2021 to continue the collective commitment from 2006 until the goal of a secure, prosperous, and healthier population with social protections for all Liberians is reached.⁹²

One of the key aspects of this NHSWPP is lowering mortality rates. Neonatal deaths, or deaths among live births during the first 28 completed days of life, dropped from 71 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2007 to 54 deaths in 2013, and increased to 63 deaths in 2019.⁹³ The neonatal mortality rate for 2019 has a higher rate among boys (45 deaths per 1,000 live births) than girls (30 deaths per 1,000 live births).⁹⁴

Despite the progress achieved from 2007 to 2013, many health problems persisted, which were sought out to be addressed with the integration of the 2009 WHO Integrated Management of Neonatal and Childhood Illnesses (IMNCI) clinical training package.⁹⁵ However, the high cost and the long timeframe of the 11-day training curriculum caused complications in the implementation of the program, which led to an insufficient number of trained clinicians in IMNCI for the post-Ebola period, and therefore the provision of low quality health services during the health crisis.⁹⁶ This program was later modified to be a 7-day training program that improved the competencies of 75 clinicians from 74 health facilities and contributed to closing the gaps in the quality of healthcare provided to sick children under five years of age.⁹⁷ Additionally, the increase in neonatal deaths from 2013 to 2019 is also related to the negative impact of the 2014 Ebola crisis on antenatal care (ANC). During the EVD crisis, access to ANC declined by 50 percent, facility-based deliveries dropped by 35 percent, and reported deliveries dropped by 33 percent.⁹⁸ Although the number of neonatal deaths decreased by half during this period, they returned to pre-EVD levels after the first year of the crisis.⁹⁹ The decrease of neonatal deaths during the peak of the EVD is commonly explained by the reduction in access to antenatal care which – although is seen as a stagnation in DHS data – literature points to a decrease in the services which was not recorded due to reporting issues caused by EVD.

There has also been an increase in births delivered at a health facility from 37 percent in 2007 to 80 percent in 2019 (see Graph 1.4).¹⁰⁰ A study on maternal health care services discovered that the factors associated with facility-based delivery consisted in having had maternal education, being a female head in the household, the use of media (particularly radio), having a middle, richer or richest wealth index and having had at least 4 ANC visits.¹⁰¹

Graph 1.4. Trends in place of birth

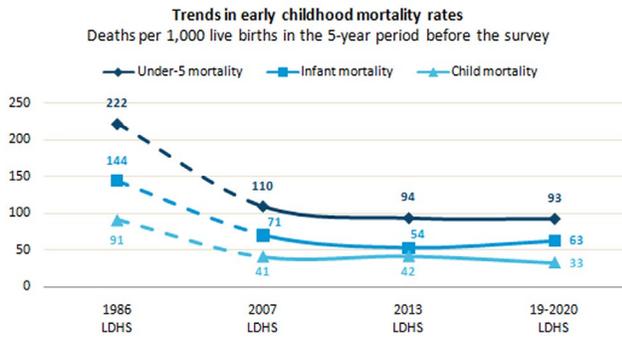


Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

Child Mortality Rates

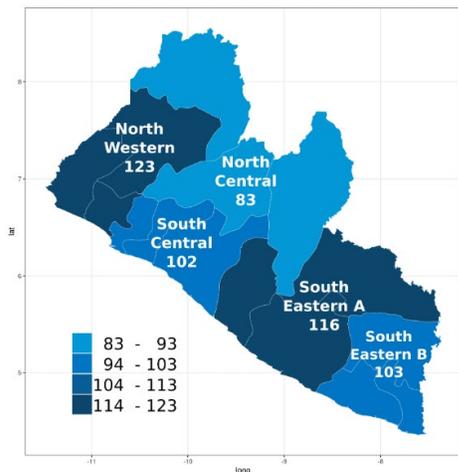
The under-5 mortality rates present a slightly decreasing trend, from 94 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2013 to 93 in 2019, although they remain much higher in number than neonatal deaths (see Graph 1.5). These rates continue to be lower in urban areas with 85 deaths per 1,000 live births than in rural areas with 102 deaths.¹⁰² When compared by region, the North Central region of Liberia stands out as having the least amount of under-5 mortality rates per 1,000 live births (see Map 1.1). This difference throughout the regions may be due to the difference in access and financial support given to each region. On one hand, the North Central region has received considerable amounts of financial support provided by external development partners.¹⁰³ On the other hand, regions like the South Eastern and North Western regions have received limited support from international donors and have relied more on government funds which are much more limited and at times delayed. Additionally, the Southeastern region is cut off from the rest of the country during nearly half the year due to the rainy season which damages roads and prevents access to this region, in turn preventing the provision of basic healthcare services and equipment.¹⁰⁴

Graph 1.5. Trends in early childhood mortality rates



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

Map 1.1. Under-5 mortality by region (deaths per 1,000 live births)



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

Regarding the reasons for these mortality rates, a study conducted at the Jackson F. Doe Regional Referral Hospital in 2013 found that malaria continued to be the leading cause of mortality in the country, taking a larger toll on children under five years old.¹⁰⁵ To address this issue, the GoL and international donors have prioritized the procurement of insecticide-treated nets (ITN) to children under five years old, creating a positive trend for this age group, from 26 percent use of ITNs in 2009 to 44 percent in 2019.¹⁰⁶

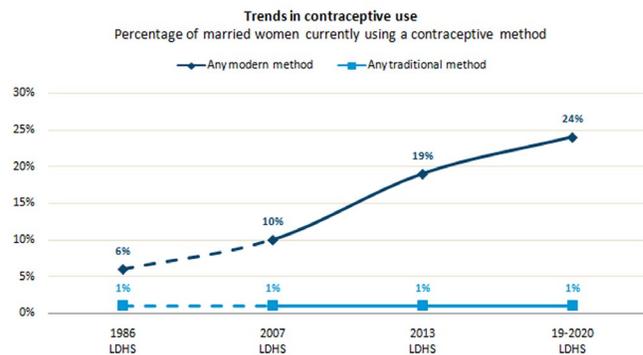
Adolescent Pregnancy and Contraceptive Use

The percentage of teenage childbearing has also decreased from 38 percent in 2009 to 30 percent in 2019, in which the rate also increases by age, from approximately 4 percent

among girls who are 15 years old to 55 percent of those who are 19 years old.¹⁰⁷ Extreme poverty, limited education, gender inequality, and sexual violence are some of the underlying causes of early sexual initiation and teenage pregnancy. There is a lack of enthusiasm to implement governmental policies that provide pregnant teenagers with the support necessary to guarantee their presence in school due to the assumption that such policies would incentivize early sexual initiation and thus increase the risk of teenage pregnancy.¹⁰⁸

One of the most direct causes of unintended pregnancies in low- and middle-income countries is the non-use of contraception. In Liberia, although there has been a high level of knowledge on family planning (76 percent of women and men know of a traditional method of contraception¹⁰⁹), the use of contraception remained extremely low until 2007 — at 10 percent for any modern method and 1 percent for any traditional method (see Graph 1.6). In 2019, the percentage of women using contraception by any modern method increased to 24 percent. This rise may correspond to the implementation of different family planning strategies by the GoL and international development partners, including the Family Planning 2020 partnership launched in 2012 that ensured contraception services at all levels of the healthcare delivery system.¹¹⁰

Graph 1.6. Trends in contraceptive use

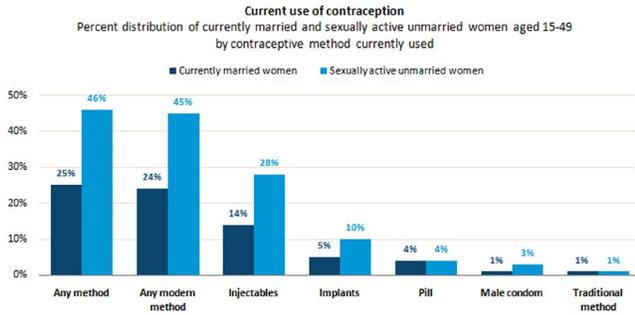


Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

Out of the total population of married women, 25 percent use contraception methods, and out of the total of sexually active women, 46 percent use contraceptive methods. Injectables, implants, and pills are the most commonly used types of contraception method.¹¹¹ In terms of age, the age groups with the highest percentage of contraception use are women between 20-24 and 25-30 years, with 34 percent and 32 percent respectively, using any

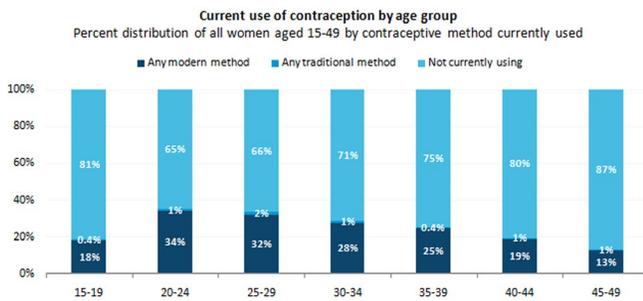
contraceptive method. For Liberia, the factors associated with contraception use are education level, wealth index level, and place of residence (region and urban/rural setting).¹¹²

Graph 1.7. Current use of contraception



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

Graph 1.8. Current use of contraception by age group



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

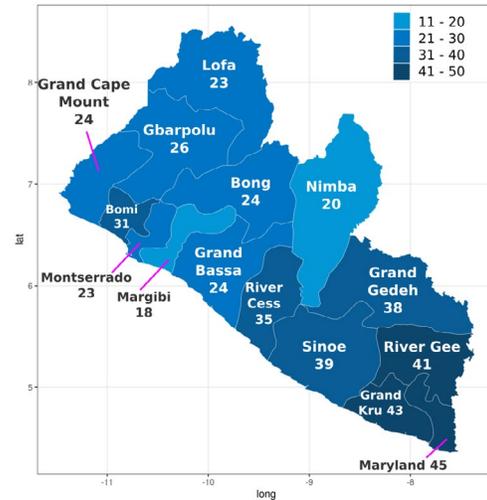
There is also a very clear difference between counties in Liberia. The counties with the highest percent distribution of contraceptive use are Maryland, the Grand Kru, and River Gee, all located in the Southeastern region. On the contrary, the counties with the lowest use of modern contraception are Margibi, Montserrado, and Nimba, with the first two being in the South Central region and the latter in the North Central region. A plausible explanation for this difference between counties and regions is the fact that there is a stronger concentration of contraception distribution coming from the private sector in the South Central region and urban areas, while the distribution of contraception coming from the government is much higher in the Southeastern region and rural areas.¹¹³ This means that women located in the Southeastern region may have a higher chance of accessing free contraception distributed

by the government and can therefore be more prone to using modern contraception, while women in the South Central region have to purchase their contraception through the private sector, and therefore may be disincentivized to using it.

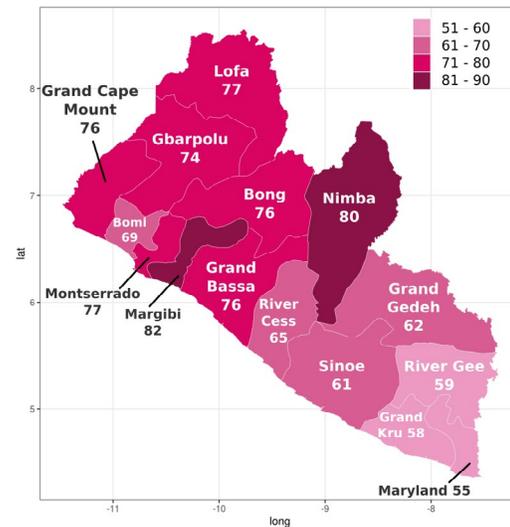
Map 1.2. Use of contraception by county

Percent distribution of currently married and sexually active unmarried women aged 15-49 years by contraceptive method currently used

A. Use of any method of contraception



B. Currently not using any method



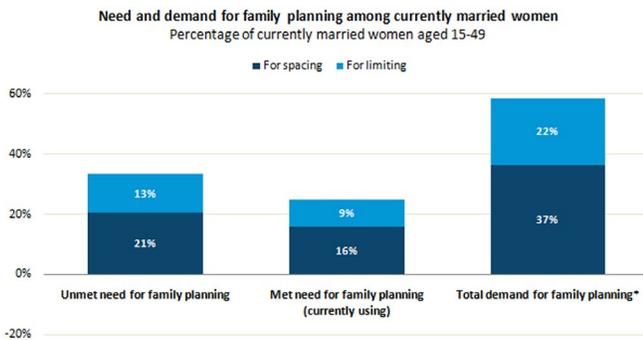
Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

Family Planning

Despite having no fees associated with contraceptive or family planning services, there remains 33 percent of married women with an unmet need for family planning, that is, women who wish to stop or delay pregnancy but

are currently not using any contraceptive method.¹¹⁴ About 60 percent of women are demanding family planning, 25 percent have this demand satisfied, 37 percent want to space births, and 22 percent want to limit births (see Graph 1.9).¹¹⁵ One of the most commonly cited reasons for having an unmet need for family planning is lack of knowledge, which can point to the fact that women know what these services are, but do not know them well enough or how to access them.¹¹⁶ To address these demands, the GoL allocated five percent, or \$45 per capita, of the national health budget to ensure the availability of family planning products and services free of charge to improve access nationwide until 2022.¹¹⁷

Graph 1.9. Need and demand for family planning among currently married women



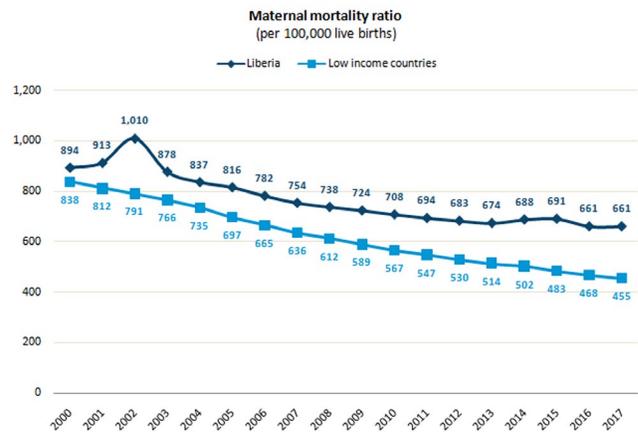
Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

Maternal Mortality

Despite progress in other areas, the maternal mortality rate remains high in Liberia. According to data from the World Bank, there were 661 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in Liberia in 2017. This mortality ratio remains higher than the average for low-income countries (see Graph 1.10). The lack of access to health facilities and services has been cited as a major factor hindering women’s capacity to access health services on time, particularly when pregnant.¹¹⁸ It is important to highlight that there remains a great disparity in health access and services between rural and urban areas, where the poor health status for rural women can reflect inadequate healthcare infrastructure and services. Other traditional practices such as early marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM), gender-based violence (GBV), and an overload of domestic care work can also increase the risk of illness among women when compared to men. Particularly, the use of solid fuels for cooking and heating has been proven to create a complex mix of health damaging

pollutants that mostly affect women who oversee carrying out domestic tasks.¹¹⁹

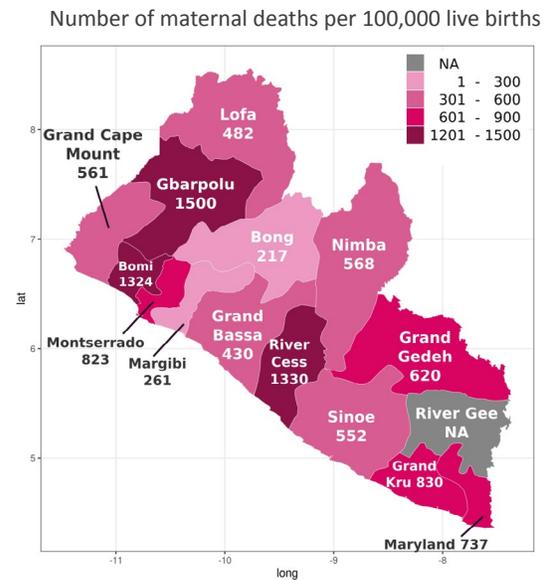
Graph 1.10. Trends in maternal mortality ratio



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from the World Bank Group (2021a). Data retrieved on 2021-06-17 [Original source: WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, World Bank Group, and the United Nations Population Division.

Trends in Maternal Mortality: 2000 to 2017. Geneva, World Health Organization, 2019].

Map 1.3. Maternal mortality ratio by county



Note: The maternal mortality ratio is calculated by dividing the age-standardized maternal mortality rate for women aged 15-49 in the 7 years preceding the survey by the general fertility rate (GFR) for the same time period. For this reason, DHS values are not directly comparable to the maternal mortality rates calculated by the World Bank.

Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

1.2.2 Women and Education

Data highlights: Sex-disaggregated data on access to education and other relevant issues is available with some relevant and updated indicators. However, data is not exhaustive or comprehensive, particularly in regards to potential barriers hindering girls' access to education. Indicators provided by both the DHS 2019-20 and OCHA are included in this section.

Liberia's educational challenges have persisted over time. The destruction and neglect produced by the civil wars that hit the country as well as the economic crisis caused by past epidemics, specifically the Ebola crisis in 2014 and recently COVID-19, illustrate an educational landscape in urgent need of help.¹²⁰ In 2019, one-third of the population had no access to education, 31 percent of the population attained primary education, and 36 percent attained secondary and tertiary education, a gap which deepens in relation to geographic location (urban versus rural areas) and gender.¹²¹ The combination of these conditions places women at a marked disadvantage, resulting in the literacy rate of women in rural areas dropping to 33.5 percent, while in urban areas, it rises to 63.2 percent.¹²²

The GoL has made efforts to strengthen educational institutions in recent years. In 2005, under Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's mandate, the Liberian Ministry of Education (MoE) adopted the National Policy on Girls' Education with the objective of consolidating national and international legal instruments that promote girls' access to quality education. One of the most outstanding objectives of this law is that it seeks to decrease and eventually eliminate disparities in access to education in the various geographic areas as well as reduce the school dropout rate of girls by 50 percent.¹²³

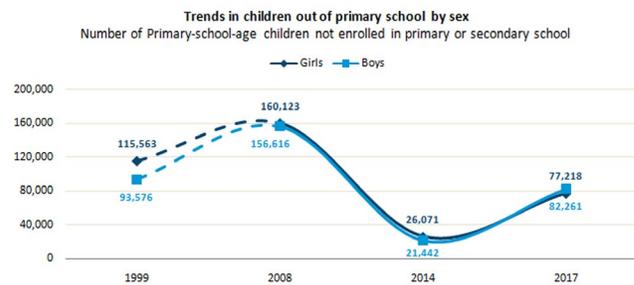
The 2019 Beijing+25 National Review Report published by the George Weah administration gives an account of the actions taken by the Liberian government in recent years to transform the education system, allocate budget for classroom infrastructure and services, combat SGBV in schools, and support vulnerable female students to continue their studies.¹²⁴ Although significant progress has been made, the gender gap in education persists, and literacy levels decline as age increases.

Elementary Education

Throughout the years, the education landscape has deteriorated, and primary education has been severely

affected by the social and economic effects of armed conflicts and health emergencies. As noted in Graph 1.11, the National Policy on Girls' Education —adopted in 2005— had a positive impact on the number of girls with access to schooling services. The 2014 results seem to confirm the National Policy's goal of reducing the dropout rate for girls by 50 percent. However, by 2017, the figure shows that the number of girls dropping out of school increases again. This increase in dropout rates is mainly due to the aftereffects of the Ebola epidemic which caused many economic constraints for Liberian families, who at the time were pressured to obligate their children to work in order to assist with household expenses.¹²⁵

Graph 1.11. Trends in children out of primary school by sex



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from OCHA (n.d.) Data retrieved on 2021-06-17 [Original source: The World Bank].

Secondary and Tertiary Education

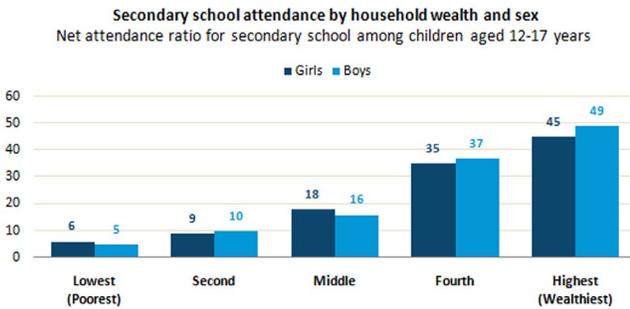
The Liberian secondary level comprises three years of academic education or technical and vocational training for children between the ages of 15 and 17. According to the education system, this level comprises of grades 10 to 12.¹²⁶ Meanwhile, tertiary education provides students with a certificate, diploma, degree, or postgraduate academic degree, and is offered by teacher training institutes, colleges, and universities.¹²⁷

Only basic education is compulsory, making secondary and tertiary levels of education opportunities only available to a few young people. Nationally, the upper secondary school net attendance ratio is 24.9 for men and 26.2 for women.¹²⁸ At this level of schooling, young people face economic pressures that lead them to drop out of school and seek to low-paying jobs, demonstrating that attendance records are a relevant indicator of the impact of financial stress on girls living in economically vulnerable conditions.

Graph 1.12 shows the attendance levels of students from different social backgrounds. Availability of, and access to, financial resources serve as a solid foundation that sustains

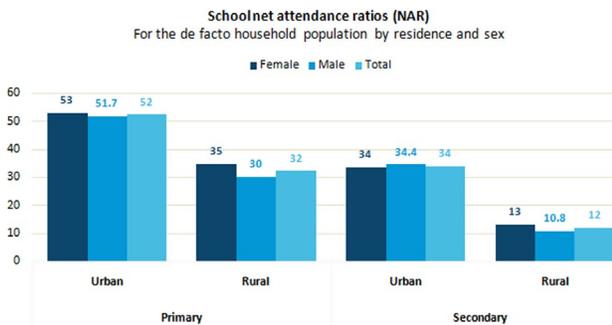
studies at the secondary level. In addition, the type of urban versus rural setting determines to a large extent the opportunities to access and remain in the education system. Graph 1.13 shows that attendance levels at both primary and secondary levels are consistently lower in rural areas. The difference is even more pronounced for secondary school in rural areas.

Graph 1.12. Secondary school attendance by household wealth and sex



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

Graph 1.13. School net attendance ratios



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

Box 1.2. Differences in school attainment by residence

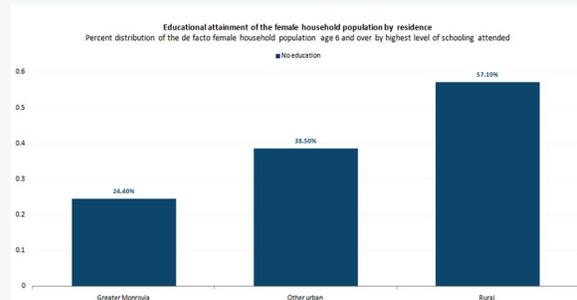
One of the biggest differences that can be noted in school attainment is when the data is disaggregated by urban and rural areas. Regarding these differences, one of the primary factors that accounts for the disparity in values is related to the rapid urbanization the country has undergone in the last few decades, particularly after the civil wars.¹²⁹ Around half of all Liberians currently live in cities, which usually host better quality education centers and school facilities

considering the higher level of investment and access to infrastructure. For this reason, urban populations are more likely to complete their upper secondary education and/or access higher education and have overall more educational attainment than rural populations.¹³⁰

Another factor is the availability of schools and teachers based on region. The South Central region which is predominantly urban has a large share of teachers and non-governmental schools in comparison to rural regions.¹³¹ The main reason for this is that teachers normally prefer to live in urban areas and work in non-governmental schools, which tend to be located in the main cities. Also, when working in rural areas, Liberian teachers endure challenging working conditions and limited support that is reflected in the lack of infrastructure and teaching materials, as well as disproportionate student-teacher ratios and multi-age and multi-level learners.¹³²

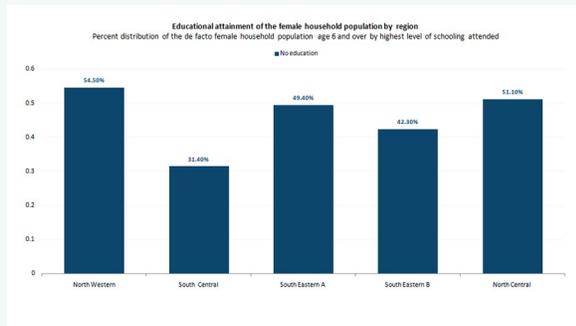
Finally, the long distances required for children to attend schools in rural areas is a hindering factor that prevents them from accessing education. The percentage of children who have never attended school due to long distances is almost double for rural areas, reaching 15.2 percent.¹³³ In some cases, it takes students more than an hour of walking to reach their schools, and this situation is further aggravated during the rainy season when roads are damaged. The combination of these different factors evidences a disparity between rural and urban educational attainment in Liberia.

Graph 1.14. Percentage of the female household population by residence that has received no education (age 6 and over)



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

Graph 1.15. Percentage of the female household population by region that has received no education (age 6 and over)

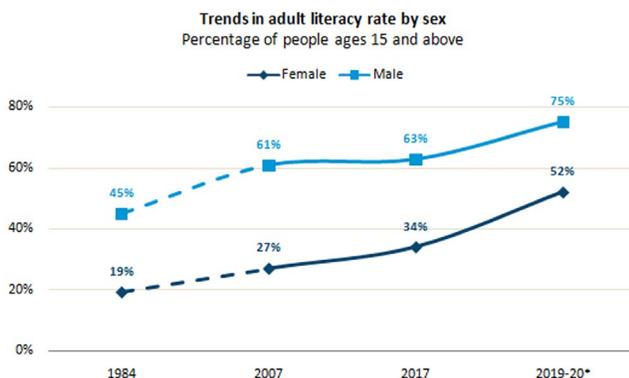


Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

Women in The Education Sector

Women's role in the education sector is highly relevant: in addition to representing women's empowerment in the labor sector, they serve as role models for female students. Nevertheless, the modest portion of women participating in the education sector today faces several difficulties. It is worth mentioning that the low participation of women in the sector is due to the cumulative effects of the disadvantages faced by girls in education from primary levels onwards. This results in literacy levels among adult women which are much lower than those of men, ultimately reducing the opportunity for women to integrate themselves smoothly into the education sector (see Graph 1.16).

Graph 1.16. Trends in adult literacy rate by sex



Note: *Data from Liberia DHS 2019-20 for women/men aged 15-49 years.

Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from OCHA (n.d.) Data retrieved on 2021-06-17 [Original source: The World Bank] and with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

Women teachers in Liberia face cultural challenges both at the beginning of their studies and when they embark on their careers in teaching. In addition, working conditions do not recognize the additional responsibilities they carry as heads of households, and other complexities including but not limited to: distant schools, poor accommodation facilities, late payments, and large class sizes. Furthermore, women who wish to participate in education programs do not receive any support for childcare or family expenses, which disincentivizes achieving a gender quota in the education sector.¹³⁴ Women's participation in the education sector is mainly at the primary level, while the number of female teachers at the secondary level is significantly lower.

The above difficulties need to be addressed because of the added value of having progressively more women teachers and women in administrative positions. Special attention needs to be paid to the circumstances that women face due to cultural and social norms as well as the urgency to implement more gender-sensitive policies and school facilities.

1.2.3 Gender and Cultural Norms

Data highlights: Sex-disaggregated data on cultural norms, beliefs, and practices is comprehensive, exhaustive, reliable and updated. The main indicators used to provide an overview of the intersection between gender and cultural norms in Liberia are provided by the DHS 2019-20. However, the authors identified a large gap in data documenting the situation of the LGBTQIA+ community in Liberia, with no relevant available information on the matter.

Liberia is marked by traditional gender norms that are deeply rooted in the dynamics of social power relations. Historically, indigenous communities of pre-war Liberia followed patrilocal types of marriage in which women can only access land and resources by inheriting from their husbands.¹³⁵ The Americo-settler society held very traditional ideas of sex roles, that is, men are naturally more powerful than women; therefore, they should be the breadwinners, and their wives should not work outside the household because they should be economically dependent on their husbands.¹³⁶

Child Marriage

Traditional gender norms play an important role in upholding child marriage, a major subject of gender-related inequality.¹³⁷ In Liberia, child marriage is mostly practiced by tribal groups, however, this tradition has become increasingly more common in other communities.¹³⁸ Since the country's economic downturn, some low-income families have resorted to marrying off their daughters as early as possible to ensure the provision of daily meals for their children.¹³⁹

Despite this adverse scenario, the latest data shows that the median age of first marriage has increased over time among both women (from 18.4 years in 2007 to 21.2 years in 2019-20) and men (from 23.9 years in 2007 to 24.5 years in 2019-20). This may be explained by the fact that various awareness campaigns have been launched to highlight the negative effects that child marriage has on the development of both boys and girls; this includes one massive regional campaign that specifically reiterated the GoL's goal to abolish early and forced marriage in the country.¹⁴⁰ From 2007 to 2020, the percentage of girls marrying at the age of 15 decreased by 5 percent, whereas it decreased by 13 percent for women at the age of 18 (see Graph 1.17).

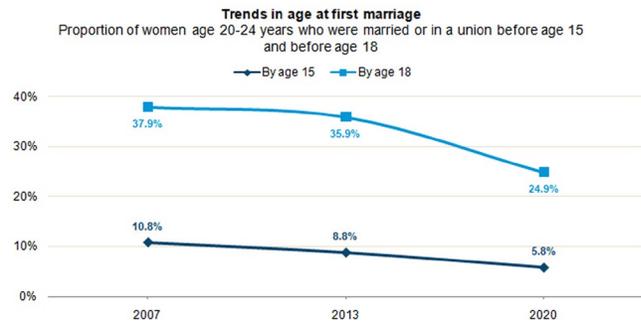
It is also important to notice that the median age at first marriage generally increases as the wealth quintile increases (see Graph 1.18), meaning that these awareness campaigns might not adequately reach low-income groups to the same extent as they do with groups with more favorable economic situations. This hypothesis is further corroborated by the urban versus rural dichotomy. Table 1.7 shows that in rural areas, the median age at first marriage (19.1 years) and at first sexual intercourse (15.8 years) are both lower in rural areas than in urban areas (23.3 and 16.2 years, respectively).

Table 1.7. Median age of women aged 25-49 years at first marriage and at first sexual intercourse by residence

Residence	Median age at first marriage	Median age at first sexual intercourse
Rural	19.1	15.8
Urban	23.3	16.2

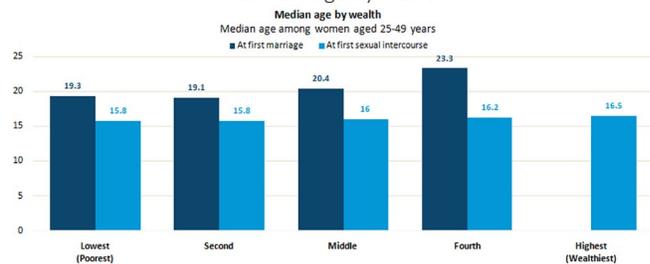
Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

Graph 1.17. Trends in age at first marriage



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from OCHA (n.d.) Data retrieved on 2021-06-17 [Original source: The World Bank and with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

Graph 1.18. Median age at first intercourse and at first marriage by wealth



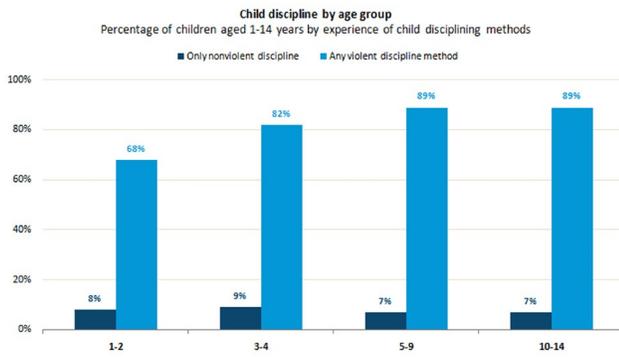
Note: Data for "Age at first marriage - Highest (Wealthiest)" was omitted because less than 50 percent of the respondents started living with their spouse/partner for the first time before reaching the beginning of the age group.

Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

Child Discipline

Traditional norms also result in gender stereotyping when parenting. Although Liberia is a 'young' country with two-thirds of the population below the age of 25, violent discipline is widely accepted throughout the country.¹⁴¹ According to the last Demographic Health Survey, 89 percent of children aged 1-14 years have been subjected to some sort of discipline method that includes the use of violence, and only 7 percent of the children within this age-group experienced nonviolent discipline (see Graph 1.19).¹⁴² Girls and boys experience violence in very similar patterns, sharing nearly the same rate as any violent discipline method, particularly in terms of psychological aggression and physical punishment (see Table 1.8).

Graph 1.19. Child discipline by age group



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

Table 1.8. Child discipline by sex

Percentage of children aged 1-14 years by experience of child disciplining methods

Sex	Male	Female
Only non-violent methods	7.4	7.1
Psychological aggression	80.1	80.9
Physical punishment (any)	71.8	70.9
Physical punishment (severe)	20.9	19.8
Any violent discipline method	85.2	85.1

Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

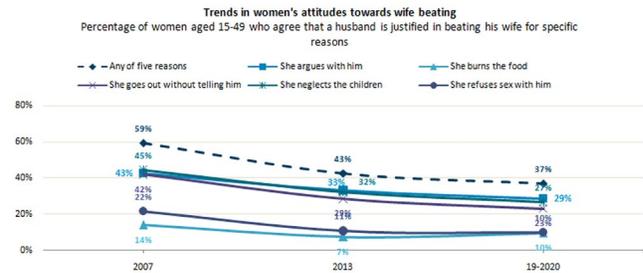
Attitudes Towards Intimate Partner Violence

Violence is not only one type of ‘educational tool’ for children in Liberia, but also the principal means of coercion adopted by men to impose their power and authority over spouses, which contributes to the perpetuation of women’s subordination over time. GBV is one of the most pervasive and far-reaching phenomena in Liberia, and the acceptance of this violence perpetrated by intimate partners is also commonly observed in the country’s society.

One of the unwanted legacies of these traditional norms is precisely the belief that if a man does not beat his wife, it means he does not love her; this is particularly common in rural areas.¹⁴³ However, this trend has been changing, and now this previously accepted norm is strongly discouraged. Graph 1.20 shows how this trend has been shifting over the course of the last 13 years. The percentage of women who believed that it was justified for a husband to beat his wife for any of the following supposed transgressions– she goes out without telling him; she argues with him; she neglects the children; she

burns the food, or she refuses sex with him – notably decreased by 22.3 percent from 2007 to 2020.

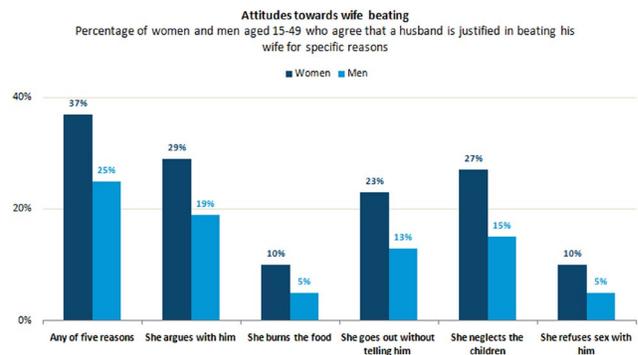
Graph 1.20. Trends in women’s attitudes towards wife beating



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from OCHA (n.d.) Data retrieved on 2021-06-17 [Original source: The World Bank] and with data from Liberia DHS.

However, it is important to note that despite the decrease in rates of acceptance of violence between spouses, this rate remains high. 37 percent of girls and women aged 15-49 years agree that it is justified for a husband to beat his wife in at least one of the five specified circumstances, as compared to 25 percent of men (see Graph 1.21).

Graph 1.21. Attitudes towards wife beating



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

Religion and Polygamy

Religious beliefs are an influential force underpinning these traditional cultural norms that shape the structure and type of relationships women have within families and communities. According to registries from the 2008 National Population and Housing Census, 85.6 percent of the population of Liberia is Christian, 12.2 percent is Muslim, and 1.4 percent of individuals claim to have no religious beliefs.¹⁴⁴ Although Christianity has undergone fundamental changes over time, the Christian faith considers sacred marriages to be those which are

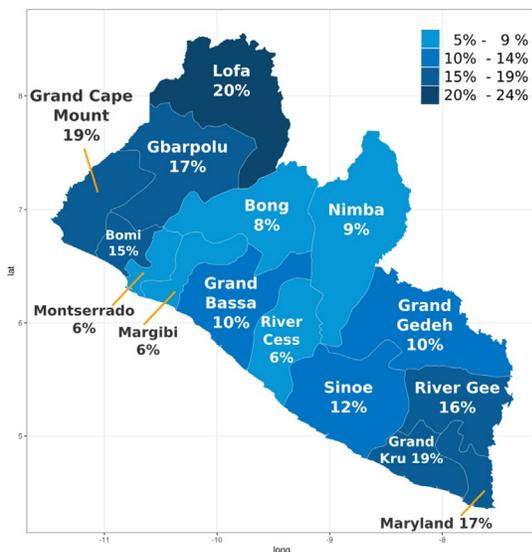
“characterized by the practice of monogamy (one current spouse only) and official resistance to divorce.”¹⁴⁵

More conservative and traditional families tend to value monogamous marriages because women have more bargaining power within non-monogamous relationships, and therefore have a greater capacity to object or refuse to conform to traditional gender norms and roles. Although Muslims also conform to certain traditional gender roles and expectations, polygamy seems to prevail within this religious group, and in Liberia, polygamy is a common practice among Muslim communities.¹⁴⁶

The northwestern part of Liberia is predominantly populated by Muslims, and as shown in Map 1.4, more than 15 percent of married women aged 15-49 years are in a polygynous union (up to 23 percent in Lofa county). Montserrado registers one of the lowest rates of married women aged 15-49 years in a polygynous union despite Christians constituting an estimated 68.2 percent of the population in the county and Muslims totaling 31.8 percent.¹⁴⁷

Map 1.4. Polygyny by county

Percent of currently married women aged 15-49 years in a polygynous union



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

Although polygamy is more so tied to non-traditional gender norms, the practice is also linked to some patriarchal beliefs. For instance, amongst the Muslim community, it is believed that marrying more than one woman is associated with power and wealth. It is also believed that having more

children from these marriages translates to more working men that the head of the household could rely on to support farming activities. However, it is important to note that Liberia’s civil law prohibits polygamy, but customary law allows men to have several wives.¹⁴⁸

Box 1.3. LGBTQIA+ in Liberia

In Liberia, homosexuality is classified as a sexual offense under section 14.74 of the Penal Code, which classifies it as “voluntary sodomy,” punishable by up to one year of imprisonment.¹⁴⁹ In 2012, several bills sought to replace this sentence with the death penalty. However, the proposals were not approved.¹⁵⁰ In Liberian society, homosexuality is not accepted and LGBTQIA+ people suffer persecution, stigmatization, harassment, and violence. The hostile environment in their communities affects their quality of life and prevents them from accessing public services such as health care.¹⁵¹ Intolerance was exacerbated when the end of the armed conflicts brought about increased migration to cities, bringing along conservative values from rural areas. According to these prevailing ideas, homosexuality is un-African and immoral. Such conservative positions enjoy the support of many Americo-Liberians.¹⁵²

Intolerance of sexual diversity is associated with other types of violence, such as violence against women. A Human Rights Watch study found that intolerance, fear, and aversion are recurrent against people considered transgressors of cultural and gender norms in Liberia.¹⁵³

On the other hand, the media plays an essential role in constructing the public’s image of sexual diversity. In this sense, the media generally perpetuates stigmatization through misleading, biased, and inflammatory communications.¹⁵⁴ This practice is complemented by opinions that many public figures share regarding sexual diversity, such as urging the criminalization of sexual deviance and even accusing it of ruining the sanity of young people.¹⁵⁵

There are also groups dedicated to persecuting sexual diversity, such as the New Citizens Movement (NCM), in which some religious leaders participate. This phenomenon is all the more worrying given that these groups’ activities include mass protest, which could devolve into uncontrollable violence

against those perceived to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer.¹⁵⁶ Finally, persecution and stigmatization also discourage and threaten activists who consider the defense of LGBTQIA+ rights to be one of the riskiest areas of work.¹⁵⁷

Lack of data: Data regarding violence against the LGBTQIA+ community and denial of access to services is limited, given the fear that reporting could lead to further aggression. Existing information comes from anonymous interviews with international organizations that monitor and document the situation of the LGBTQIA+ community.

1.2.4. Women's Participation in Decision-Making: Micro-level

Data highlights: Sex disaggregated data on micro-level decision-making is available primarily through the DHS 2019-20. The survey includes relevant and comprehensive indicators of women's decision power at a household level. However, the data presented only presents information for married women, omitting relevant information on women of different marital statuses and does not allow for the comparison of decision-making of different family dynamics.

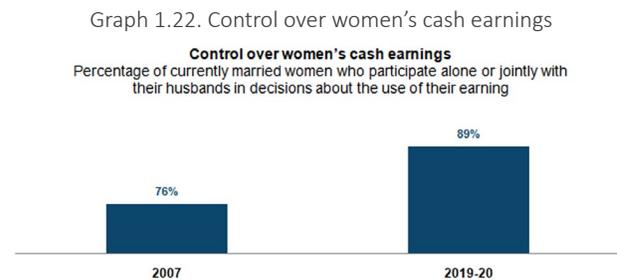
Women's Decisions Over Personal Earnings

During both civil wars, there was a significant shift in gender roles as women shouldered the responsibilities of being both the breadwinners and heads of households. War unintentionally served as a catalyst for transforming women's roles within the home, community, and even in the market, where women's empowerment initiatives began to thrive; women seized the opportunities they were given to expand their power both in the public and private sphere.¹⁵⁸

On a micro level, the trends related to women making personal decisions while married are mixed. Of the women who are currently married and have cash earnings, 26 percent reported that they decide how their personal earnings are used, 63 percent make decisions jointly with their husbands, and only 11 percent defer decision-making to their husbands.¹⁵⁹ The difference between men and women who make decisions alone or jointly is slightly more in favor of men. Approximately 28 percent of currently married men between the ages of 15-49 reported making

decisions on their own for the use of their personal earnings whereas 57 percent reported making these decisions with their wives.¹⁶⁰

There has been an increase from 76 percent in 2007 to 89 percent in 2019 in the percentage of women with cash earnings who decide on how to use of their personal earnings either by themselves or with their husbands (see Graph 1.22).¹⁶¹



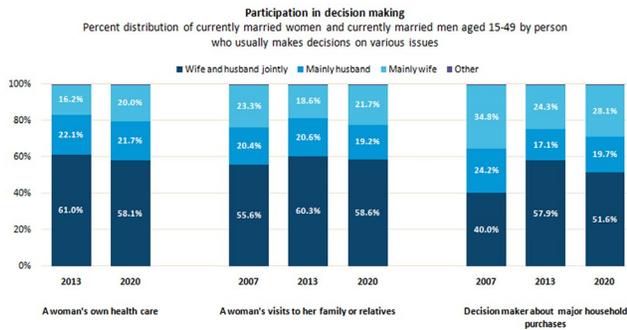
Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

This translates to women having more say in how the money they earn is spent. Considering that Liberia exhibits a culture in which men have traditionally managed decision-making in their communities and households, this increase shows an improvement in the way in which women's decision-making powers are conceived of within a marriage.¹⁶² This improvement applies to women from all wealth and education categories where at least 8 out of 10 women participate in making decisions about their personal earnings.¹⁶³ In order to successfully fight against poverty (SDG 1), it is crucial for women to be able to access economic opportunities and secure cash earnings, which then empowers them to participate in making decisions on their own earnings.¹⁶⁴

Women's Decision-Making in The Household

For decisions regarding women's healthcare, major household purchases, and visits to family, the data is not as promising. While there was a slight increase from 66 percent in 2013 to 69 percent between 2019-20 in women who participated alone or jointly with their husbands in all three of the specified decisions, there was also an increase from 9 percent to 12 percent of the women who did not participate in any of the three decisions.¹⁶⁵ Of the women who have the power to personally decide on these three decisions, only 28 percent can decide on major household purchases, only 22 percent can decide on visits to their family or relatives, and only 20 percent can decide on their own health care.¹⁶⁶

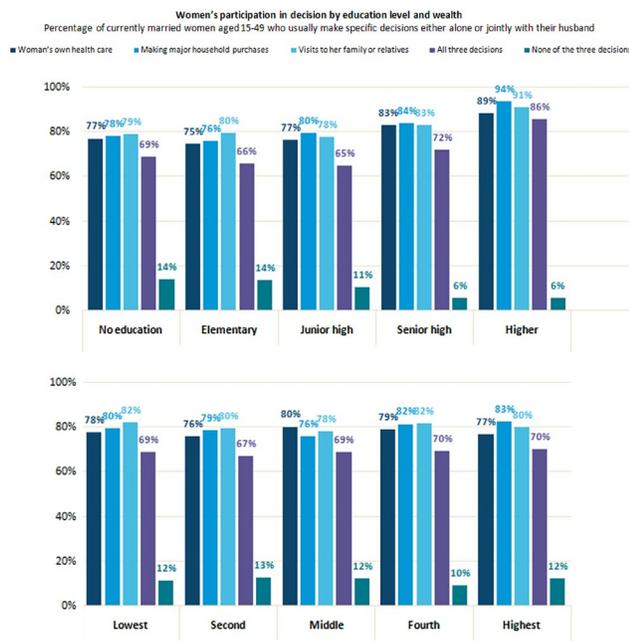
Graph 1.23. Participation in decision-making



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from OCHA (n.d.) Data retrieved on 2021-06-17. [Original sources: The World Bank and Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS)].

The literature suggests that women who are not married tend to experience more liberty than those who are, particularly when making decisions about personal matters such as their own healthcare.¹⁶⁷ As mentioned before, education and employment are also other factors that affect women's empowerment. The percentage of women who take part in all three specified decisions is significantly higher for women who attained senior high (72 percent) or higher education (86 percent) than among those who have not attained education (69 percent) or only attained elementary education (66 percent).

Graph 1.24. Women's participation in decision-making by education level and wealth

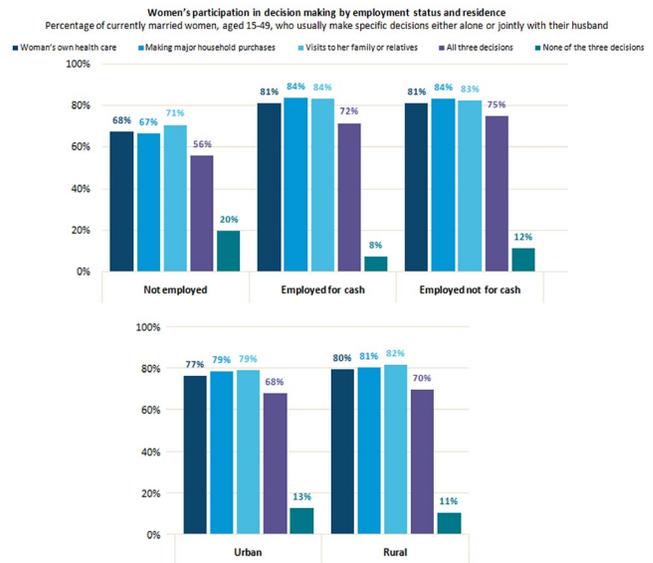


Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

In the literature, education is seen as a “rights multiplier,” which allows the rights-holders to exercise a wide range of human rights.¹⁶⁸ Education is a catalyst that promotes and delivers equality between men and women in all areas, and it has a ripple effect which not only improves the life of the educated woman, but also the lives of women in her family and community. As seen in the results, education does positively affect a woman's power to make decisions and it is a tool that boosts the role of women in families and society.

Employment also has a positive impact on women's participation in decision-making (see Graph 1.25). Women who are employed, either for cash (72 percent) or not for cash (75 percent), are more likely to participate in all three specified decisions than women who are not employed (56 percent).¹⁶⁹ Please note that “not for cash” is a category elaborated by the DHS, which includes women (aged 15-49 years) that were employed in the 12 months preceding the survey with “In-kind” earnings or “not paid”.

Graph 1.25. Women's participation in decision-making by employment status and residence



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

Therefore, economically empowering women contributes to an increase in women's decision-making in the household.¹⁷⁰ Economic empowerment has been defined as a process whereby “women's and girls' lives are transformed from a situation where they have limited power and access to economic assets to a situation where they experience

economic advancement.”¹⁷¹ The relationship between micro decision-making and economic empowerment is evident: if a woman enlarges her economic assets and income-earning capacity, her confidence and self-esteem increases, which then improves the likelihood that she will participate more in private and public decision-making.

Challenges

Despite the positive trend in which wives are more involved in the domestic decision-making process, there are still cultural norms that limit the independence of women in making decisions about personal matters. The notion, anchored in a gender-binary understanding, remains that ‘real’ men should be heads of households and therefore should control all family-related decisions.¹⁷² The agency of women and girls is still viewed as being dependent on the degree of power offered to them by men and boys.

To change this notion of women, international development partners have adopted an approach to engage men and boys through dialogue groups. Through this approach, selected

male participants are invited to a series of dialogues where they discuss norms of masculinity, manhood, SGBV, and the broader concept of gender equality.¹⁷³ By participating in these dialogue groups, men are encouraged to reflect on rigid gender norms and examine their own personal beliefs and traditional ideas about household decision-making and the division of labor. They are also encouraged to support their wives’ participation in decision-making and economic empowerment groups, and ultimately treat them with greater respect. Approaches such as this one have helped to compel individuals, communities, and society beyond the notion that a woman’s role in the household is that of a domestic worker. However, there is still much to be done as men continue to report difficulties in putting into practice their desire to challenge gender norms because of societal expectations to conform to gendered roles.¹⁷⁴ Regardless, trends reveal that women are becoming more involved in the decision-making process in their household, in large part due to shifting attitudes among husbands.

1.3. Economic Context

The empowerment of women and their equal participation in Liberian society is key for addressing the remaining challenges in terms of gender equality. The economic barriers that women face presents a number of obstacles for reaching their full and equal participation in the formal labor sector. This third section details these obstacles and their connection to the remaining gender equality challenges by analysing the access and participation of women in financial services; the issues women face in order to participate in the formal economy; and the current situation most Liberian women face in the informal economy.

1.3.1 Women and Financial Services

Data highlights: *Sex-disaggregated data on access (or lack of thereof) and usage of financial services is limited. The DHS 2019-20 provides some information; however, more detailed and exhaustive data is necessary to comprehend gender differences in accessing and using financial services, as well as the different opportunities and difficulties encountered in this process.*

The financial sector in Liberia consists of “nine commercial banks, one development finance company, one microfinance deposit-taking institution, 20 insurance companies, 20 microfinance institutions, nine licensed rural community financial institutions, 400 credit unions, and 1,450 village savings and loans associations.”¹⁷⁵ There are three main modalities of accessing financial services, through commercial banks and mobile banking which belong to what is known as the formal financial services, as well as through rotating credit associations which belongs to the informal financial services that are community-based. Women are often at a disadvantage in the process of accessing formal financial services, leading to unequal participation in the financial sector, along with their reliance on their communities’ informal and precarious financial organizations.

Commercial Bank Services

Access to a bank account in Liberia is considerably low, with 80 percent of the population unbanked and instead relying on other financial services to meet their basic needs.¹⁷⁶ One

of the reasons for this broad absence of commercial bank services is the fact that physical access points are extremely limited. There are only four commercial bank branches and two ATMs per 100,000 adults and less than one branch and ATM per 1,000 km², with very slow growth since 2010.¹⁷⁷ This level of access is far below the middle income country (MIC) average and is also considerably lower than the average when compared to three comparator groups: sub-Saharan African (SSA), fragile economies, and ECOWAS.¹⁷⁸

However, there are multiple factors that disproportionately affect women and explain why they are less likely to have a bank account, as only 12. percent of Liberian women have a bank account, in comparison to 21.3 percent of men.¹⁷⁹ Gender inequality in accessing formal financial services in Liberia is lower than the general situation in sub-Saharan African countries, where only 37 percent of women have a bank account compared to 48 percent of men; the gap has only widened over the past several years.¹⁸⁰

In terms of barriers to accessing formal financial services, information shared by the Central Bank of Liberia shows that 27.2 percent of the population is unable to meet documentation requirements to open an account, of which 53.1 percent were women.¹⁸¹ Moreover, supply and demand factors compound the difficulty women have in accessing credit in the country, as they are considered at higher risk. Young women face several challenges in accessing credit opportunities, as they lack financial skills and are often illiterate. Only two of the nine commercial banks in Liberia offer loans to low-income earners and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). High interest rates and collateral requirements also play a major role in excluding women from the formal credit market. Household borrowers, who are mostly women needing smaller amounts, find it hard to cope with interest rates that can top 25 percent; furthermore, until the International Finance Corporation supported the launch of an online movable collateral registry in June 2014, Liberians could hardly borrow money using their assets other than buildings of recent construction as collateral.¹⁸²

Mobile Financial Services

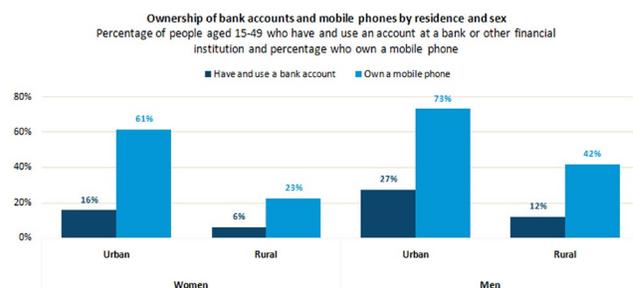
Since the introduction of mobile money services in 2011, the services have expanded and are currently available in all 15 counties in Liberia, complemented by a large mobile money agent network (6,995 agents as of 2018).¹⁸³ 61 percent of men and 47 percent of women own a mobile phone in Liberia, but of these numbers, only 52 percent of

women and 50 percent of men use their phone for financial transactions. Therefore, only 24.4 percent of women use their mobile phone for financial transactions in comparison to 30 percent of men, which exemplifies how unequal access to technology hinders the access of women to financial services.

In general, 27.6 percent of Liberians reported to the Central Bank of Liberia that they have made or received digital payments; and while the levels of account ownership among youth (aged 15-24 year) and the older population are similar, there are gaps due to education and income levels.¹⁸⁴ For example, high levels of illiteracy, limited access to energy and phone services, and lack of trust due to inadequate financial education and awareness regarding the benefits of mobile financial services continue to impede women and girls from accessing and using these services.¹⁸⁵

The geographical location also represents a significant barrier not only in terms of access to mobile financial services but also the provision of commercial bank services as well. The ownership of bank accounts or mobile phones decreases considerably from urban to rural areas (see Graph 1.26). While there is a 9.6 percent difference between women from urban and rural areas who own a bank account, there exists a 38.7 percent gap between rural and urban women who own a mobile phone. Of those women who own a mobile phone and use mobile banking, 58.4 percent are located in urban areas, in comparison to 36.2 located in rural areas.¹⁸⁶

Graph 1.26. Ownership of bank accounts and mobile phones by residence and sex



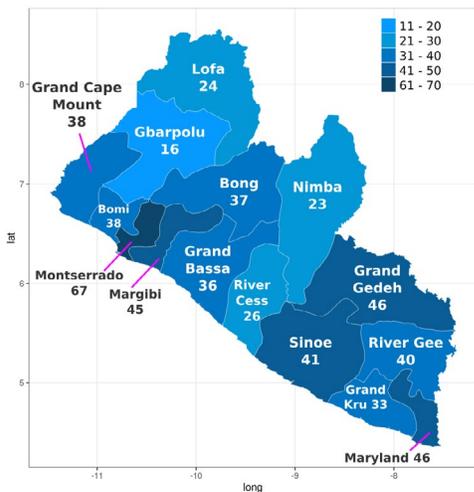
Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

Looking closer at county differences in female ownership of mobile phones in Map 1.5, Montserrado is the only county in which more than half of the women aged 15 to 49 years own mobile phones, precisely 67 percent of them. In 10 counties, women's ownership of mobile phones is between the 30 and 50 percent range, and in the counties of River Cess, Lofa, Nimba, and Gbarpolu, around one in

four women or less own mobile phones (26, 24, 23, and 16 percent, respectively). This reinforces the importance of residence as a factor in accessing financial services for women in Liberia.

Map 1.5. Women’s ownership of mobile phones by county

Percentage of women aged 15-49 years who own a mobile phone



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

Overall, the access of women to formal financial services (be it commercial bank services or mobile financial services) is considerably limited, and low profitability in the formal financial sector—which continues to persist overtime—has affected the ability for financial service providers to expand products and services.

Informal Financial Services

Due to the fact that access to capital is still one of the biggest challenges faced by women in Liberia, non-banking microfinance institutions (MFI), such as susu clubs and village savings loans, have been major sources of capital for women. These grassroots organizations “pool money on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis by collecting set amounts from each susu member, putting all the money together, and distributing the lump sum to one person at a time.”¹⁸⁷ These rotating credit associations are the main way for marginalized groups, such as women, to procure significant amounts of money; and while they were essential in supplying food during the civil wars in Liberia, they have maintained their role as a key informal financial service in the post-conflict period, particularly given that women make up 98 percent of the nearly 310,000 active Liberian MFI borrowers and have benefited from more than \$5.5 million in loans.¹⁸⁸

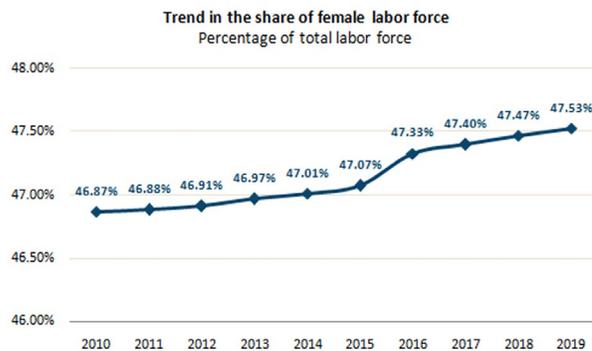
1.3.2 Women and the Formal Economy

Data highlights: Sex-disaggregated data on economic activities are available with some relevant and updated indicators. Indicators provided by both the DHS 2019-20 and ILO (through the OCHA database) are included in this section. However, there is a lack of updated, comprehensive and exhaustive data, such as the Labour Force Survey 2010 (LFS), or the School to Work Transition Survey 2012, 2014 (SWTS). Recent data would be crucial to further understand women’s current economic situation, opportunities, and constraints in Liberia, particularly after the 2015 economic reforms and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Paid employment is an essential enabler for women to achieve independence and improve their living conditions. However, in Liberia, the situation of young people seeking employment is precarious and even more so for women. According to 2011 figures, females represented half of those employed and only 25 percent of paid work.¹⁸⁹ Since then, the share of women in the labor force has remained relatively fixed with a slight increase in recent years, mainly in 2015, as can be seen in Graph 1.27.¹⁹⁰ Yet, female participation is still much lower when compared to male involvement (see Graph 1.27).

Government efforts have been successful, as evidenced by the increase in 2015 mentioned above. For instance, the presidencies of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and George Weah have carried out significant legislative reforms in favor of women’s participation in political life. The results have been positive and have increased women’s participation in government positions, especially during the Weah administration.¹⁹¹

Graph 1.27. Trend in the share of female labor force

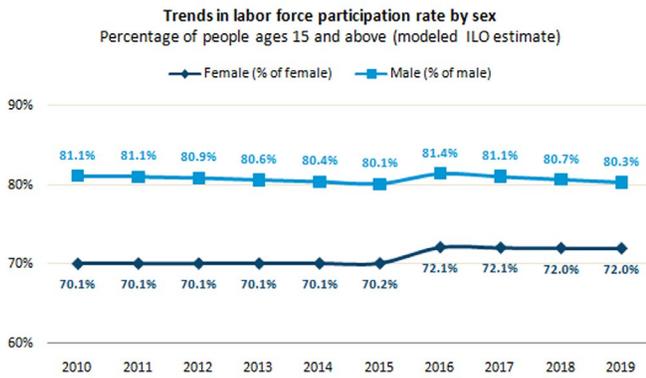


Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from OCHA (n.d.). Data retrieved on 2021-06-17 [Original source: International Labour Organization (ILO)].

Specifically, in 2015, the Decent Work Act introduced several provisions aimed at eradicating sexual harassment and hostile work environments. The act also established adequate complaint procedures, compensation, and sufficient penalties, which may have contributed to the increase in women’s participation in the labor market.¹⁹²

Additionally, programs such as “Employment-oriented support to women in the health sector,” developed by the German agency GIZ, implemented activities from 2016 to 2017 to support the insertion of women in the health sector.¹⁹³ The program intended to meet an increase in the presence of women in healthcare, which in the short period from 2010 to 2016 presented a rise from 38 percent to 45 percent.¹⁹⁴

Graph 1.28. Trends in labor force participation rate by sex



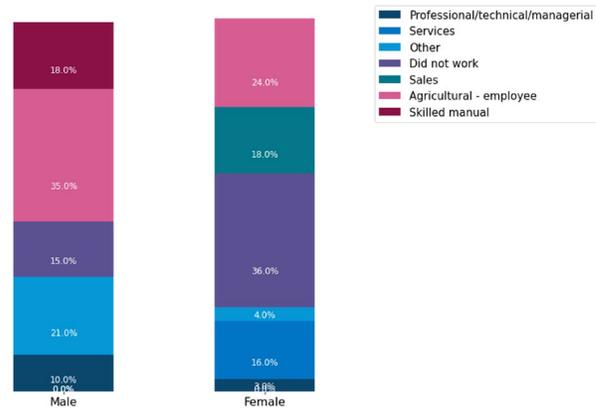
Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from OCHA (n.d.) Data retrieved on 2021-06-17 [Original source: International Labour Organization (ILO)].

Graph 1.28 shows the evolution of the labor activity rate by sex from 2010 to 2019. Both sectors present a sustained trend with a significant increase in 2015. However, compared to men, women continue to show a lower participation rate in the labor market throughout all these years.

Employment Sector and Occupation

Graph 1.29 shows the occupation by sex of the Liberian population aged 15-49 years; the percentage of individuals not working is higher among women than men with 36 percent versus 15 percent, respectively. In addition, the principal occupational area in both sectors is agriculture, followed by sales for women and skilled work for men.

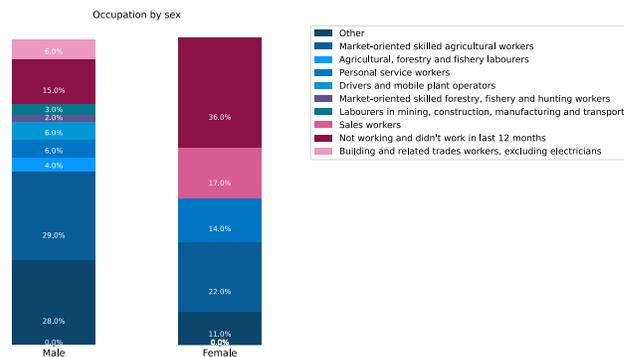
Graph 1.29. Employment status and main branch of economic activity by sex (ages 15-49)



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

A closer look at the participation branches shows that the male population is specifically engaged in forestry, fishing, as well as driving and mobile plant operations, while the female population that is employed is engaged in personal services and other activities, in addition to the service sector where their percentage of participation is 22 percent (see Graph 1.30).

Graph 1.30. Employment status and occupation by sex (ages 15-49)



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

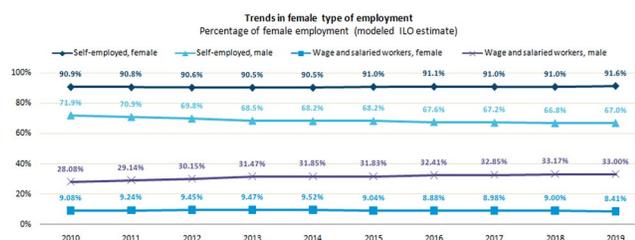
An under-explored trend in the analysis of the Liberian labor market that requires urgent attention is the urban-rural divide. Employment rates are higher among rural Liberians than among urban Liberians (67 percent versus 57 percent for women and 88 percent versus 76 percent for men).¹⁹⁵

In addition to the differences in occupation, the type of labor participation is differentiated. Graph 1.31 shows that most women in the labor market are self-employed,

while the percentage of women who receive wages is considerably low. On the other hand, in 2019, one out of three employed men were wage or salaried workers. In this sense, the World Bank defines wage and salaried workers as those workers who occupy the type of jobs defined as “paid jobs”, where the holders have explicit (written or verbal) or implicit employment contracts that give them a basic remuneration that does not depend directly on the income of the unit for which they work.¹⁹⁶

Furthermore, the high rates of self-employment suggest that: 1) the national economy is heavily dependent on the primary sector; 2) there are difficulties in formalizing the economy; and 3) there are a large number of jobs in which family members are not compensated, meaning that they work in conditions with low job stability and without job protections and benefits of any kind.¹⁹⁷

Graph 1.31. Trends in type of employment by sex



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from OCHA (n.d.) Data retrieved on 2021-06-17 [Original source: The World Bank].

Wage Gap, Unpaid Work, and Unemployment

Three phenomena of particular attention are the wage gap, unpaid work, and unemployment. These factors influence the differences in participation rates and inequalities women face to enter and stay in the formal labor sector.

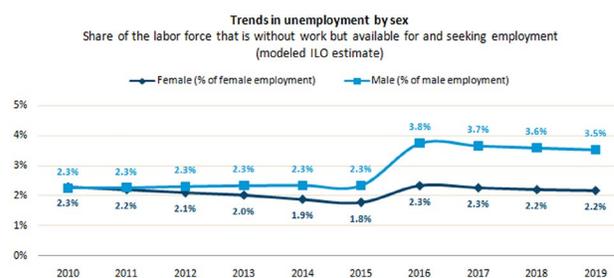
A common issue characterizing the labor market worldwide is the wage gap between men and women, and Liberia is no exception. Measuring this gap is particularly complex in Liberia for two reasons: high rates of informal work and scarcity of data. In the first case, 74 percent of all women workers in Liberia are informal workers, so there is no recorded data to diagnose the wage gap.¹⁹⁸ In the second case, as of December 2020 alone, only 41 percent of the indicators needed to monitor the SDGs from a gender perspective were available.¹⁹⁹ The scarcity of data affects relevant areas such as the labor market, the gender pay gap, and ICT skills.²⁰⁰

The limited data available points toward wage parity between men and women.²⁰¹ However, this income equality should not be interpreted as a favorable condition

because what this parity reflects is, in fact, that both men and women receive low incomes and thus have the same precarious wage status.²⁰²

In addition to high unemployment rates, Liberian women spend more time on domestic work than men (6.3 percent of their time compared to 2.7 percent of men), which impedes women’s increased participation in the labor market.²⁰³ In 2015, when the increase in employment was experienced, male participation was much higher than that of women (see Graph 1.32).

Graph 1.32. Trends in unemployment by sex



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from OCHA (n.d.) Data retrieved on 2021-06-17 [Original source: International Labour Organization (ILO)].

Since 2011, the number of unemployed people looking for a job has increased, a trend that applies more to men. The year 2015 represents a notable increase in the number of people looking for a job. In the following years, the amount increases, especially among men.

When multiple factors such as being female, young, and looking for a job are combined, a particularly disadvantageous scenario is created. Table 1.9 shows that the female population is the most unemployed sector and, according to 2013 figures, the duration of such a condition lasts more than one year in 60 percent of cases.²⁰⁴

Table 1.9 Youth unemployment rate and unemployed youth duration of unemployment and sex (percentage)

	Total	Male	Female
Youth unemployment rate (relaxed definition)	35.0	28.3	41.3
Youth unemployment rate (strict definition)	19.3	15.1	23.5
Share of total unemployed (relaxed) by duration			
Less than 1 year	38.7	36.6	40.0
1 year to less than 2 years	22.8	20.7	24.1
2 years or more	38.5	42.7	35.9

Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from De Mel, Elder & Vansteenkiste (2013) [Original source: SWTS-Liberia, 2012].

Therefore, inequalities persist, and the main areas of concentration of women’s work are in the informal economy, where their share reaches 74 percent.²⁰⁵ Furthermore, 41 percent of women with university-level studies also work informally.²⁰⁶ It is essential to mention that due to the national economy’s emphasis on informal work, data and records do not exist beyond 2013, which would have made it possible to assess the sector’s evolution in recent years.

1.3.3 Women and the Informal Economy

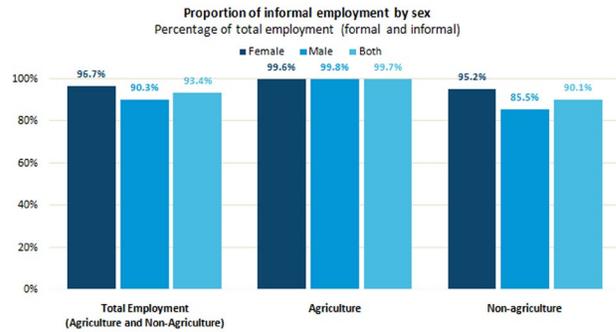
Data highlights: Sex-disaggregated data on the informal economy is scarce and outdated. The Labour Force Survey 2010 (LFS) and the School to Work Transition Survey 2012, 2014 (SWTS) (through the ILO database) provide the latest data available. Moreover, information regarding women’s participation in some specific activities, such as cross-border trade, is also not well documented. The only exception is information on child labor, considering that the DHS 2019-20 included relevant indicators on this issue.

According to the ILO, informal work includes all paid work, self-employment, and wage employment which is not registered, regulated, or protected by existing legal or regulatory frameworks.²⁰⁷ This type of employment excludes secure employment contracts, employment benefits, social protections, or worker representation. In comparison, the GoL considers informal work to be an activity where people produce goods or services for their own household use.²⁰⁸ Both definitions describe a situation of autonomous income production and, therefore, without any labor benefits or protections, which places women and their families in a situation of vulnerability in the face of possibly losing their primary source of income.

Informal work is a significant contributor to the Liberian economy, as 93.4 percent of the population is employed in this sector (see Graph 1.33). Furthermore, it has been a critical element in sustaining the country’s economy both in times of conflict and recovery. A large part of the population is involved in the informal economy, and — as like in many other countries— women comprise the majority of the workforce.²⁰⁹

As seen in Graph 1.33, women and men are equally represented in the agricultural sector. Moreover, of their respective total labor force participation — in agricultural and non-agricultural activities — women account for 96.7 percent, while men account for 90.3 percent, according to 2014 data.

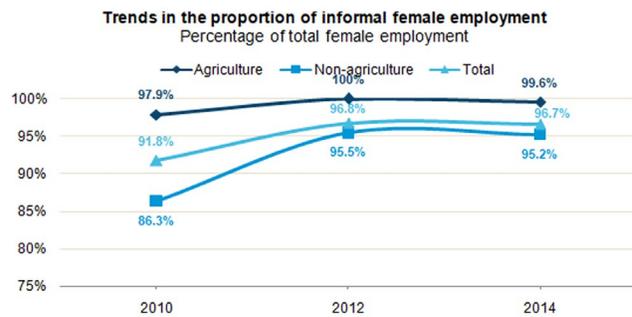
Graph 1.33. Proportion of informal employment by sex (2014)



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from ILO-STATISTICS - Microdata processing. Data retrieved on 2021-06-21 [Original sources: Labour Force Survey 2010 (LFS) and School to Work Transition Survey 2012, 2014 (SWTS)].

Both men and women’s high percentages of participation in informal work require the government’s attention, as they represent precarious working conditions. This type of employment places workers in a position of vulnerability without any health care services, retirement plans, savings possibilities, or access to other economic benefits. Graph 1.34 shows that the percentage of informal employment, both non-agricultural and agricultural, has increased in recent years.

Graph 1.34. Trends in the proportion of informal female employment



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from ILO-STATISTICS - Microdata processing. Data retrieved on 2021-06-21 [Original sources: Labour Force Survey 2010 (LFS) and School to Work Transition Survey 2012, 2014 (SWTS)].

Additionally, women’s education backgrounds do not necessarily translate to better employment, resulting in 41 percent of university-educated women working informally, compared to 24 percent of university-educated men.²¹⁰

However, the role of informal work in Liberia is decisive. In addition to contributing to the national economy at the micro-level, it is a vital source of income for most families, covering living expenses, lightening medical costs, and supporting children’s education. Thus, the transition of

women to the formal economy would not only result in their empowerment and advance gender equality, but also benefit Liberian society holistically.

Recent Efforts Targeting Informal Workers

Considering this situation, the GoL is prioritizing policies to protect informal women workers and enable their transition into the formal economy.²¹¹ In particular, the government has worked with several multilateral organizations and local groups to address obstacles that hamper Liberian women's economic potential.²¹² For example, the National Petty Trader Union for women in the informal economy established a partnership with the Central Bank of Liberia to create a credit facility for women traders to receive small loans.²¹³

There have been other significant actions such as an agreement on street vendors between the National Petty Trader Union and local authorities. Other street vendors and service-providing organizations have highlighted the need for better government regulation and the creation of binding Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with local authorities, which would significantly improve women's working conditions.²¹⁴ Efforts to transition to the formal economy have also included education initiatives, financial inclusion, and capacity-building programs. Moreover, the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection is also prioritizing policies to protect female informal workers.²¹⁵

In terms of legislation, in June 2015, the Liberian government adopted the first labor law since the 1950s, the "Decent Work Act," which establishes basic standards for safe working environments and collective-bargaining rights for workers in the informal sector.²¹⁶ One of the most significant contributions has been providing skilled and unskilled workers in the formal economy with standard minimum wages, guaranteed paid leave, improving working conditions, and providing financial and childcare services to women.²¹⁷

Ongoing dialogue and collaboration between government authorities and workers' organizations have reduced deficiencies in informal work. In Monrovia, for example, the signing of MoU gave street vendors licenses to work, eliminating the fear that the authorities would confiscate their goods.²¹⁸

Recently, the Liberian government has implemented the Recovery of Economic Activity for Liberian Informal Sector Employment (REALISE) project.²¹⁹ The program aims to increase access to income-earning opportunities for people

in the informal sector in response to the COVID-19 crisis.

Recognizing Informal Work, Corruption, and Child Labor

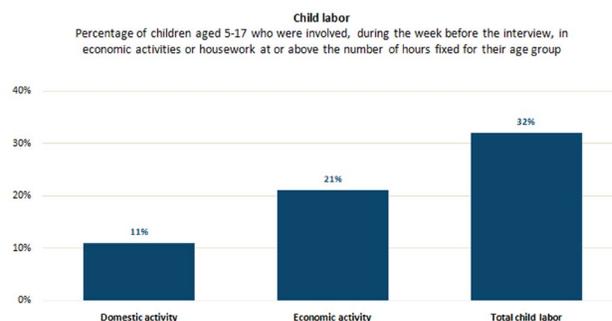
Women participants in the informal economy face several challenges that prevent them from improving their working conditions, including the lack of start-up funds for business and microcredit.²²⁰ As a consequence, women often turn to financing alternatives such as the Susu clubs (see section 1.1.3). One important challenge is recognizing informal work by government authorities and support from NGOs.²²¹ This kind of recognition and collaboration allows organizations such as the Sirleaf Market Women's Fund (SMWF) to consolidate and promote women's economic development and insertion into the formal sector.

Organizations such as SMWF assist women workers in the informal sector through business training programs, savings and loan associations, and financial assistance programs that target women in urban and rural areas.²²² This last point is especially relevant since differences between urban and rural areas are also present in the informal economy. The latest figures (from 2010) show that the percentage of informal work in rural areas is 90.4 percent while it is 86.2 percent in urban areas.²²³

Corruption is also another critical obstacle to the transition from the informal to formal economy. Even when women have access to financial services and credit, challenges such as pervasive harassment and corruption from local authorities impede the possibilities for economic progress.²²⁴

Finally, one of the most important challenges is child labor. According to data from 2020, most children aged 5-17 years participated in economic activities. The second most important activity in terms of child labor is domestic work (see Graph 1.35).

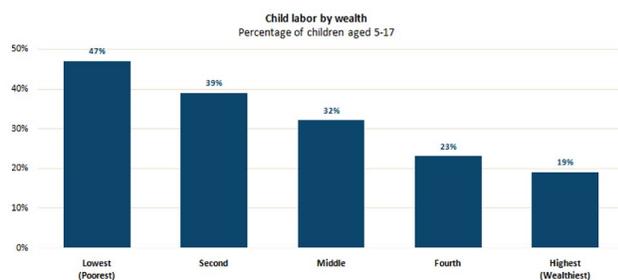
Graph 1.35. Child labor



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

The rate of children participating in economic activities which are considered excessive work engagement outside the home is 11 percent for children aged 12-14 years and 3 percent for children aged 15-17 years. Furthermore, 30 percent of children work in dangerous conditions, such as in rubber production or gold and diamond mining.²²⁵

Graph 1.36. Child labor by wealth

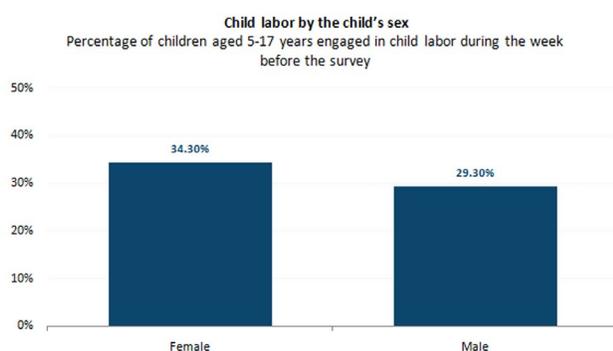


Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

As can be seen in Graph 1.36, the number of children working decreases directly in relation to the level of a family's wealth, so that children with increasingly scarce resources make up a larger part of the child labor force.

It is important to note that the sector with the highest number of working children is agriculture, followed by the sectors of services and industry. The second most important sector is domestic work, which is often the result of human trafficking.²²⁶

Graph 1.37. Child labor by the child's sex



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

Graph 1.37 shows boys and girls from 5 to 17 years of age who work during the week, and as can be seen, the percentages are similar with slightly higher participation of girls (34.30 percent vs 29.30 percent).

Although Liberia ratified the Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor in 2003, efforts have not

been sufficient in eliminating this practice.²²⁷ In 2019, the lowest number of workplace inspections at the national level was recorded; such inspections are essential because they ensure the enforcement of child labor laws.²²⁸

Box 1.4. Lack of data on women's participation in cross-border trade

Cross-border trade, both formal and informal, is a vital component of the Liberian economy and essential to securing food security for those inhabiting along the borders. Of the large number of people engaged in this activity, women make up the majority.²²⁹

Among the total products exported to and imported from Liberia, minerals and forestry contribute to 50 percent of GDP.²³⁰ Agriculture, forestry, and fisheries account for more than a third of GDP and include rice, rubber, cocoa, and palm oil production; and extractives account for 9 percent of GDP and manufacturing, 7 percent.²³¹ (See Table 1.10)

Table 1.10. Liberia Commodity Composition of Imports and Exports 2016-2017 (\$ million)

Export Products	2016	2017
Iron Ore	48.2	63.3
Diamonds	28.7	32.8
Gold	116.4	187.5
Natural Rubber	55.9	68.1
Cocoa Beans	12.4	2.5
Coffee Beans	0.1	0.0
Other	17.6	34.6
Total Exports	279.3	388.8
Import products	2016	2017
Food & Live Animals	268.0	267.5
Beverages and Tobacco	22.4	15.7
Crude Materials, Fuel	353.6	230.1
Animal and Vegetal oil	23.2	24.4
Chemicals	95.0	94.0
Manufactured Products	167.8	156.6
Machinery & Transport Equip.	271.1	229.9
Total Imports	1,201.2	1,018.2

Note: Figures for 2017 are preliminary.

Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from International Development Group LLC [IDL] & Kirk (2018) [Original source: Central Bank of Liberia, Annual Report 2017].

While cross-border trade is an activity of economic empowerment for Liberian women, it is also an activity in which inequalities and violence against women are reproduced.

It is essential to mention that cross-border trade is mainly informal, which affects both women traders and the national economy. In the first case, women face obstacles such as corruption, sexual harassment, and discrimination when attempting to transport their products across borders. In the second case, the government is unable to collect taxes that benefit the national economy.

There is a stark disparity between the number of goods moving across borders and the taxes collected. The sizeable difference between the number of products imported and the amount of taxes collected is due to the corruption and high informality of border agents. However, informality among Liberian women traders is not by choice, but rather the consequence of a series of circumstances, such as the lack of access to adequate financing.²³²

The United Nations Development Fund for Women held a conference in Liberia in 2010, where it met with Liberian women traders. The event shed light on several issues that women face, such as the lack of recognition of laissez passer by neighboring countries, payment of bribes, good losses from informal transportation services, and limited opportunities to access finances, all in the formal movement of goods alone.²³³

The case of informal commerce is particularly problematic because women must pay additional bribes, and cases of sexual violence are more frequent. In both sectors (formal and informal trade), the lack of knowledge of tax policies is detrimental to women, who ultimately pay at each border checkpoint and receive no proof of payment.²³⁴ In addition, the need for microfinancing, the volume of products transported, mobility obstacles, time, and high levels of illiteracy make women's participation precarious and hinder their transition to formal cross-border trade.

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2

**Sectoral Gender Analysis and
Cross-Cutting Gender Issues**

2.1. Women, Post-Conflict, and Peacebuilding

Data highlights: *There is a large gap in sex-disaggregated data on the participation of women in post-conflict decision-making processes and peacebuilding initiatives. Data collection on this matter is imperative to better understand the role of women and monitor the effectiveness of the different initiatives, as well as their impact on women and men, which could provide valuable insights for future policies and programs.*

Between 1989 and 1997, Liberia suffered a civil war that culminated in the signature of a peace agreement and the election of Charles Taylor as president. Yet, in 1999, civil war broke out again as members of the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) sought to overthrow Taylor's government. The conflict ended in 2003 with the United States and Economic Community of West African States' involvement in peacekeeping efforts.¹ In both conflicts, the civilian population suffered human rights violations, resulting in approximately 150,000 deaths, 850,000 refugees and internally displaced persons, as well as thousands of survivors and combatants who were involved in the internal dispute.²

Among them, there were thousands of women and girls who lived decades marked by the conflict and SGBV, and their experiences sparked a movement that had a key role in advocating for peace agreements and reconciliation of the country.³ During the first civil war, women rallied themselves in different organizations – such as Women in Action (AWA), the Abused Women and Girls Project, the Women's Development Association (WDA), and the Rural Women's Association (RWA).⁴ The creation of the Liberian Women's Initiative (LWI) in 1994 pushed for a united and active campaign for the end of the conflict.⁵ The different repertoires of action gave visibility to women's peace movements, and with the establishment of the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace (WLMAP) and the Women for Peacebuilding Network, these movements grew continuously across Liberia.⁶ This was instrumental for the peace agreements, as recognized by the Nobel Peace Prize Committee, and Liberian women emerged from the conflict as important agents of change.⁷

As a society marked by two civil wars, peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery have been central efforts aimed at the stabilization, development, and prosperity of the country; yet key challenges remain, especially in addressing the complexities of the conflict, which often pose an added disadvantage for women. The peacebuilding process that followed the end of the conflict in Liberia is characterized as being one of the first to consider gender as a cross-sectional issue, setting a precedent for the inclusion of women in political and conflict-resolution processes at the national and international level. However, these are complex processes and key gender-related dimensions of the conflict remain unaddressed, such as the adoption of male-centered approaches and the exclusion of women and girls in broader peace-building initiatives.

The perception of women and girls as having a “fixed” role in conflicts has obstructed their participation in conflict-resolution, even though women were involved as combatants, victims, peacebuilders, and politicians — or a combination of all these categories. Social, economic, cultural, and contextual factors often reduce women to passive bystanders or victims. Consequently, Liberian women who engaged in trauma healing, conflict resolution, mediation, campaigning, and networking during the conflict, were initially excluded and not consulted in the disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation, and reintegration (DDRR) program.⁸ This led to the implementation of public policies which belatedly incorporated a framework based on UNSCR 1325, but which in practice did not break from a heavily male-centered approach. Liberia's DDRR program, for example, naturalized specific gender binaries and stereotypes associated with conflict; implemented highly gendered skills training; and did not respond adequately to the social reintegration and psychological rehabilitation of women.⁹

Women had to appeal to their own networks to find the support they needed to face the post-conflict context and expand their agency in peace-building processes. For instance, the Peace Huts serve as an exemplary example of how women found community support. Reflecting traditional settlement councils, the more than 21 Peace

Huts across Liberia “engage in gender mainstreaming and promote programmes for Liberian women’s full participation in the society.”¹⁰ Funded by international organizations including UN Women and CSOs, these communities of women and girls erected their own transitional justice processes, promoting peacebuilding and gender equality while raising awareness on the importance of women’s participation in peace and security, guided by the UNSCR 1325.¹¹

However, these women are also “acutely aware of the precarity of peace in an environment where anger from unresolved loss or trauma lies just beneath the surface.”¹²

Across the country, Peace Huts have worked to address structural issues that lead to conflict and gender inequality, issues which were neglected in the initial peacebuilding strategy’s public policies.¹³ The second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (NAPWPS) has recognized that “many of the root causes linked to the civil wars remain unaddressed,”¹⁴ such as limited access to sustainable livelihoods; issues of land tenure and property rights in which women were not consulted; corruption; the exclusion of women, rural women, women with disabilities, and youth from peacebuilding processes; and the concentration of political power.

2.2. Women and Agriculture

Data highlights: *Sex-disaggregated data on employment, earnings and wealth (particularly land ownership) is comprehensive, periodically updated, and reliable. The main sources of information for these indicators are the DHS 2019-20 and the African Development Bank. Some indicators on food security are also available through the DHS 2019-20 and FAO databases. Nevertheless, further information on women’s participation in agriculture (i.e. mainly tasks performed, such as crops production, fisheries, etc., types of discrimination suffered, among others) could provide a better understanding of the development of the sector, as well as women’s challenges and opportunities within it.*

Agriculture is one of the most important sectors of Liberia’s economy. It contributes to over 60 percent of the GDP and provides a source of livelihood for more than two-thirds of the population.¹⁵ After the end of the civil war in 2003, the country was damaged in matters concerning its agricultural production, which created a position of high vulnerability in terms of food insecurity for the population. To address this situation, the GoL created the Food and Nutrition Strategy in 2008 which in large part focused on enhancing food availability by addressing production, processing, and marketing constraints of small-scale farmers.¹⁶ This strategy was later updated with the adoption of the new Food Security and Nutrition Strategy of 2015. In parallel, the Liberian Agriculture Sector Investment Program (LASIP) was created

in 2010 for the period of 2011-2015 to prioritize four areas: food and nutrition; competitive value chains and market linkages; institutional development; and land and water management. The program was formulated following the Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Program (CAADP) of 2003 which sought to create a continent-wide framework that prioritized the restoration of agricultural growth, facilitated rural development, and ensured food and nutrition security in Africa.¹⁷

In 2018 the Ministry of Agriculture developed the second version of LASIP for the period of 2018-2022. Through these programs, the government has shown great initiative in structuring a framework to guarantee the proper development of the agricultural sector in Liberia and ensuring the provision of food security. Agriculture is considered the economic bedrock of Liberia as it is the primary source of employment, earnings, food, and livelihood security for the majority of the population, making it a central sector for the creation of wealth and reduction of poverty strategy of the government.¹⁸ The results of these initiatives were mixed. Some contributed to the improvement of the agricultural sector in Liberia, including: an average of 5.3 percent of commercial bank loans earmarked for the agricultural sector, 1,196.2 km of rehabilitated roads and 445.2 km maintained in various counties, an increase in crops production (rice and cassava), and an increase in the forestry sector’s contribution to GDP.¹⁹ Others left gaps in

the sector, including: a lack of a strategic set of priorities that would lead to well-coordinated, multi-sectoral actions, local farmers with low or no access to domestic output and input markets, and the absence of technical expertise and knowledge in the field to improve the performance of the livestock sub-sector.²⁰

In terms of food security and nutrition, the percentage of the population living with food insecurity has greatly decreased from 41 percent of households in 2010 and 49 percent in 2012, to 16 percent in 2015 and 18 percent in 2018.²¹ However, food insecurity remains at its highest in female-headed households, with 85.3 percent of them being in a state of moderate or severe food insecurity.²² Chronic malnutrition reaches almost one third of children under the age of 5, and diseases such as diarrhea and malaria due to poor sanitation continue to take a toll on the Liberian population.²³

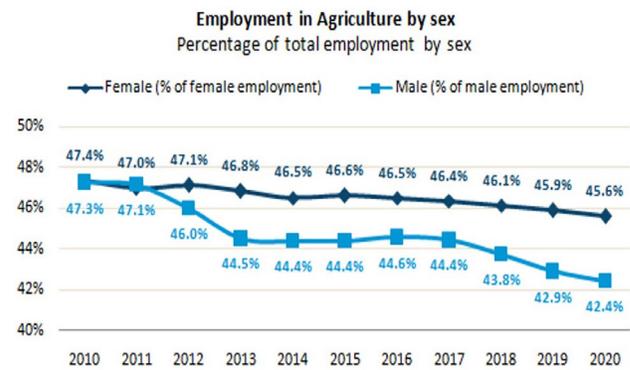
This situation prevails due to several factors. Among these is: the depreciation of the Liberian dollar against the US dollar; the rising price of food commodities; and the reliance on rice and cassava which results in poor dietary diversity and consequently a lack of necessary nutrients, particularly affecting children.²⁴ The percentage of households with severe or moderate food insecurity in counties such as Grand Kru (33 percent), River Gee (32 percent), and Grand Cape Mount (30 percent) was further exacerbated during the Ebola epidemic when border closures and roadblocks greatly affected market activity, greatly contrasting a more urban setting like Monrovia (8 percent) which was minimally affected.²⁵ In general, rural counties present a higher level of food insecurity than urban ones, with Maryland (35 percent) being the highest and the Great Monrovia (8.8 percent) region being the lowest. For this reason, agriculture plays such a crucial role for the Liberian population, particularly concerning food security and livelihoods in rural areas.

Employment in Agriculture

Considering that 70 percent of the workforce in Liberia derives a portion of their cash income from an agriculture related activity, employment rates in this sector are a particularly important indicator.²⁶ One of the most interesting trends over the last years is the decrease of women employed in agriculture. In 2010, 47.7 percent of women were employed in agriculture, in 2015 it was 46.6 percent, and in 2020 the percentage continued to decrease to 45.6 percent (see Graph 2.1). This decrease in women's participation in

agriculture corresponds to the trend of women increasingly transferring to the sales and services sector.²⁷ A possible reason for this transition in women's employment trends is the fact that women employed in agriculture (57 percent) are more likely than women employed in non-agricultural work (17 percent) to not receive payments. This translates to 74.9 percent of women earning cash payments for non-agricultural work, whereas only 22.6 percent of women working in agriculture earn cash payments.²⁸ Furthermore, the civil war and general search for economic opportunities sparked migration waves to urban cities which has led to overcrowding situations in Liberia's main cities; in conjunction with this migratory trend, there is also additional appeal for women to work in the sales and service sector.²⁹ For men, there was also a significant and larger decrease than for women in employment in agriculture, from 47.3 percent in 2010 to 42.4 percent in 2019.

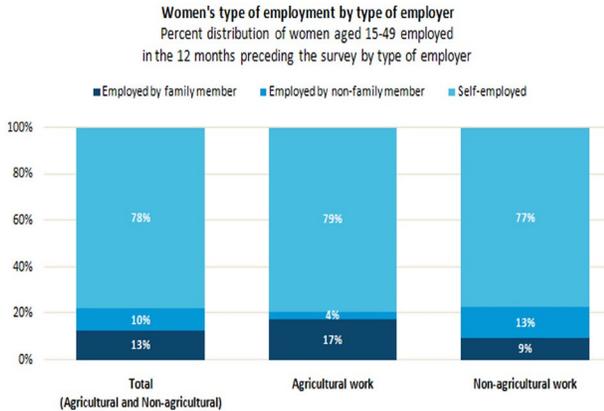
Graph 2.1. Employment in Agriculture



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from the AFDB Socio Economic Database. Data retrieved on 2021-07-26.

Primarily, women contribute to the agricultural sector's workforce through food crop production (93 percent), marketing and trading (85 percent), and agricultural labor (80 percent).³⁰ Women are mainly responsible for the planting, weeding, and harvesting of food while men take care of the brushing, feeling, clearing, and fencing.³¹ However, women have the additional responsibility of cooking, fetching water, and other domestic chores that constrain available time required for completing agricultural work tasks, which in turn lowers their productivity and can ultimately affect their food security as well as their children's food security.³² Additionally, 79 percent of women working in agriculture are self-employed, 17.3 percent are employed by a family member, and only 3.7 percent are employed by a non-family member (see Graph 2.2).

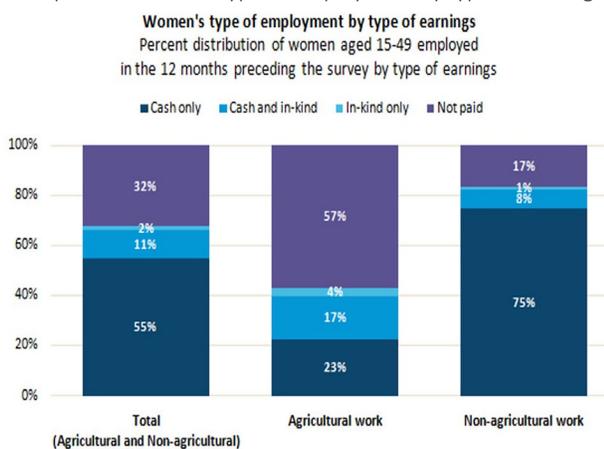
Graph 2.2. Women’s type of employment by type of employer



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from the AFDB Socio Economic Database. Data retrieved on 2021-07-26.

Women employed in agriculture have a higher percentage of being employed either by a family member or being self-employed (96.3 percent) than women in non-agricultural work (87 percent). According to the International Labour Organization, being either self-employed or employed by a family member increases economic instability and leads to a position of “vulnerable employment”.³³ Another factor contributing to employment vulnerability is the lack of proper payments. For women who are employed in agriculture, more than half (56.8 percent) are not paid for their work, a percentage much higher than women who are employed in non-agricultural work (16.8 percent).³⁴

Graph 2.3. Women’s type of employment by type of earnings



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

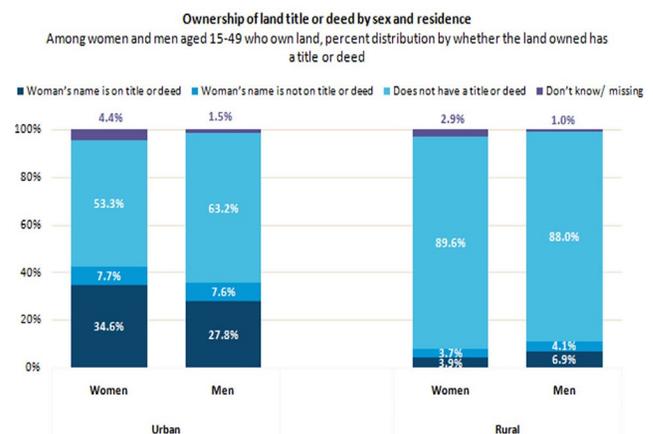
The combination of these two factors leads to 90 percent of Liberian women living in a vulnerable employment position, while for men this figure is lower (69 percent).³⁵ Despite making up a significant portion of the agricultural sector, women still face many challenges that put them in vulnerable positions and compromise equality in the

sector. For example, regarding credits, women in rural areas have restricted access to formal credit institutions. Generally, these institutions are nonexistent in rural areas, thereby leading communities to borrow money from family or friends, or to use traditional forms of community credit like Susu clubs or Village Savings and Loan Associations.³⁶ When these institutions are present, women face constraints in accessing credit due to lack of information as well as know-how.³⁷ However, the importance of these services cannot be underestimated as data from the UNDP Community Based Reintegration Recovery Programme in rural Liberia shows that out of the 1700 members of the seven community credit unions created under the program, women accounted for 52 percent.³⁸ Women need to access these types of services to improve their economic conditions and have the means to eventually own land.

Land Ownership

Land ownership in Liberia is complicated because of the lack of organization and officiality of land titles and deeds. It is estimated that less than 20 percent of the total land in the country is registered with a proper title.³⁹ Of the 16 percent of women and men who own land, 76 percent of women and 78 percent of men do not have a title or deed of ownership.⁴⁰ Even though urban men and women are less likely to own land, they are far more likely to have a title or deed (35 percent and 28 percent, respectively) than rural women (4 percent) and rural men (7 percent) who own land.⁴¹ Wealth is also a significant factor when it comes to ownership of titles and deeds. In the highest wealth quintile, 83 percent of women and 52 percent of men who own land possess a deed or title while for the lowest wealth quintile, only 2 percent of women and 5 percent of men do.⁴²

Graph 2.4. Ownership of land title or deed by sex and residence



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

To address these issues, the government adopted the Community Rights Law in 2006 and the Community Rights Act in 2009 which attempted to return resources back to communities that were previously under state control.⁴³ In 2018, the government developed the Lands Rights Act to respond to several inequities in land access and governance that had historically disempowered communities. Under this act, the protection and provision of women's land rights were elevated to an equal status as men.⁴⁴ Unfortunately, in practice, this Act has substantial flaws that particularly prevent unmarried, co-inhabiting young women who moved into their partner's community from having land rights.⁴⁵ However, customary land rights still prevail largely in Liberian society, as opposed to statutory laws which contain no specific provisions to protect women from discriminatory practices in the private and domestic spheres. One of these practices

relates to the most common ways that women acquire land: under family provisions or upon marriage.

The patrilineal customary system privileges men, disadvantaging women, but not entirely excluding them from accessing land rights.⁴⁶ Several women groups have been created to defend women's rights in agricultural and trade issues. The Rural Women Structure, an initiative established by the FAO, IFAD, UN Women, and WFP, is an example of said groups that seek to articulate rural women farmers' concerns, analyze their accomplishments, and develop strategies to address the challenges they still face.⁴⁷ Informal networks are also very important channels used by women to trade their agricultural products in urban markets. Despite the challenges they still face related to land ownership, women continue to mobilize through civil society to improve their conditions in the agricultural sector and pressure the government to adopt fairer policies.

2.3. Women and Infrastructure

Data highlights: *Sex-disaggregated data on women and infrastructure is scarce and mostly outdated. The DHS 2019-20 provides some reliable and updated indicators, but primarily at the household level. At the macro-level, there is a large gap in information on women's employment (or their participation) in the infrastructure sector, their levels of representation in decision-making processes, and on the design of concrete policies to advance women's inclusion in the sector. Moreover, information on access and use of different facilities (roads, transportation, and public spaces) is also lacking, which is crucial to design more valuable gender-inclusive policies within this sector.*

Infrastructure and Quality of Life

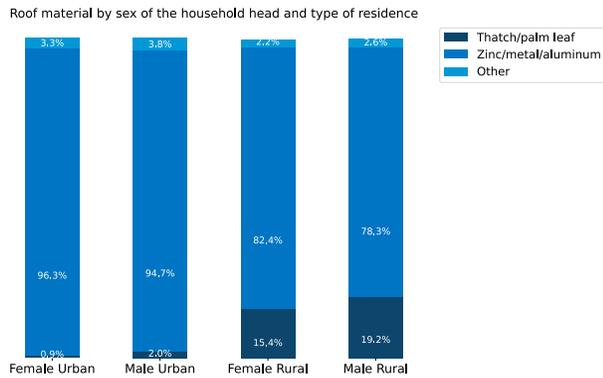
The number of hours that women spend on domestic and care work leaves them without any personal time, negatively affecting their health and quality of life. In this regard, the demand for better facilities ranges from mobility to working conditions inside and outside the home.⁴⁸

Research has found that deficiencies in access to public infrastructure and mobility services negatively affect women's availability and care-related responsibilities.⁴⁹ This situation reduces women's ability to devote more time to market activities, for instance. Therefore, better infrastructure would reduce the gender gap in labor participation.⁵⁰

In Liberia, 74 percent of the de jure population has access to drinking water whereas 10 percent has limited access.⁵¹ Lack of safe water affects aspects such as sanitation, health, food, security, and economic opportunities. Consequently, due to gender roles, women are particularly affected by this water scarcity.⁵²

In the case of housing conditions, disparities also exist, though it is essential to recognize that both men and women lack adequate housing conditions. According to figures from 2020, there are significant differences in the roofing material of houses where women are heads of households. Graph 2.5 shows that male-headed household roofs are constructed from materials such as zinc, metal, or aluminum.

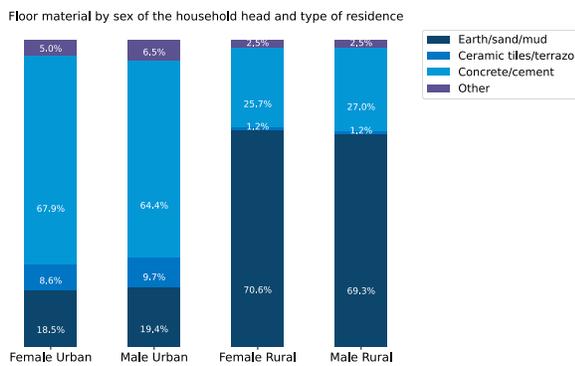
Graph 2.5. Household characteristics by sex of the household head and residence: Roof material



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

In the case of floor material, most of the male population’s homes consist of soil composed of earth, sand, or mud (see Graph 2.6.).

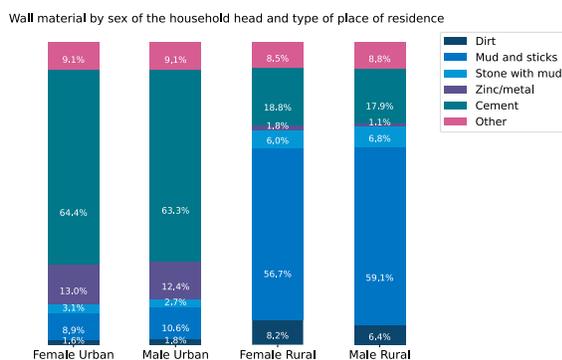
Graph 2.6. Household characteristics by sex of the household head and residence: Floor material



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

In terms of wall material, most male-headed households have mud and stick walls. In the case of cement, male-headed households have the most access to this material (see Graph 2.7).

Graph 2.7. Household characteristics by sex of the household head and residence- Wall material



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

According to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, access to infrastructure and services is a crucial factor that determines economic opportunities, and in the case of Liberia, there is still much to be done in terms of housing conditions.⁵³ More specifically, the design and availability of services affect men and women differently due to different needs and priorities, such as their various economic activities and care responsibilities. According to a European Bank study, the availability, safety, reliability, and affordability of services impact their perceived usability and may, in turn, restrict their mobility, employability, and freedom of movement.⁵⁴ In addition, when women lack access to some essential infrastructure services such as transportation, water, and electricity, they allocate an elevated proportion of their time to household chores than men.⁵⁵

Women in Infrastructure Design

The lack of women’s participation in infrastructure design is a reality in many parts of the world.⁵⁶ The United Nations Office for Project Services recognizes “underdeveloped and gender-blind infrastructure” as a leading cause for the inability of women and girls to access essential services and an obstacle obstructing social mobility and gender gap eradication.⁵⁷

In Liberia as in many parts of the world, this gap is even more pronounced in rural areas.⁵⁸ Given the significant weight of agriculture in the national economy and the high participation of women in the sector, the absence of women’s needs in public infrastructure and services design is particularly worrying.

UN-Habitat published a paper in 2020 that assesses the state of urban policy in Liberia, with a diagnosis that basic infrastructure and services are inadequate and there is a lack of sustained economic opportunities. According to the document, by 2020, the Sustainable Development Goal of providing safe, affordable, and sustainable access to transport systems, safe roads, and means of transport to vulnerable sectors such as women, children, the elderly, and people with disabilities has not been met.⁵⁹ Furthermore, the urban agenda lacks a gender perspective in its objectives and plans. Additionally, it does not consider women’s participation a necessary element in its planning and implementation.

Peace Infrastructures

Peace infrastructures are defined as those that mediate intra-state or intra-community violence by harnessing local resources and adopting a problem-solving approach. Such procedures take the form of centers and committees such as Peace Huts, County Service Centres (CSCs), County Peace Committees (CPCs), District Peace Councils (DPCs), and Sexual and Gender-Based violence (SGBV) Observatories.⁶⁰ In a study conducted by UN Women and Independent National Commission on Human Rights, five counties (Bomi, Bong, Grand Bassa, Grand Gedeh, and Lofa) found that women's participation was significant, both as users and as an active part of this infrastructure.⁶¹ However, parity is far from being reached, and women's equal participation in peace infrastructures remains a pending task for various organizations.

Challenges

An important challenge in the realm of infrastructure and public infrastructure is women's involvement in public infrastructure design. The European Bank for

Reconstruction and Development states that public infrastructure is often designed and managed mainly by male engineers and planners who may not be fully aware of women's needs in low-income areas.⁶²

In this sense, programs such as the City Development Strategy are a successful illustration of how women's inclusion is essential to effectively identify the needs of specific sectors and communities. The program, which focused on providing water and sanitation to informal communities, prioritized women's voices in assessing current infrastructure and addressing existing deficiencies.⁶³

Regarding specific needs in rural environments, investment in mobility infrastructure may help women increase their income, as it ensures access to markets where they can sell their products and the establishment workplaces.⁶⁴

Finally, in the case of peace infrastructures, the challenges would be to maintain women's participation and involvement in such infrastructure, in addition to securing government funding and fair wages for the workers.⁶⁵

2.4. Women and Energy

Data highlights: *Sex-disaggregated data on employment (or participation) in the energy sector, the levels of representation women have in decision-making processes and on the design of concrete policies to advance women's inclusion in the sector is insufficient, lacking and mostly unavailable. At the micro-level, the DHS 2019-20 provided some relevant, comprehensive and disaggregated indicators on access to electricity and use of cooking fuels.*

Macro Level

In 2009, the Ministry of Mines and Energy [MME] in Liberia created the National Energy Policy and Agenda for Action and Economic and Social Development. In it, the MME pointed out how limited access to modern fuels and electricity contributed to gender inequality in the country, and that there is a need for women to be present in the development of rural energy services.⁶⁶ It

stated that given that the MGCSP did not have a program or even the capacity to address energy-related gender issues, the MME should be in charge of developing a gender strategy for the sector, but that the MME currently did not have the necessary resources to develop such a strategy either.⁶⁷ This situation created a scenario in which the energy sector was left without a clear framework or strategy to integrate gender considerations to achieve gender equality. In 2015, Liberia signed the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Policy for Gender Mainstreaming in Energy Access. The initiative sought to promote equality in energy development by ensuring equal access to resources and decision-making processes that shape the energy sector.⁶⁸

In 2016, the MME developed the Rural Energy Strategy and Master Plan for Liberia until 2030. This plan includes gender equality as one of its cross-cutting issues and sets out policies to improve the availability of electricity and

electric appliances for women so that they are not forced to resort to cooking fuels which require supplementary labor. It also mentions a scholarship program to facilitate training opportunities for women that will allow them to participate in the sector's decision-making processes.⁶⁹ However, it is unclear how both actions will be implemented. Therefore, the vision for equality in the energy sector is still an uncertain reality for Liberia due to a lack of gender-specific policies as well as indicators at a macro level to advance equality in the energy sector.

To address the scarcity of trained women in the energy sector, several initiatives have arisen from international organizations and civil society. In 2010, USAID awarded a four-year contract to Winrock International for the implementation of the Liberia Energy Sector Support Program (LESSP). Through the program, two female staff at the Rural and Renewable Energy Agency of the MME were trained in project and financial management. Unfortunately, in other cases such as that of USAID in collaboration with the Booker Washington Institution, female participation in solar photovoltaic training was extremely low.⁷⁰ This corresponds to different barriers related to low education, domestic responsibilities, and cultural issues such as this type of work's association with masculinity.⁷¹

Despite the cultural barriers, there have been successful programs developed to level the representation of women in the field. The Norwegian Water Resources and Energy Directorate (NVE) alongside the MoME carried out institutional capacity-building and trainings from 2011 to 2013 on the product uses of electricity, with female rates of attendance at 70 percent.⁷² UN Women, the MGCSP, and Barefoot College in India created the Women's Entrepreneurship for Sustainable Energy program that trained 26 women from 16 villages in Liberia on building, installing, and maintaining solar lamps and panels.⁷³ Similarly, in 2019, the GIZ invited women interested in Renewable Energy technologies to participate in an off-line hub to build leadership capacities and create initiatives for the sector.⁷⁴ These initiatives are a step towards the right direction in creating a framework for gender equality in the energy sector; however to achieve the vision of Liberia Rising 2030, more must be done.

Micro Level

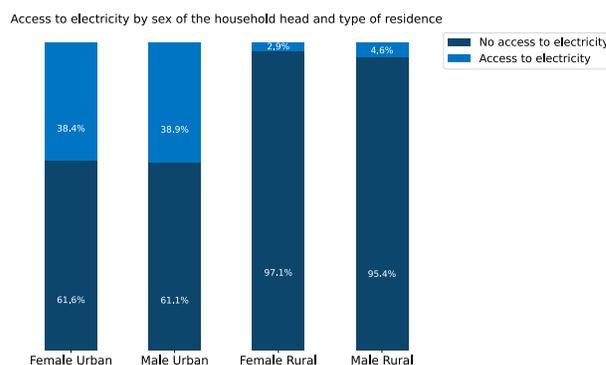
Access to electricity and cooking energy at the household level has been at the center of gender-related energy analysis. The positive impact that such access has

on women's income, educational advances, poverty reduction, and health has been widely concluded throughout global studies.⁷⁵ In Liberia, both of these indicators show substantial disparities that reinforce gender inequalities.

In terms of access to electricity, even though Liberia has had one of the lowest electricity access rates in the world, there has been a considerable increase in the last few years, from 1.9 percent of the population with access to electricity in 2009 to 26.7 percent in 2019.⁷⁶ However, this varies considerably between rural and urban zones, with a 39 percent point difference in the percentage of the population with access to electricity (see Graph 2.8). The difference can be explained by a number of issues such as the high upfront cost of electricity, which is "more likely to be unaffordable for the poor and other disadvantaged groups."⁷⁷ This geographical gap poses an important challenge that has been addressed by development partners. For example, projects led by USAID/Liberia with Power Africa have connected rural households to renewable energy, highlighting the viability of community ownership models which are crucial to improving the well-being of families and entire communities, and ultimately positively impacting the lives of women and girls.⁷⁸

Evidence demonstrates no significant disparity based on the sex of the household head (see Graph 2.8). There is a considerable gap between urban and rural households, but there is only a slight difference in the percentage of male and female-headed households that have access to electricity in urban (38.9 percent versus 38.4 percent) and rural areas (4.6 percent versus 2.9 percent).

Graph 2.8. Access to electricity by sex of the household head and residence

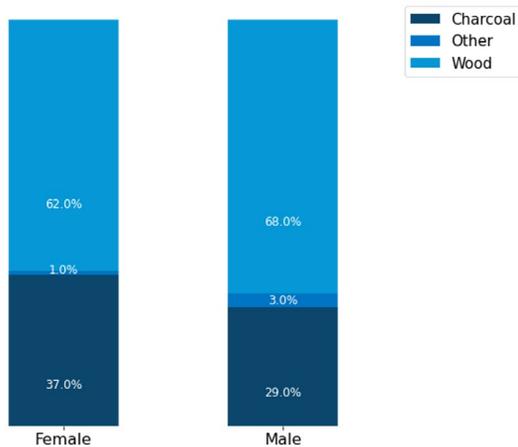


Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

In terms of the type of cooking fuel used, the majority of the population relies on charcoal and wood for heating and cooking, which can cause serious health problems such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD, pneumonia, or lung cancer) due to indoor air pollution.⁷⁹ Moreover, the use of traditional biomasses for cooking can impact immune systems, especially of children.⁸⁰

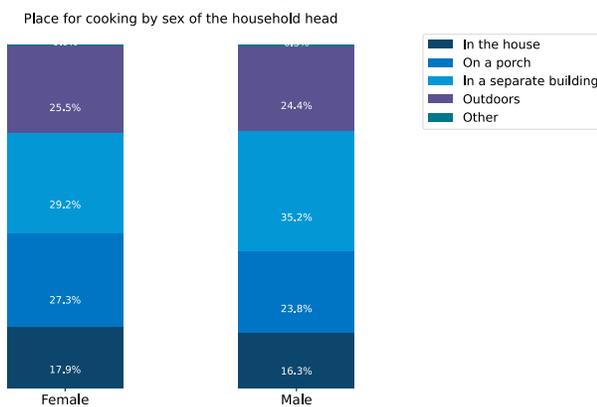
Regarding the type of cooking fuel used, location for cooking, and distinction of whether the fuel is clean or solid, differences between male- and female-headed households expose a gender gap that negatively affects women. While most of the population uses charcoal and wood as cooking fuel, male-headed households are more likely to use other types of cooking fuel (see Graph 2.9), whereas female-headed households are more prone to indoor cooking or using a porch (see Graph 2.10), which exposes them to indoor air pollution and deteriorating health conditions.

Graph 2.9. Cooking fuel by sex of the household head
Percentage of type of cooking fuel by sex of the household head



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

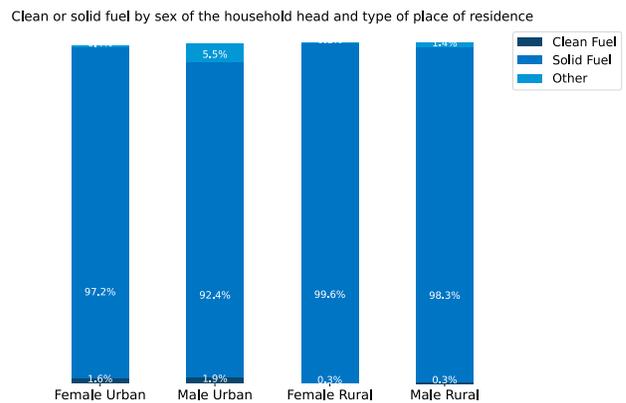
Graph 2.10. Place of cooking by sex of the household head



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

As seen in Graph 2.11, the use of solid fuel - charcoal or wood - is prevalent in all households, but there's a gap between urban female-headed households (97.2 percent) and urban male-headed households (92.4 percent), as well as in rural female-headed households (99.6 percent) and rural male-headed households (98.3 percent). This reaffirms the trends seen previously, in which women are more likely to be exposed to the negative effects of using solid fuel.

Graph 2.11. Clean or solid fuel by sex of the household head and residence



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

At the same time, societal and cultural norms have relegated household and domestic work to women and children. They are generally in charge of gathering wood and making charcoal for heating and cooking, leading to health risks as well as the prevention of them pursuing educational or economic opportunities.⁸¹ The trends in the use of cooking fuel negatively affect the well-being of women and girls across Liberia and deepen gender gaps.

2.5. Women's Entrepreneurship and Economic Empowerment

Data highlights: Sex-disaggregated data on women's entrepreneurship and economic empowerment is partially available. There are relevant, updated and reliable indicators provided by both the DHS 2019-20 and the World Bank. However, further detailed information on self-perception, challenges and coping strategies are necessary to better understand the gender dynamics of this key area.

Women's Entrepreneurship

Women in Liberia are dynamic entrepreneurs, predominating informal businesses in small-scale retail and trade; and they are more likely to be self-employed (69 percent compared to 56 percent of men) and completely own informal enterprises (60 percent compared to 45 percent of men).⁸² However, the socio-economic context of Liberia presents multiple challenges for women entrepreneurs; starting from high illiteracy levels and women's exclusion from household decision-making, to a lack of asset ownership and access to formal financial services and credits. While general literacy is a determining factor for the inclusion of women in the economy, financial literacy and access to business information is equally fundamental; 75 percent of surveyed members of the Alliance for Financial Inclusion identifying financial literacy as the main obstacle for women's inclusion.⁸³ At the same time, research carried out by the WBI & IFC reveals that in Liberia, not only do these gender gaps in education and financial skills exist and are a main obstacle for women, but also that the internal conflicts (civil wars) widened these gaps, showing the complex and cross-sectional character of the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs.⁸⁴

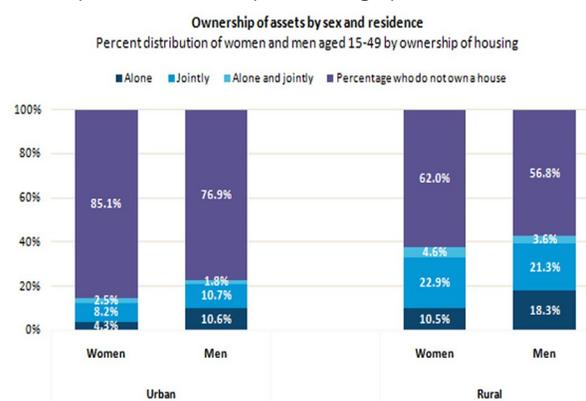
Educational gaps and lack of financial literacy lead to exclusion from financial services, and therefore women often need to independently establish an enterprise or small business. As previously detailed in section 1.1.3, the general population in Liberia faces considerable challenges to access any type of formal financial services, be it commercial banking or mobile financial services. Minimal bank account and phone ownership means that much of the population, especially women from low socio-economic backgrounds and rural contexts, are forced to rely on informal financial

services such as Susu clubs. Thus, the options for women entrepreneurs to establish enterprises are often restricted to informal communal financial services for small credits, perpetuating the cycle of dependence on the informal economy and precarious living conditions.

At the same time, for the limited number of women who do have access to formal financial services, there are challenges which impede access to credits. The Women, Business, and the Law Index has pointed out that there is no explicit prohibition of discrimination in accessing credits based on gender.⁸⁵ This absence of anti-discriminatory legal protections, in conjunction with a lack of overall repayment rates and mainstream credit practices, lead financial services to directly discriminate against women entrepreneurs and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) because they are deemed to be high risk clients.⁸⁶ Another key obstacle in the access to formal credits is the ownership of assets, especially land or housing, as they are the collaterals required by financial institutions. There is a considerable gender gap in which women are less likely to own land (see section 3.1) and housing (24 percent of women versus 31 percent of men), whether it be individual or joint ownership.⁸⁷

There is also a geographical gap which disadvantages the ownership of assets, as men and women who live in urban areas are less likely to own a house (see Graph 2.12) or land (see section 3.1); yet the gender gap is seen in both urban and rural contexts.

Graph 2.12. Ownership of housing by sex and residence



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

Some specific trends in the ownership of assets are also worth noting: on one hand, a higher proportion of women are missing documentation of titles and deeds or they do not know if their name is on the title or deed (for housing-related titles and deeds, this is reflected 3 percent of women compared to less than 1 percent of men).⁸⁸ On the other hand, for the population who owns property, the owner’s name on a title or deed directly increases based on increasing wealth and education levels.⁸⁹ These trends expose a lack of financial literacy and accessibility to financial services for women, which obstructs their entrepreneurship, economic empowerment, and inclusion in the economy. The complicated process of establishing and operating an enterprise as a woman leads to more precarious living conditions and less access to social protections, directly impacting women and girls’ rights and gender equality.

Empowerment in Employment

The previously outlined challenges hinder the success of women entrepreneurs, yet for women who are employed or who are business owners themselves, there are also multiple barriers within their work environment that lead to gender inequality in the workforce.

Informal and formal women-owned businesses are vulnerable to investment climate constraints, especially when it comes to corruption and taxes. Furthermore, gender-based violence (GVB) is a common occurrence which has often been normalized, including “sexual assault from government authorities in return for official permits/transactions is a pervasive problem.”⁹⁰ This is also a common challenge for female employers and employees, who face daily sexual harassment and the presence of conservative social and cultural gender norms in their work environment. This not only contributes to the feminization of certain professions and workplaces, but also relegation of women to lower-ranking positions, as only 20 percent of total management-level positions were held by women in 2010.⁹¹ That being said, due to a reform in the labor sector in 2015, progress has been made on this specific issue; the implementation of this law that is committed to gender equality in workplaces has meant a considerable improvement in Liberia’s Women, Business and the Law Index Score (see Graph 2.13). In fact, in 2017, women’s ownership of, and participation in, firms exhibited an increase in the proportion of women in high decision-making positions, although there is still a considerable disadvantage to

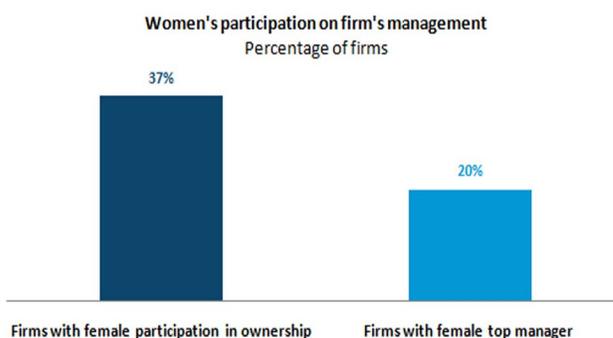
women’s participation in decision-making positions (see Graph 2.14).

Graph 2.13. Women in Business and the Law Index score



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from the World Bank: Women, Business, and the Law (wbl.worldbank.org.). Data retrieved on 2021-07-26.

Graph 2.14. Women’s participation in firms’ management (2017)



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from the World Bank, Enterprise Surveys (enterprisesurveys.org). Data retrieved on 2021-07-26.

The importance of women’s participation in decision-making bodies not only leads to the empowerment of those women, but also has an important impact on overall work environments and their communities, ultimately contributing to the protection of women’s rights and their equal participation in society.

2.6. Women and Technical and Vocational Education Training

Data highlights: Sex-disaggregated data on participation and provision of Technical and Vocational Education Training is scarce, with a large gap in TVET indicator for Liberia, particularly in terms of STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) professions. There is also a lack of information on the trajectory of industries, emerging skills needs, and projections of future returns on investment in education and training, particularly for women and girls.

Technical and Educational Segregation

Women's gender roles, early marriage, teenage pregnancy, and the training of women exclusively in certain professions such as hospitality and cosmetology are some of the main causes that prevent them from acquiring competitive job skills and transitioning into the labor sector.⁹²

Graph 2.15 shows that there are traditionally assigned professions to women, such as services and sales. It is important to recognize that participation in the agricultural sector is high for both men and women. Women's participation is considerably low in the professional, technical, managerial areas, and other areas. Additionally,

the rates of involvement in areas such as sales and services and agriculture vary from county to county.

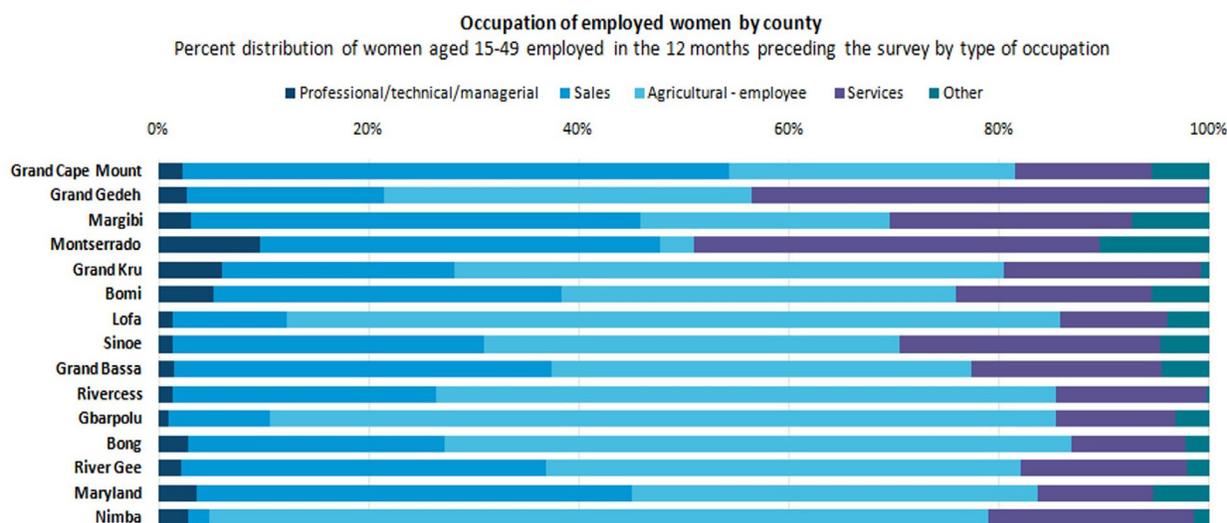
Moreover, training programs are concentrated in Monrovia and Montserrado, excluding a significant portion of the rural population from these opportunities.⁹³ This is particularly worrying because rural areas have concentrations of the highest percentage of unemployed young people, in addition to the fact that most of this population juggles studies with work and. Consequently, there are young people up to 19 years of age who are completing primary education.⁹⁴

In Liberia, as in many other parts of the world, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields are dominated by males, while other professions, such as education, are traditionally assigned to women.⁹⁵

Women in Education

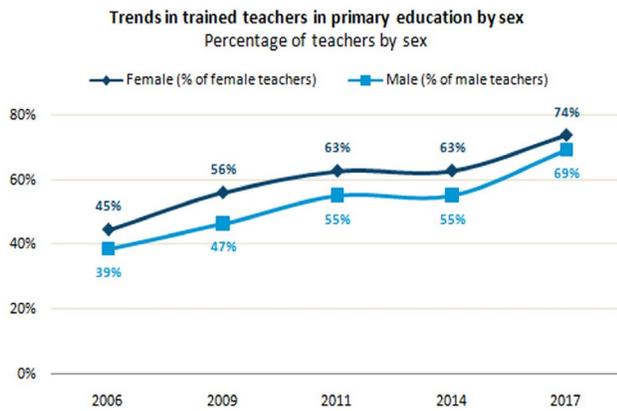
As shown in the graphs below, women are involved and well represented in primary education. Women in the sector also receive the most training. Graph 2.17 shows that women's involvement in secondary education is considerably reduced compared to primary education.

Graph 2.15. Occupation of employed women by county (ages 15-49)



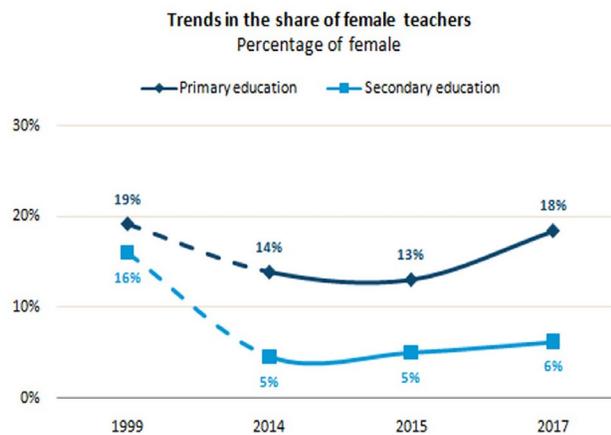
Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

Graph 2.16. Trends in trained teachers in primary education by sex



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from OCHA (n.d.) Data retrieved on 2021-06-17 [Original source: The World Bank].

Graph 2.17. Trends in share of female teachers in primary and secondary education



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from OCHA (n.d.) Data retrieved on 2021-06-17 [Original source: The World Bank].

The reason for this trend may be lower wages that characterize female-dominated jobs.⁹⁶ Moreover, the absence of women professionals in higher education is a recurrent phenomenon in the African continent.⁹⁷

Additionally, this low participation of women in higher education is due to the low percentage of females who graduate from the school system.⁹⁸ Thus, the supply of teachers is biased even before the selection process. Furthermore, even with an education degree, women face employment difficulties and reluctance due to challenging gender roles.⁹⁹ This educational and technical segregation constitutes a form of discrimination against women and perpetuates economic disadvantage.

Women in Technology

Globally, women's participation in technology is 28 percent, and in sub-Saharan Africa, the figure is 30 percent.¹⁰⁰ The eradication of this gap is a fundamental step towards Liberia's scientific and technological progress and will also contribute to poverty reduction at the national level. According to figures from PwC South Africa, increasing female participation in this sector would give low-income households a 2.9 percent increase in income.¹⁰¹

In 2019, the organization Women in Tech Africa launched a Liberia Chapter to encourage Liberian women and girls to participate in STEM fields.¹⁰²

Similarly, because of a program conducted by the EU and UNIDO for the promotion of STEM technologies in Liberia, five potential pedagogical and technological courses were identified, and aim to:¹⁰³

1. Increase agricultural productivity;
2. Develop skills relevant to the energy sector;
3. Build knowledge in information and communication technologies;
4. Encourage cross-cutting courses on metal fabrication and mechatronics; and
5. Promote pedagogy courses.

The project is currently in progress, and the organizations will present results in 2024 when the program is due to be completed.¹⁰⁴

Challenges

Critical challenges in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in Liberia include addressing the education gap and increasing access to technical training for women in high-growth, modern-economy occupations.¹⁰⁵

Another necessary action is the inclusion and involvement of female students in STEM fields through programs such as internships. Buehren and Salisbury's study shows that one of the most influential factors in a young woman's decision to enroll in a male-dominated technical and vocational course is their familiarity with the relevant trade.¹⁰⁶ For example, having relatives or friends working in the area who provide women with insight into the sector allows women to acquire a clearer idea of earning potential and the type of tasks they would perform, directly influencing their decision to enroll.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, familiarity with, and awareness of, a given sector are determining factors for women who are considering professional development.

Furthermore, there is a lack of information on the future trajectory of industries, emerging skills needs, and projections of future returns on investment in education and training. Highlighting the importance of STEM professions is necessary both in the design of educational programs as well as attracting female students' interest.¹⁰⁸

Multilateral cooperation is also an indispensable factor. Because of the disparity in women's participation in STEM,

cooperation in African sub-regions is vital. As UNDP points out, it requires that the more advanced regions in the South and East support others that have not yet developed the necessary infrastructure to promote more women in this sector.¹⁰⁹

2.7. Women, The Environment and Climate Change

Data highlights: *Sex-disaggregated data on climate change impacts and decision-making processes is not available. Understanding the different impacts of climate change on men and women, as well as their participation in both mitigation and adaptation strategies is critical since Liberian women are highly vulnerable to environmental hazards, particularly water stress. Information on geographical, socio-economic and cultural characteristics would also be desirable to better comprehend any potential differences in coping mechanisms to environmental shocks.*

Liberia is situated in one of the most biologically diverse regions in the world. The country is located in the center of the Upper Guinea Rainforest Region, along the West Coast of Africa. Given the vast biodiversity of the region, West Africa has one of the richest natural resource reserves, covered by a continuous block of dense tropical rainforest as well as easily accessible freshwater and marine resources.¹¹⁰ However, the region is highly vulnerable to climate shocks, particularly in terms of recurrent drought and rising sea levels.¹¹¹ This is particularly concerning because according to a recently published report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the impacts of climate change such as rising sea levels are expected to continue increasing exponentially for the next few years.¹¹²

The Environmental Protection Agency of Liberia (EPA) acknowledges that sea levels have risen, along with

changes in rainfall patterns and coastal erosion.¹¹³ It is expected that by 2100, Liberia's sea levels will rise 0.6-1.0 meters, eradicating several sources of livelihood — particularly agriculture and fisheries — and forcing intense displacement of the population to other regions in the country.¹¹⁴ This is particularly concerning because Liberia's coastline hosts about 58 percent of the country's population and is essential for agricultural and fishing activities.¹¹⁵

In addition, as the majority of the countries forming the West African region, Liberia is highly vulnerable to climate variability because of the country's heavy dependence on economic activities from agriculture, forestry and fisheries. According to a predictive study produced by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) in 2013, there is expected to be considerable temperature rises and precipitation changes due to climate change in Liberia, which may cause substantial losses to the production of rice, the country's staple food crop.¹¹⁶ In this sense, environmental changes pose a threat to the country in terms of not only the economy and agriculture, but also food security.

Another important factor increasing the country's vulnerability to climate change is the fragility of the Liberian Government's institutions, as well as the lack of financial resources and low technical capacity to adapt and respond to climate change. During the years of civil war, Liberia's network of meteorological monitoring and forecasting centers were destroyed and have yet to be restored,

undermining the country's internal capacity to adapt farming and forestry activities to environmental strains.¹¹⁷ However, the country's efforts to mitigate the effects of climate change, and prevent and respond to future risks have increased considerably since the end of the second civil war. In 2018, the GoL launched the National Policy and Response Strategy on Climate Change, and in 2021, the EPA released Liberia's Second National Communication to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.¹¹⁸ Both documents precisely highlight the importance of mainstreaming gender — focusing on women, youth, children, and people with disabilities — in planning, decision-making, and implementing climate change responses across Liberia.

In order to tackle the impacts of climate change, it is critical to acknowledge women's greater vulnerability to suffering from the adverse effects of environmental hazards. In Liberia, women are disproportionately grouped in the least productive sectors, with almost 90 percent of them employed in the informal sector and agriculture.¹¹⁹ As previously stressed by the AfDB, "African women stand on the frontline confronting the challenges that climate change poses to their livelihoods and the health of their families. Yet, they are poorly equipped to slow change, and poorly resourced for the adaptations demanded of them."¹²⁰

Environmental hazards may provoke shortfalls in terms of access to clean water. According to the AfDB, one of the main climate variability challenges faced by women is water stress because "diverting fresh water to areas where there is a water shortage (dikes, water transfer, or irrigation canals) may have the unintended consequence of lengthening and/or intensifying the productive and reproductive working day of women by placing water sources in distant zones." That also may apply to Liberia, considering that in the country, women and girls have the primary responsibility to manage household water supplies, sanitation and health.¹²¹ However, lack of data on water stress limits further analysis to identify the extent of this issue in the country.

In 2012, the government of Liberia developed a Climate Change Gender Action Plan (CCGAP) to provide a framework for enhancing gender equality in both climate adaptation — the process of adjusting to current or expected climate change shocks and effects — and mitigation — the process of tackling the causes of climate change in order to minimize the possible impacts of environmental hazards. The CCGAP

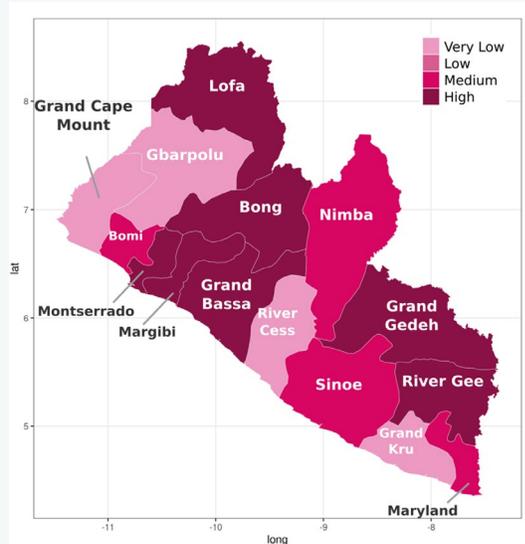
takes into account gender for decision-making processes, capacity-building activities, and measures to guarantee that global warming and climate change vulnerabilities are addressed with a gender perspective.¹²² According to the CCGAP, curbing climate change requires the participation of women in creating processes to adapt to climate change and mitigation strategies, particularly when considering the critical role of women in energy efficiency; their receptiveness and adaptability to greener sources of energy; as well as their power to change consumption patterns.¹²³ However, there is a large gap in sex-disaggregated data and official statistics in Liberia that allows for further analysis of not only the impacts of climate change on women, but also the extent to which they have been included in decision-making processes for both climate change adaptation and mitigation. As a result, this prevents a holistic discussion on the aforementioned key areas such as water availability, agriculture, forestry, and fisheries.

In addition, the successful integration of a gender perspective is only feasible once both women and men possess adequate comprehension of climate change, as well as have the capacity to share information on counteracting its negative impacts jointly.¹²⁴ However, according to the Afrobarometer, awareness about climate change in Liberia is higher among males than females (67 percent for males in comparison to 41 percent for females).¹²⁵ This kind of information is concerning from a political point of view because it not only indicates that women do not have the same understanding or perception of climate change as men, but also demonstrates that they continue to be marginalized and excluded from processes and strategies to combat climate change along with its negative consequences on the environment and population.

Box 2.1. Flooding in Liberia

One of the biggest challenges Liberia faces in regard to climate change is the high risk of flooding. According to the webportal ThinkHazard! — a risk tool provided by the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery— Liberia presents a high risk index for urban and river flooding, and a medium risk for coastal flooding. The urban area of Greater Monrovia is largely affected by this phenomenon, considering that its high risk of flooding is further complicated by the city's high socioeconomic vulnerability.

Map 2.1. Flooding risk by county



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from ThinkHazard Liberia Report. Data retrieved on 2021-08-19.

The city of Monrovia houses 1.3 million inhabitants where 2 out of 3 live in slum communities in the lowlands and swamps.¹²⁶ This translates to 90 percent of the population at risk to flooding from the sea or river system, and facing serious consequences related to health problems and employment.¹²⁷ Regarding health issues, nearly half the city's population practices open defecation; the combination of this practice in periods of consistent rainfall and flooding doubles the risk of contracting diseases such as malaria, cholera and diarrheal disease. In terms of employment, many sources of income are threatened when high waters

flood business establishments and hinder the capacity of the population to move around. It is estimated that around 2,150 km² will be lost from a rise in sea level by one meter, including land, infrastructure, and a large portion of Monrovia, with damages valued at \$250,000,000.¹²⁸

This situation disproportionately affects women because they not only are threatened by income loss — considering that flooding may impede their capacity to commute to their areas of work — but also face extra burdens in terms of household workload, given their primary responsibility in collecting water and wood. This workload increases due to the longer distances they would have to travel because of damages caused by the flooding. Additionally, limited awareness of disaster risk reduction's gender dimensions as well as women's limited participation in climate change decision-making processes also create negative consequences for adequate gender-sensitive response to flooding.¹²⁹ Women have been on the frontline of adapting to climate change and in building the resilience of their communities to face the continuous threat of natural hazards like floods.¹³⁰ They often mobilize through community-based networks and organizations, directly contributing to disaster preparedness and mitigation.¹³¹ Therefore, women must be acknowledged as actors of change instead of only victims. Furthermore, the GoL and INGOs should invest more in promoting women's capacities and knowledge in addressing natural disasters.

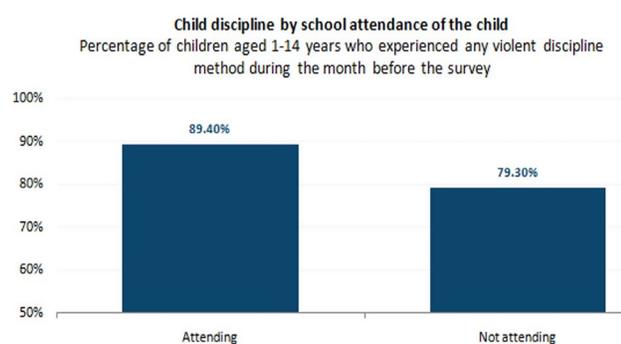
2.8. Gender-Based Violence and Human Trafficking

Data highlights: Sex-disaggregated data on gender-based violence is comprehensive, exhaustive, reliable and updated. Indicators used in this section are provided by the DHS 2019-20 and the Gender Based Violence 2020 Statistical Report of the Ministry of Gender. It is

important to notice that the latter data was not easily accessible, as it had to be requested and was not open access. In terms of human trafficking, sex-disaggregated data explaining patterns or trends is scarce and majorly unavailable.

Gender-based violence continues to be one of the most pervasive forms of human rights abuse in Liberia. In war and post-war contexts, while this phenomenon adversely affects both men and women, women and children are primarily the most victimized groups, at risk of suffering the worst forms of mistreatment and consequences.¹³² Many of the youth of the current Liberian generation were raised amid the two armed conflicts, having lived and experienced the most brutal forms of the conflict and violence perpetrated during that time. Different studies have shown that when young boys are socialized from an early age to express hyper-masculinity – which is linked to the use of violence as a means to obtain social prestige – this will shape their sense of “manhood” and increase the likelihood of them turning to violence as part of being a man.¹³³ According to recent data, 85.2 percent of children aged between 1 and 14 years in Liberia have experienced at least one type of physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by caregivers.¹³⁴ Furthermore, children who attend school seem to suffer more violence than those who do not (see Graph 2.18). There are several reasons that explain this trend, including corporal punishment of children and youth by teachers and school assistants. In Liberia, for instance, punishment in school is only prohibited in a few settings, which makes the practice acceptable depending on the school facility.¹³⁵ This may also explain why GBV is still such a prevalent and long-lasting issue in the country even 20 years after the end of the second civil war.

Graph 2.18. Violent child discipline by school attendance of the child

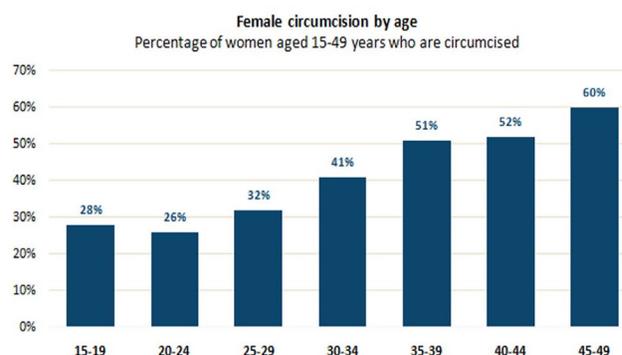


Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

Experiencing violence may begin at a very early age in Liberia, especially for young girls. The practice of FGM is still common and widespread among the population. According to the Association of Female Lawyers in Liberia (AFELL), around 85 percent of the population of Liberia

is made up of Sande practicing ethnic groups, and these groups are known for initiating girls into adulthood by rituals that include FGM, alleging that such rites are necessary for the passage to womanhood, promoting adult responsibility, and establishing proper sexual behavior.¹³⁶ In 2013, statistics show that FGM was a nearly universal custom within practicing communities, in which around 75 percent of women aged 45-49 years were circumcised.¹³⁷ Although this number has decreased over time, it still represents a concerning statistic. In 2019, 60 percent of women belonging to the same age group of 45-49 years were circumcised (see Graph 2.19). These statistics are even more disturbing when broken down by region. Rates of female circumcision are as high as 78 percent in Gbarpolu, 71 percent in Grand Cape Mount, and 68 percent in Lofa (see Map 2.2). Opinions regarding the continuation of the practice vary greatly by the region where the practice is perpetrated. For instance, in Grand Kru, where only 3 percent of women aged 15-49 years have been circumcised, 84 percent of women do not want the practice to continue, whereas in Grand Cape Mount – the county that has one of the highest rates of FGM – only 25 percent of women do not want the practice to continue.¹³⁸

Graph 2.19. Female circumcision by age

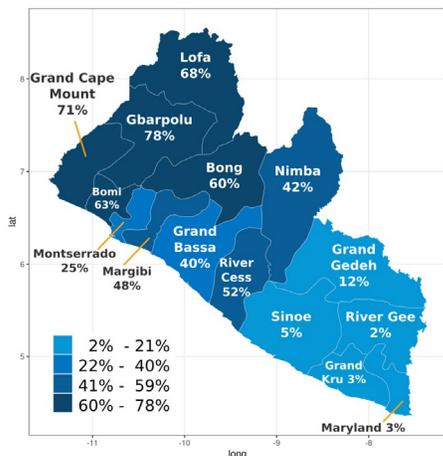


Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

A recent study conducted by the Women In Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET) and the Program of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP - Liberia), in collaboration with the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Liberia (MIA) and the National Council of Chiefs & Elders of Liberia (NACCEL) shows that due to women’s rights advocates and traditional leaders constantly urging for the suspension of FGM taking place at Sande schools in Lofa county, local residents started relocating girls to neighboring

places in Sierra Leone so that circumcision could still take place.¹³⁹ This is an alarming finding, considering that such a practice has proven to negatively impact girls' lives, particularly when circumcision is performed poorly and causes severe health complications, leading to difficulty during childbirth and even death.

Map 2.2. Female circumcision by county
Percentage of women aged 15-49 years who are circumcised

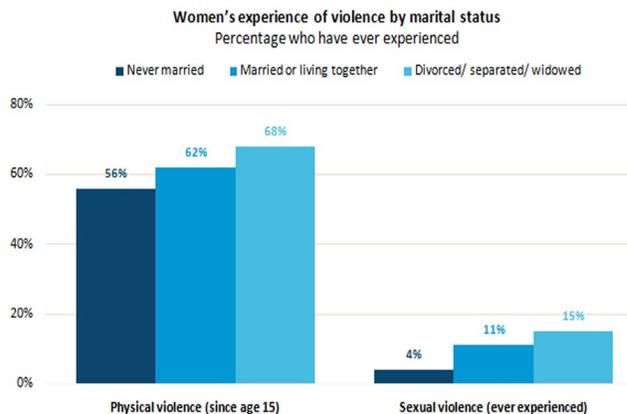


Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

As discussed in Chapter 1, violence against women and girls is a sociocultural problem rooted in traditional gender norms and beliefs in Liberia. Because of the magnitude this problem represents for the country's development, many actors and stakeholders, including the government, international non-governmental organizations, civil society, and women's rights advocates have dedicated their attention and employed various efforts to tackle this crisis. Women's movements have played a central role in advocating for the creation of new state agencies to address GBV, as well as development and implementation of programs to prevent rape and support survivors.¹⁴⁰ The government of Liberia recently approved the 2019 Domestic Violence Bill, which aims to abolish all forms of violence against women, children, and men, and provides assistance to, and protection of, victims of violence.¹⁴¹ However, the percentage of women who have experienced at least one form of physical violence since age 15 increased by 16 percent since 2007, from 44 percent in 2007 to 60 percent in 2019-20. Women who are divorced, separated, or widowed are the most likely to have experienced physical violence (see Graph 2.20). It is also important to highlight that this violence is mainly concentrated in urban spaces, with 67 percent of women living in Greater Monrovia

compared to 54 percent of rural women reporting that they have experienced physical violence.

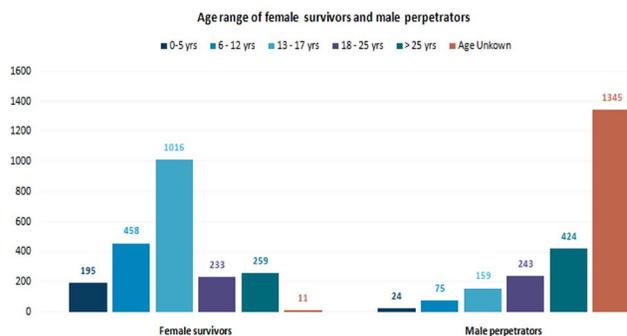
Graph 2.20. Women's experience of violence by marital status



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

Although physical violence seems to be the most prevalent form of violence in the country, it is often difficult to separate this violence from other accompanied forms of violence. For example, physical and sexual violence do not always occur in isolation. To date, 61 percent of women aged 15-49 years have experienced either physical or sexual violence in Liberia.¹⁴² In regard to physical violence, some studies suggest that exposure to war events is highly associated with physical intimate partner violence (IPV) among both men and women — with women more likely to be victims of IPV, and men more likely to perpetrate IPV.¹⁴³ According to LDHS 2019-20, in Liberia, most of the physical violence experienced by women aged 15-49 years is perpetrated by a current husband or partner (37.6 percent). It is equally important to note that the age of females most likely to suffer some sort of GBV is between 6 and 17 years old, whereas the age of male perpetrators is usually 25 years and older (see Graph 2.21).

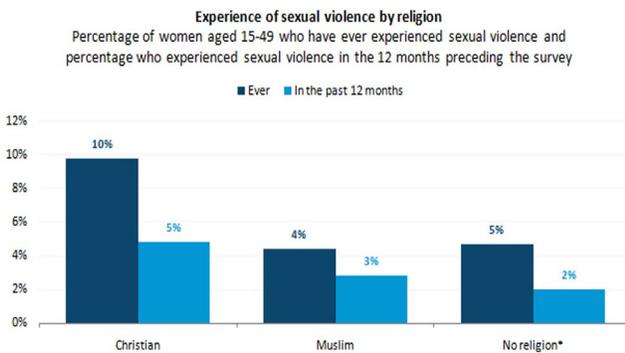
Graph 2.21. Age range of female survivors and male perpetrators



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from the Ministry of Gender, Children & Social Protection (2021).

Isolated estimates of SGBV are somewhat more optimistic. Latest data indicates that only 9 percent of Liberian women aged between 15 and 49 years reported that they have experienced sexual violence at least once in life.¹⁴⁴ However, it is important to carefully consider the validity of this trend. Although SGBV has diminished in recent years, it may be more prevalent amongst those coming from certain backgrounds. For instance, when analyzing sexual violence in relation to religion, it is possible to conclude that Christian women are more likely to have experienced sexual violence than Muslims or women who do not follow any religion in particular (see Graph 2.22). This trend follows a broader issue in which sexual violence against Christian women prevails across every region in the world. According to the Gender-Specific Religious Persecution 2020 report, sexual violence committed against Christian women is more common because the abuses are “rooted in the belief that a Christian woman is of inherently lesser value than a man or woman of another faith. It’s all in a concentrated effort to take away a woman’s right to make up her own mind.”¹⁴⁵

Graph 2.22. Experience of sexual violence by religion

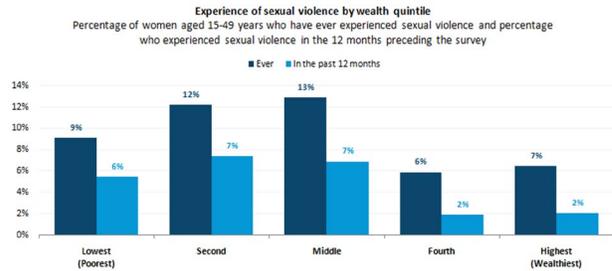


Note: *Figures are based on 25-49 unweighted cases

Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

In Liberia, SGBV also seems to be perpetrated more frequently against women with lower and middle-income backgrounds than amongst those with more economic resources (see Graph 2.23). This may be attributed to the fact that women in more favorable economic situations are able to afford better resources to protect themselves from this type of violence, such as using paid private transportation instead of walking on streets alone.

Graph 2.23. Experience of sexual violence by wealth quintile



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

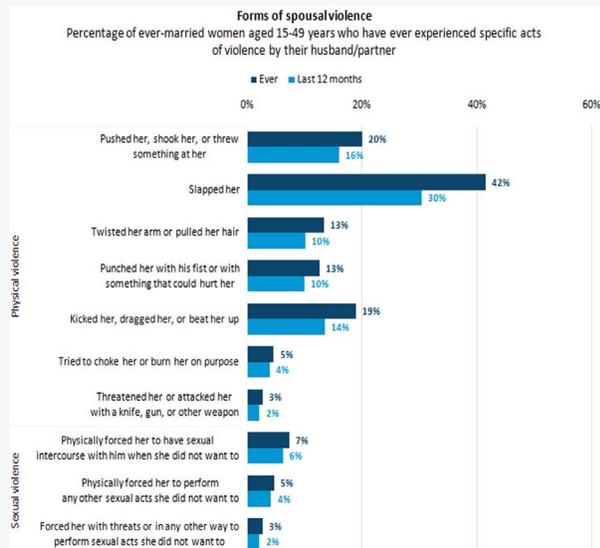
Rape continues to be a very concerning and widespread issue in Liberia. During Liberia’s civil war years, rape was one of the main weapons used by combatants to destabilize enemy groups since the majority of the warring factions targeted women.¹⁴⁶ Today, when comparing trends of GBV incidents by different sexes, data shows that rape is strikingly more prevalent among females than males. According to the GBV Statistical Report of the MGCS, 1,441 females reported to have suffered rape or sodomy, whereas only 21 males reported to have been abused by the same type of GBV; and 84 females reported to have suffered from gang rape, whereas no males reported the same sort of violence.¹⁴⁷

Box 2.2. Intra-marital violence in Liberia

One of the greatest problems with societies grounded in traditional gender norms is precisely the widespread belief that husbands control and own their wives. Whenever this belief is challenged, there is a high likelihood that men will resort to violence in order to resolve intra-marital conflicts. In Liberia, one of the most common marital controlling behaviors reported by ever-married women (66 percent of them) is a husband’s expression of jealousy or hatred if a wife talks to other men, which is then followed by the husband’s insistence that he must know where the wife is at all times (63 percent). In turn, 55 percent of ever-married Liberian women reported having experienced spousal emotional, physical, or sexual violence, and the prevalence of one or more of these forms of violence increased by 6 percent from 2007 to 2019-20 — from 49 percent to 55 percent, respectively. The most common type of physical violence reported by ever-married women is slapping

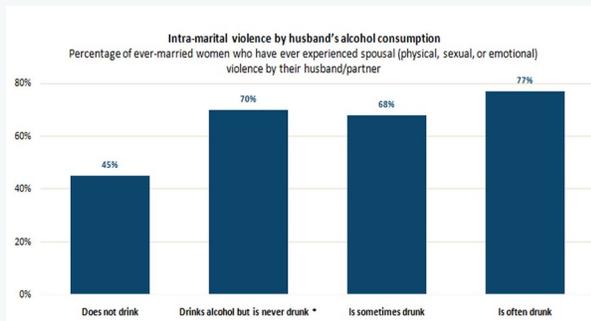
(42 percent, see Graph 2.24). Husbands’ alcohol abuse appears to be highly associated with the likelihood of wives experiencing any form of violence. According to recent data, 77 percent of women whose husband gets drunk frequently reported to have experienced emotional, physical, or sexual violence, in comparison to 45 percent of women whose husband does not consume alcohol (see Graph 2.25).

Graph 2.24. Forms of spousal violence



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

Graph 2.25. Intra-marital violence by husband’s alcohol consumption



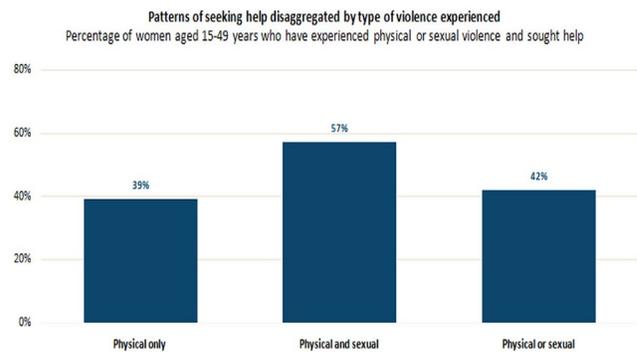
Note: *Figures are based on 25-49 unweighted cases.

Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

Another important factor associated with GBV is precisely the act of reporting or seeking help when violence is experienced. According to UN estimates, less than 40 percent of women experiencing intimate partner violence

report this crime or seek any type of support.¹⁴⁸ In Liberia, these statistics are more promising than in other parts of the world, specifically when analyzed from the perspective of the type of violence. According to the Liberia DHS 2019-20, more than 50 percent of women who have experienced both physical and sexual violence are more likely to seek help (see Graph 2.26). Seeking help is also more predominant among women who are employed and financially remunerated than women who are not employed — 48 percent against 37 percent, respectively. It is also important to note that of the women who sought help, more than half reported that the support received was useful for the situation at that time, and 33 percent said that the support was useful in the long run.

Graph 2.26. Patterns of seeking help disaggregated by type of violence experienced



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Liberia DHS 2019-20.

The services offered by the GoL to support victims of GBV include two government-operated shelters for victims of SGBV and two hotlines for reporting SGBV-related crimes.¹⁴⁹ In 2016, the MGCSF also inaugurated the National 116 Helpline for children to report against all forms of violence.¹⁵⁰ Civil society and international organizations have also been key actors in providing services for victims of GBV. This is the case of the Liberia Crisis Center for Abused Women and Children, which was funded in 2005 and opened its first safe shelter in Liberia for children and women survivors of SGBV in 2006. The center operates in 25 communities throughout Monrovia and provides victims with shelter, counseling, and legal services, as well as mentoring, advocacy and prevention programs for rural and urban communities.¹⁵¹ Likewise, the THINK homes in Liberia provide shelter, vocational skills training, and medical and psychological support. Their services consist of safe homes which provide refuge for victims of GBV and

one-stop clinics which offer medical, legal, and psychological services all in a single location for victims.¹⁵² They have also provided training services to the Liberian National Police (LNP), teaching staff on the importance of procedures for ensuring prosecution. Other organizations have also taken on the task of supporting the LNP. The AFELL was an active participant in the drafting of the Sexual Assault and Abuse Police Handbook for the Women and Children Protection Section of the Liberian National Police.¹⁵³

Despite this range of services, there are still several limiting factors that prevent victims of GBV from receiving help. Most of these services are concentrated in urban areas, mainly in Greater Monrovia, which limits access for rural women and girls.¹⁵⁴ Additionally, most of these services are focused on helping victims of sexual violence, particularly rape, while ignoring other forms of GBV, including physical, psychological, and economic domestic violence.¹⁵⁵ There is also a lack of staff training on providing clinical and psychological care for SGBV survivors, particularly in medical

facilities. Despite possessing a willingness to provide assistance, these staff are limited in their capabilities and resources.¹⁵⁶ These factors pose tremendous barriers for victims of GBV in reporting as well as searching and receiving necessary help.

Finally, one form of GBV that is rarely discussed – yet is equally as important and alarming as other forms of violence – is the trafficking of women and children. Human trafficking can be defined as the deceitful transfer of persons to supply market demands generally associated with sex labor, particularly in the case of women and girls, as well as young boys.¹⁵⁷ In the case of Liberia, data explaining patterns or trends about this phenomenon is scarce. According to the Counter Trafficking Data Collaborative (CTDC), 91 percent of the victims of human trafficking are women, and half of the victims are trafficked to Lebanon. Most of the victims are adults (88 percent), aged in their mid-20s (almost 35 percent).¹⁵⁸

2.9. Women, Migration and Displacement

***Data highlights:** Sex-disaggregated data is available, relevant and updated for macro-level trends on migration patterns. Key sex-disaggregated Indicators used in this section are mainly provided by UNDESA. However, more sex-disaggregated data would be desirable, specially on the particular challenges faced by female refugees and internal displaced populations. Sex-disaggregated data on environmental disaster displacement was also not available.*

Liberian Refugees and Forcibly Displaced Persons

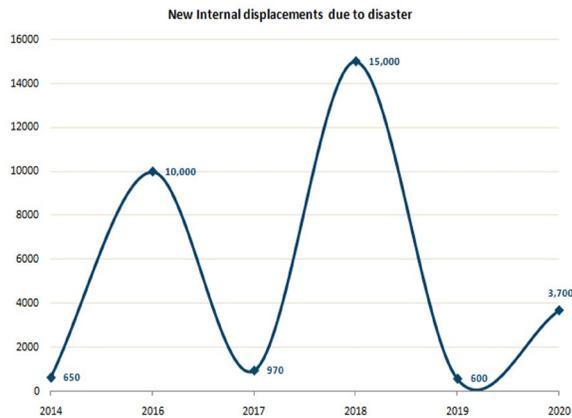
The status of refugees and forcibly displaced persons has gained increasing importance, as thousands of Liberians were forced to flee their homes during the conflict and migrate to either new localities or neighboring countries. According to Omata & Takahashi, the “reintegration of conflict-affected communities remains one of the most daunting challenges in post-crisis recovery,” among which refugees and displaced people are particularly vulnerable.¹⁵⁹

After the civil wars, the UNHCR, in coordination with the GoL, established and managed a voluntary repatriation program; by the end of 2012, more than 155,000 Liberians had returned to the country.¹⁶⁰ Nonetheless, the reintegration process has often been met with difficulties in finding sustainable livelihoods, especially for women, who often participate in the informal economy, have less access to financial services, possess less education, and are often relegated to domestic duties. Despite support from international development partners such as UNIDO’s skills training program, crises including the Ebola epidemic led to the delayed entry of women into the labor market.¹⁶¹ Moreover, there are always risks of new conflicts emerging due to land disputes; this is caused by conflicts between returnees who own improperly documented land and those who, in the meantime, had settled down on land disputed by those who had been internally displaced.¹⁶²

At the same time, the forced displacement of people due to environmental disasters has gained increasing attention, as

disasters directly affect communities, livelihoods, and the stability of countries; and, the lack of an efficient response can lead to mistrust and conflicts in society.¹⁶³ Women play a critical role in the prevention and reduction of disasters, yet they are still “largely excluded from formal planning and decision-making,”¹⁶⁴ which can lead to disadvantages for women and girls when it comes to bearing the risks and consequences of environmental disasters. Considering the cyclical trends of new internal displacements in Liberia (see Graph 2.27), disaster prevention and preparedness should be considered when developing strategies to protect women and girls from increased vulnerability.

Graph 2.27. Trend in new internal displacements due to disaster



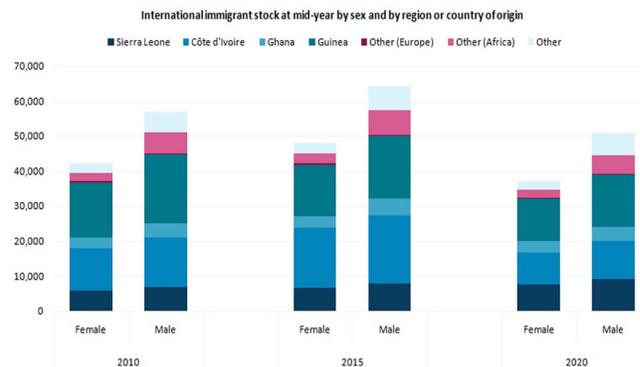
Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) (2020). Data retrieved on 2021-07-26.

Migrants and Refugees from Foreign Countries

Migrants from neighboring countries also complicate matters for the country of Liberia. Even though the total number of migrants by mid-2020 was at a historically low number (87,900 migrants, 1.7 percent of the total population) in comparison to previous years, conflicts in neighboring countries have led to an influx of migrants and refugees.¹⁶⁵ It is important to note that the experiences of migrants and refugees are not comparable, as the conditions of migration, and resources are either voluntary or forced, and thus the difficulties faced differ considerably. However, in the case of Liberia, the vast majority of immigrants historically come from the sub-Saharan region (see Graph 2.28), and they are most often refugees who flee their countries during times of conflict. For example, there was an increase in the number of refugees from 6,900 in 2009 to more than 128,000 in 2011 due to various crises and conflicts in the region, including the second civil war in Côte d’Ivoire.¹⁶⁶ This dramatic rise in persons fleeing the conflict led to UNHCR establishing and managing refugee camps in Liberia, as well

as guiding integration processes with local communities. Even though the GoL supported this intervention, it evolved from being an urgent crisis into a prolonged problem “with no immediate end in sight,”¹⁶⁷ which may potentially lead to conflicts between groups as refugees attempt to integrate into a society with limited opportunities.

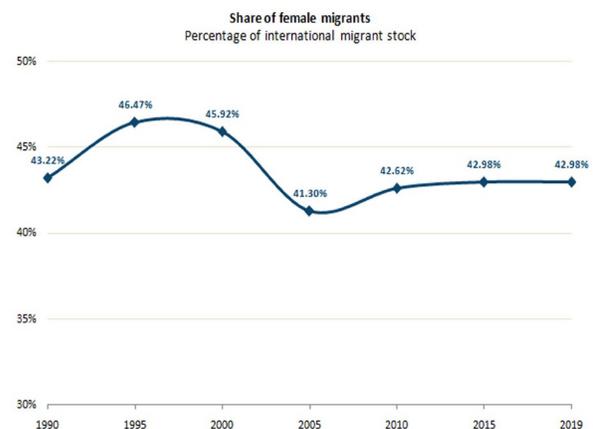
Graph 2.28. Trends in international immigrant stock at mid-year by sex and by region or country of origin



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2020). International Migrant Stock 2020. Data retrieved on 2021-07-26.

As shown in Graph 2.29, the proportion of male and female migrants does not present a significant difference by country of origin, and close to 90 percent of both male and female migrants come from sub-Saharan Africa. The percentage of female migrants has changed during the last few decades; while it was at 43.2 percent in 1990 and observed its peak in 1995 and 2000 (46.5 percent and 45.9 percent, respectively), the percentage decreased to 41.3 percent in 2005 and has since stabilized at 43 percent.

Graph 2.29. Female migrants (% of international migrant stock)



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2020). International Migrant Stock 2020. Data retrieved on 2021-07-26.

2.10. Women, COVID-19 and Other Epidemics' Impact, Response and Recovery Implications

Data highlights: Sex-disaggregated data on Ebola and COVID-19 cases are made available on a periodic basis by the National Public Health Institute of Liberia (NPHIL)/Ministry of Health. In the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, Our World in Data provides relevant and updated information; however, it is not sex-disaggregated data. The Afrobarometer also provides information on the perceptions of citizens on how governments have handled the COVID-19 pandemic as well as number of people vaccinated; however, it is not sex-disaggregated data either. Moreover, there is a lack of sex-disaggregated data measuring the effects of Ebola and COVID-19 pandemics.

Government Response to the Ebola Virus Disease

One of the first measures taken by the GoL to address the EVD was to create the Ebola Task Force. This task force was headed by the MoH and conducted daily meetings to provide updates on the progress that was being made, as well as the challenges and opportunities to prevent and control the disease.¹⁶⁸ Some measures taken by the task force included a mandatory prohibition of movement and a state-enforced quarantine. The GoL also rolled out a strong communication strategy that centered on countering disbelief by promoting messages such as “Ebola is real.”¹⁶⁹ Yet, this backfired and led to the stigmatization of the disease, which caused people to hide any signs of illness instead of seeking medical assistance. Many reported that the GoL launched a fear-mongering campaign that did not explain what the disease was, how it was transmitted, or why there was a need for specific measures such as the cremation of bodies.¹⁷⁰ Therefore, virus’ novelty and unprecedented nature of the health emergency for the country complicated the GoL’s communications efforts.

However, a positive legacy from the EVD was the creation of the Incident Management System, supported by the

US Center for Disease Control & Prevention, WHO, and the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, which was also used to incubate a strategy to increase the efficiency and sustainability of a response to the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁷¹ These strategies led to increased health expenditures after the Ebola epidemic. In terms of disease control, the EVD catalyzed the adoption of two main health priorities in Liberia: to ensure rapid recognition and containment of resurgent diseases, and to restore health services to address vaccine-preventable diseases (measles) and malaria.¹⁷²

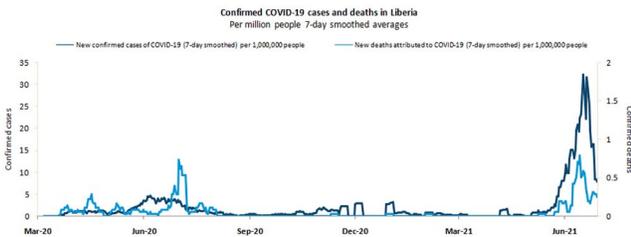
Socio-Economic impacts of the EVD

The consequences of the Ebola epidemic influenced all sectors of society. During the health crisis, access to sexual, reproductive, and maternal health care services was extremely limited. Rates of immunization fell from 73 percent to 36 percent which contributed to the rise of measles in the following years in addition to challenges in responding to malaria, which had overlapping symptoms to Ebola.¹⁷³ Under the EVD, education also suffered setbacks as schools were shut down for many months and when they did reopen, parents faced economic obstacles that prevented them from sending their children back to school.¹⁷⁴ The situation was further complicated by the fact that the Ebola epidemic left behind 6,000 orphaned children.¹⁷⁵ In regards to the economic implications, the EVD measures such as national quarantines and the impact of the virus on the whole region caused many long-lasting economic consequences. During the EVD, unemployment rates also rose significantly as shown by a World Bank survey that reported that 41 percent of household heads who had a job at the start of the EVD were unemployed by the time of the survey.¹⁷⁶ These effects in different sectors illustrate Liberia’s vulnerability to the consequences of the health crisis and overall lack of social safety nets that would have helped the population during the times of crisis.

COVID-19 Pandemic

The first case of COVID-19 in Liberia was confirmed on May 16, 2020. As of July 12, 2021, there have been 1,031 cases and 28.47 deaths confirmed per million people. Of the total percentage of cases since March 2020, around 35 percent have been women and 65 percent correspond to men.¹⁷⁷

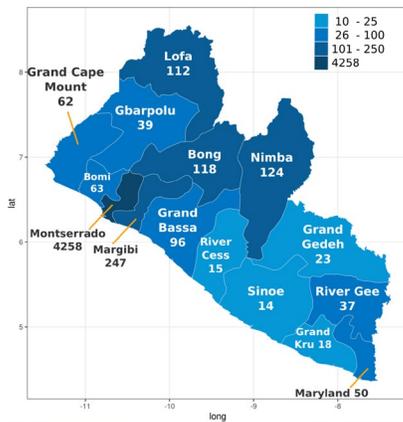
Graph 2.30. Confirmed COVID-19 cases and deaths per million people in Liberia



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Our World in Data (2021). Data retrieved on 2021-07-14. [Original source: John Hopkins University CSSE COVID-19 Data].

The county with the highest number of cases recorded is Montserrado county, where the capital of the country is located, with a total of 4,258 confirmed cumulative cases up to July 13, 2021.

Map 2.3. COVID-19 cases by county- July 13th, 2021



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from National Public Health Institute of Liberia (NPHIL)/Ministry of Health (2021).

Government Response to COVID-19

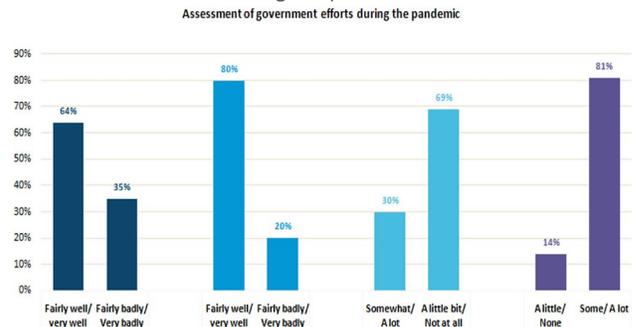
On March 22, 2020, the Liberian Government announced the “Declaration of National Health Emergency” which was followed by a parliament-sponsored policy that proclaimed a 60-day state of emergency throughout the country along with a 21-day lockdown in 4 counties.¹⁷⁸ However, prior to these measures, the country had already been preparing for the arrival of the pandemic with the creation of the Special Presidential Advisory Committee on Coronavirus

(SPACOC) at the beginning of March.¹⁷⁹ On April 8, 2020, the Executive Committee on Coronavirus was also created as the operational arm of SPACOC, operating under 18 pillars focused on the necessary outreach and initiatives to address the population’s needs.¹⁸⁰ Although the GoL responded to the COVID-19 pandemic in a much more efficient and effective manner than they did with the Ebola epidemic, limitations in health facilities remain significant, with only one laboratory in the country capable of conducting COVID-19 tests, and only one ventilator in the entire country.¹⁸¹

To address the shocks of the pandemic, the GoL carried out a series of measures. These measures, among others, included a \$25 million stimulus package to distribute food to households, provide support for electricity and water expenses, and grant loans provided under the Market Women and Small Informal Petty Traders Bank Programme (benefiting at least 85,000 Petty Traders, including market women).¹⁸² The Liberia Social Safety Nets Project was also adapted to provide relief through the provision of emergency cash transfers via mobile money to roughly 25,000 of the poorest households in Greater Monrovia in addition to 3,5000 extremely poor rural households.¹⁸³

In practice, the overall effectiveness of these initiatives was very limited. According to the Afrobarometer survey, only 9 percent of respondents have received COVID-19 relief assistance.¹⁸⁴ Regardless of these problems in the implementation of government aid, the majority of Liberians (64 percent) believe the government has managed the crisis well and 80 percent believe they have done an adequate job of keeping the public informed. In regards to trust in the GoL’s transparency, most Liberians (69 percent) do not trust government-compiled COVID-19 statistics and 81 percent think many resources corresponding to COVID-19 aid programs were lost to corruption.

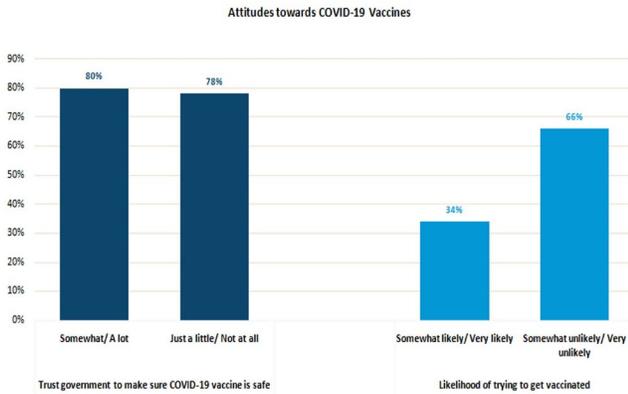
Graph 2.31. Assessment of government efforts during the pandemic



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from the Afrometer (2020).

As for Liberia’s vaccination program, there is minor trust (20 percent) in the safety of the vaccines as promised by the government; the majority of Liberians (66 percent) are somewhat or very unlikely to get vaccinated (see Graph 2.32). According to official figures of data on the number of vaccinations administered, only 1.90 percent of the total population has been vaccinated (1.45 percent of all Liberian women and 2.33 percent of all Liberian men).

Graph 2.32. Attitudes towards COVID-19 vaccines



Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from the Afrometer (2020).

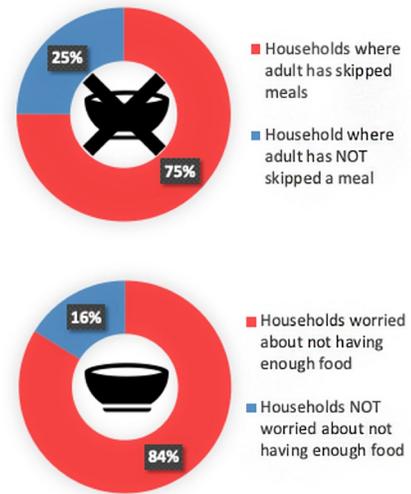
Socio-economic Impacts of COVID-19

Similar to the Ebola crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the livelihoods of many Liberians. The health sector has been particularly impacted as some of its initial funds have been diverted to fund the emergency response to fight the pandemic. In particular, child immunization, sexual and reproductive, and SGBV services have been significantly reduced.¹⁸⁵ The education sector has also been particularly affected because of confinement measures that led to the closure of 5,432 schools, affecting over 1.4 million students throughout country, 650,000 of whom are girls.¹⁸⁶ Another consequence of the pandemic has been an increase of GBV cases by 50 percent, with 616 rape cases having been reported. To counter this issue, President Weah declared rape a national emergency and started the National Roadmap to End SGBV in Liberia.

Regarding the economic impact of COVID-19, it is currently difficult to determine the precise long-term impacts, but some estimates indicate negative consequences. According to the World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook, extreme poverty has reached pre-2012 levels and is expected to peak at 52.1 percent of the Liberian population in 2021.¹⁸⁷ According to the report, poverty is expected to start declining once again in 2022, but the economic

impact of the pandemic has set progress back by 5 years. The economic consequences of the pandemic may also be observed in the ways they have impacted the economic stability and livelihood of the Liberian people. As detailed in the High-Frequency Phone Monitoring Survey (HFPMS) launched by the Liberia Institute for Statistics and Geo-information Services with support of the World Bank, 83.8 percent of households reported that they were worried about not having enough food as a result of lack of resources and 75.1 percent of them reported having adults skip a meal.¹⁸⁸

Graph 2.33. Impact of COVID-19 on Food Security



Source: Letouze et. al (2020) based on Front Page Africa (2021).

In the same survey, 75.3 percent of the households surveyed reported a loss of jobs and 67.5 percent reported a loss of income since the outbreak.¹⁸⁹ High informal employment rates in the country have pushed about 80 percent of the population into vulnerable situations and contributed to the loss of income and jobs. Work informality has disproportionately affected women. Around 84 percent of women in non-agricultural jobs work in the informal sector where they generally have lower-paying jobs and no social protection or insurance, putting them at high risk of not being able to meet the basic needs of their families.¹⁹⁰

As observed during the Ebola epidemic and COVID-19 pandemic, Liberians suffered drastic economic and social consequences, with women disproportionately enduring the cross-sectoral impacts in addition to the increased burden of heightened care work. However, the COVID-19 response by the GoL was proven effective because of the lessons learned while responding to EVD.

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3

Policy Recommendations

The analysis of the state of Liberia’s gender equality in terms of its political, socio-cultural and economic contexts as well as sector-based gender analysis of cross-cutting issues have highlighted key problems that hinder women’s equal participation in society and the protection of their rights. Hence, this chapter aims to identify these major needs and concerns, and provide concrete recommendations on key entry points and opportunities to engage the GoL, donors,

and other development partners to advance gender equality and women’s empowerment in Liberia. The first part of the recommendations focuses on the broader issue of political will and Liberia’s institutional capacity in policy-making, while the second part identifies sector-specific areas of concern and suggests key entry points and recommendations.

3.1. Political Will and Gender-Responsive Budgeting

Political will is a complex and disputed term between policy-makers, researchers, activists and opinion-makers. In short, political will can be defined as “the commitment of actors to undertake actions to achieve a set of objectives [...] and to sustain the costs of those actions over time.”¹ Although political will is usually expressed through different stylized words — written and spoken, such as speeches, legal resolutions, and other forms of documentation — it must be translated into tangible action.² After the analysis provided in the previous three chapters, it becomes clear that the GoL has been sustaining political will to address gender disparities in the country. Since the end of the second civil war, the country has adopted and ratified several international treaties, resolutions, and protocols while developing and putting into practice national policies and action plans to mainstream gender equality in different sectors (see Chapter 2). However, these actions must be accompanied by concrete financial planning and strategic budgeting, so that the established commitments are properly fulfilled.

In Liberia, for over ten years, actors such as UN Women have supported government officials to gain skills and knowledge in gender-responsive planning.³ Political will and gender-responsive planning and budgeting are two sides of the same coin: they rely on each other to be effectively accomplished. In 2018, 25 staff of the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP) of Liberia were trained in gender mainstreaming in the context of planning.⁴ By the end of the two-day training, an assessment was conducted in order to understand the participants’ needs for acquiring

such skills. Nearly 80 percent of the staff revealed that there was, at the time, no gender mainstreaming strategy in the Planning Division at the MFDP, and another 85 percent stated that the development plans drafted and implemented by the Ministry were not gender-sensitive.

Following this breakthrough, in 2019, the Liberian MFDP developed the Gender-Responsive Planning and Budgeting Policy (GRPB), in order to “provide guidance to the planning and budgeting processes of the Government of Liberia for advancing gender equality to contribute to equitable service delivery and inclusive growth.”⁵ This policy marks a milestone in the country’s history when considering that Liberia’s historical exclusion and lack of transparency in economic governance has stalled the country’s economic growth and sustainable development, contributing to the marginalization of vulnerable groups, particularly women.

Despite the GRPB’s efforts to allocate financial resources to improve visibility and responses to gender equality issues, there are several challenges that continue to impede the implementation of this policy (see Table 3.1). However, cultural attitudes, perceptions, and practices, which continue to oppress and marginalize Liberian women, remain some of the most entrenched barriers to the country’s successful transition towards gender equality. The next section of this chapter will provide specific strategies and key entry points for achieving gender equality in Liberia; yet, these strategies need to be considered in conjunction with the budgetary challenges listed here, as both parts are complementary and indivisible.

Table 3.1. Challenges to Realize Gender-Responsive Planning and Budgeting

	Institutional Level		Individual Level		Impact Assessment Level
Absence of:	A common definition of gender-responsive planning and budgeting among the officials of government and other non-state actors; there is a prevailing misconception that GRPB is the sole financial provider of social sector ministries.	Lack of:	Gender analysis expertise and other technical skills among implementing officials of the government to assess plans and budgets from a gender perspective and link it to the wider national and sectoral development plans.	Absence of:	Gender-disaggregated data necessary for capturing gender-differentiated impact of plans and budget; neither baseline statistics nor appropriate gender sensitive indicators are available.
	Appropriate budget classifications to reflect the inclusion of gender-responsive components.	Pervasive:	Gender-biased culture among different stakeholders – the impression that GRPB is only meant for addressing the needs of women and girls and could divert funds away from spending on men and boys; hesitation to accept gender equality as a critical objective in the long-term transformation of the country’s macroeconomic and fiscal policies.	Lack of:	Adequate resources to establish a robust participatory and gender-responsive M&E system.
	Alternative Gender Focal Points: all gender-sensitive activities in the Spending Entities are centered on the Gender Focal Point in the ministries where they are present and their absence from the office leads to a break in attending meetings or other events related to different initiatives; moreover, Gender Focal Points are not necessarily engaged enough in their respective ministry’s decision-making processes nor do they have sufficient access to opportunities to influence their ministry’s budget.				
Weak:	1) Institutional structure to establish close coordinating mechanisms between various government institutions, including local government offices and other partner organizations.				3) Understanding of and capacity to develop gender-sensitive indicators and reporting formats to track the impact of GRPB related actions.
	2) Participation of non-state actors in planning and budgeting processes.				
	3) Capacity of the representatives of the House of Legislature to hold the executive accountable for the implementation of the GRPB.				

Source: Elaborated by the authors with information from the Ministry of Finance, and Development Planning of Liberia (2019).

3.2. Sector-Based Gender Recommendations

3.2.1 Post-Conflict and Peacebuilding

Problem I: Even though women were key advocates for peace and conflict-resolution during and after the conflict, their initial inclusion in peacebuilding processes faced many obstacles. While there has been considerable progress made in this area, some of the root causes of the initial conflict remain, disproportionately affecting women and girls. Furthermore, there has been limited consideration for historically excluded women such as women with disabilities, rural women, and girls.

Action(s): Participatory mechanisms need to be further developed and implemented to ensure that women are part of the NAPWPS II, which is currently being implemented. Emphasis needs to be placed on the access of women with disabilities and rural women and girls, as well as different peacebuilding and peace-strengthening programs and policies. The establishment of working groups focusing on these different groups of women through Peace Huts could be effective in addressing specific needs which are not yet mapped or included in policy-making processes. At the same time, the needs of Peace Huts and women's CSOs need to be mapped to guide the varying ways in which the State can continue supporting their work and promoting a favorable environment for women's participation in civil society.

Results and Impact: It is expected that the implementation of these working groups, in conjunction with other participatory mechanisms for all women and girls and the mapping of the needs of women in civil society will enable the effective implementation of the NAPWPS II and address the needs of women throughout peace-building processes in Liberia.

Actors Involved: Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSP); Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA); development partners; Peace Huts; and other peacebuilding and grassroots women's organizations.

3.2.2. Women and Agriculture

Problem I: A primary reason for precarious employment in the agricultural sector is the lack of

payments in return for work. Women in the agricultural sector report higher percentages of not receiving corresponding payments for their work than women working in sales and retail, despite this being in clear violation of Liberian labor laws. These situations arise frequently due to the informality of the agricultural sector where most women are either self-employed or work for a family member, thereby creating an unstable environment where laws related to labor rights are not followed. When women do not receive their salaries or cash income, their livelihoods are endangered and they are limited in their capacity to improve their socio-economic status, ultimately creating a sizable barrier for achieving gender equality.

Action(s): Create a mechanism in which employees can make a report when their rights are being violated so a district labor inspector can investigate and verify the situation. This mechanism could follow a community logic structure in which a group of organized agricultural workers unite to discuss the main issues that affect them on a regular basis (by month or trimester) and then formally present such concerns and requests to the Ministry of Labor (MoL), along with its labor inspectors. The MoL would then deliberate, guided by the provisions of the "Review on Complaint of Labor Violation," to provide a decision on the consequences of any employer who infringes the law. This would allow for an individual's personal needs and preoccupations to be heard; moreover, individuals would be able to access community support when experiencing injustices.

Results and Impact: Creating a reporting system ensures holding employers accountable in the agriculture sector and ensures that men and women's rights to decent labor is followed. This would create safer and less vulnerable employment conditions for women and guarantee that they are adequately compensated for their work.

Actors Involved: Ministry of Agriculture (MoA); Ministry of Labor (MoL); labor inspectors; and Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSP).

Problem II: Women face many challenges when it comes to land ownership. These challenges include a lack of representation in decision-making and general

lack of deeds or official titles. Under the new 2018 Land Rights Act (LRA), these problems are addressed, and provisions are made to ensure that women can access land ownership. Additionally, several initiatives have taken place by the GoL and International Partners to attempt to regulate the title and deed crisis in Liberia, however many of these have reported several obstacles such as a lack of clear pedagogical strategies and materials to bring into communities, physical barriers (obstruction of roads during rainy season), and high costs.⁶ Moreover, social norms continue to discriminate against women – particularly through customary land practices – despite provisions in the LRA that precisely seek to avoid these scenarios.

Action(s): Implement educational campaigns that are accompanied by a specific set of materials – including those already prepared by the Liberia Land Authority (Ex: What Communities Should Know about Liberia’s Land Rights Law) – and which disseminate different parameters under the LRA to communities. These educational campaigns should be comprehensive by covering all provisions under the LRA and being taught in a standardized manner throughout the whole country; further, only the GoL and international partners should be facilitating these campaigns. Educational campaigns should also schedule opportunities to address community-specific concerns.

In particular, it is very important to stress the significance of respecting women’s land ownership rights, even if it may seem contradictory to customary land practices. This includes women’s participation in customary land decision-making processes through the establishment of fixed representation in Community Land Management and Development Committees (CLMDC).

Results and Impact: Land deeds and titles in Liberia would be better regulated and organized. Opportunities for women to own land would increase, and these basic rights would be better understood as something all Liberian citizens should be able to access. Women would be properly represented in decision-making processes concerning land ownership by CLMDC.

Actors Involved: Liberia Land Authority (LLA); Ministry of Agriculture (MoA); Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSPP); Community Land Management and Development Committees (CLMDC).

Problem III: One of the biggest burdens that prevents women from engaging in productive activities is unpaid

domestic work. It is estimated that women spend 4.5 hours carrying out unpaid domestic work in comparison to the average 2 hours spent on these tasks by men. Although this is a burden all women shoulder, it is even more pronounced in women with limited resources who cannot afford domestic or child care support. This is particularly true for women living in rural environments and whose main productive activities are related to agriculture because, due to limited access to basic services, women often have additional responsibilities such as traveling long distances to get water and wood for cooking. This scenario leads to a concept called “time poverty” which concerns women who are constrained from pursuing other personal aspirations due to time otherwise spent on domestic labor. Therefore, despite it not being accounted for as “work” in terms of its contribution to the GDP, domestic work consists of arduous labor that leads to women working without earning payments.

Action(s): In order to account for the weight of unpaid domestic work and social security, the first step is to obtain updated and comprehensive indicators that measure time spent on different domestic tasks (including time spent fetching water or fuel) disaggregated by sex, as well as the conditions of domestic and care workers working in the informal economy.

Additionally, the 3 Rs model proposed by Professor Diane Elson should be incorporated into Liberia’s development agenda and policy design, particularly for the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSPP) and the Ministry of Labor (MoL). The 3 Rs stand for: recognition, reduction, and redistribution. Recognition emphasizes the role of care and domestic workers and considers the challenges they face in order to find key entry points for policy development. Reduction considers the necessary actions needed to reduce unpaid care and domestic work to offer women and girls more time to engage in formal jobs and in social and political activities. Finally, redistribution aims to ensure that the burden of care and domestic services are equally distributed between men and women, citizens, the government, communities, and the private sector.

Results and Impact: By implementing these recommendations, it is expected that women’s and girl’s time spent on unpaid care and domestic tasks would be substantially reduced so they could utilize this time for other productive, social, and political activities of their choice.

Actors Involved: Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSPP); Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP); and Ministry of Labor (MoL).

3.2.3. Women and Infrastructure

Problem I: One of the main problems in the area of infrastructure is the participation of women in the designing, planning, and evaluation processes of public services and facilities available to the population. This absence is related to educational limitations and attitudes in the workplace that discourage female leadership and participation. However, there is an opportunity to integrate women's participation in, and evaluation of, the services that exist in their communities.

Action(s): Host workshops and working groups, such as those carried out by the Cities Alliance, where women have the opportunity to assess public services available in their communities and propose necessary improvements.⁷ More specifically, conduct assessments, monitor and track social programs and the availability of services, and collect feedback on how these social programs could improve the quality of life for women.

Results and Impact: The inputs and experience of women in urban infrastructure planning and evaluation processes would be elevated, thereby increasing the knowledge base of the ways in which the availability and absence of certain services specifically affect women. Ultimately, women would access relevant leadership roles and participate in transforming their housing environments, thereby raising awareness of policy tools for their own empowerment.

Actors Involved: The Ministry of Agriculture (MA); Ministry of Transport (MoT); Ministry of Public Works (MPW); Ministry of Justice (MoJ); Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications (MoPT); Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS); Ministry of Health (MoH); Ministry of Education (MoE); the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA); Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP); and Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection (MGCSPP) – as well as non-governmental organizations such as Citizens United to Promote Peace & Democracy in Liberia (CUPPADL), Women's NGO Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL), and the Center for Transparency and Accountability in Liberia (CENTAL).

3.2.4. Women and Energy

Problem I: The energy sector represents one of the sectors with the scarcest number of indicators regarding

the role and representation of women in decision-making. These circumstances make it impossible to accurately assess the representation of women in decision-making processes related to energy in Liberia.

Action(s): Conduct a thorough and complete scan of women's involvement in the energy sector. This scan will map women in decision-making positions inside the energy sector, the total number of women participating at the governmental and civil society level, and the total number of women being trained in a specific energy program (for example, installing solar panels).

Results and Impact: The main result expected is to acquire an accurate understanding of the state of women's presence in the energy sector in order to map key areas where there is a higher need for proper representation. This solution would provide the Ministry of Mines and Energy (MME) with guidance to create programs and provisions that foster the representation of women. It would also help centralize information on programs currently being implemented that educate women on energy-related subjects.

Actors Involved: Ministry of Mines and Energy (MME) and Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSPP).

Problem II: Access to electricity in Liberia is considerably low, despite a steady increase in access in the past couple of years. There are high costs and barriers which disadvantage poor and rural households. This disproportionately affects the lives of women and girls because when families and communities do not have access to electricity, they rely on other sources of energy for daily needs.

Action(s): Implement working groups with grassroots community organizations – especially women and girls' organizations as well as those in which women and girls actively participate – to assess the viability of community ownership models across the country and understand specific electricity needs for each county. This strategy would guarantee the inclusion of women and girls in policy-making processes. Moreover, a national-level policy needs to be designed and implemented with the objective of expanding access to electricity for rural communities. This would guarantee not only their access to, but also the sustainability of, electricity.

Results and Impact: The expected results include the implementation of participatory processes in the design

and implementation of a national electricity policy. This would champion the communities which do not currently have access to electricity and ensure that their needs and specific contexts are considered during the policy-making process. In turn, a national electricity policy would not only lead to a higher rate of access to electricity and an improvement in living conditions, but also establish more sustainable access to electricity for all Liberians.

Actors Involved: Ministry of Mines and Energy (MME); Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSP); and development partners.

Problem III: A lack of access to electricity requires additional effort from Liberians, particularly women and girls, to obtain cooking fuels, whether they be wood or charcoal. This daily task consumes a great amount of time and preparation, and also causes significant health challenges. Therefore, these types of cooking and heating fuels all worsen living conditions for all individuals, especially women and girls who are often in charge of cooking and gathering these cooking fuels.

Action(s): Implement a national campaign to educate people on the negative impacts of cooking fuels such as wood or charcoal, with special consideration of the role women and children play in the realization of duties related to gathering and cooking. This campaign should include radio broadcasts, workshops in schools and community centers, and other educational initiatives, and should take special measures to reach rural and disadvantaged communities. The campaign should aim to inform the public of the health risks and environmental impacts from the use of traditional cooking fuels; educate the public about the measures that need to be developed in order to reduce the negative consequences (such as cooking in open spaces); and promote the equal distribution of household chores and duties, aimed at eradicating gender roles.

Results and Impact: It is expected that this action will provide the public with more knowledge on the effects of using traditional cooking fuels; lead to the implementation of prevention mechanisms that reduce the use of wood and charcoal for heating and cooking.

Actors Involved: Ministry of Health (MoH); Ministry of Mines and Energy (MME); Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSP); Ministry of Education (MoE); and development partners.

3.2.5. Women's Entrepreneurship and Economic Empowerment

Problem I: Women in Liberia face a number of barriers that obstruct them from fully realizing economic independence and empowerment. These are widened by high illiteracy levels, as most of the population is illiterate and has limited understanding of the general concepts and workings of finances.

Action(s): Increase the financial literacy and skills of women and girls according to their literacy levels and participation in the economic and financial sectors. It is necessary to include financial education in vocational education training programs as well as focus on financial literacy in general education curriculums. At the same time, women who already work in the financial sector could contribute to financial education workshops and training, which could be done through partnerships with Susu clubs across the country.

Results and Impact: It is expected that these actions will educate women and girls in the financial sector and provide them with additional tools and knowledge for them to realize economic independence and empowerment. This would also strengthen the sustainability of female-led enterprises and overall economic conditions of women and their families.

Actors Involved: Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP); Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSP); Ministry of Education (MoE); development partners; and susu clubs and village saving loans.

Problem II: Formal and commercial banking services are often inaccessible to women, because they do not meet the documentation requirements to open a bank account; they do not meet the collateral requirements to access the credit market; or the banks simply do not lend to SMEs and low-income earners. These difficulties disadvantage women and girls from pursuing entrepreneurship opportunities and economic empowerment.

Action(s): Regulate access to commercial banking services. For this to be done, there needs to be further mapping of the documentation requirements that pose challenges to accessing bank accounts. Based on the results of the mapping, the necessary steps would need

to be implemented to ensure that economic and technical conditions do not prevent women from obtaining access to their documents. At the same time, the GoL should adopt a law that penalizes the discrimination and denial of access to credits due to gender in conjunction with the implementation of the aforementioned recommendations that tackle land ownership issues (see section 3.1).

Results and Impact: This would eliminate certain barriers to women's access to financial services because simplifying documentation requirements and prohibiting gender-based discrimination would grant women with greater access to economic opportunities.

Actors Involved: Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP) and Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSPP).

Problem III: Women are generally excluded from the formal economic sector, and for those who are part of it, they are often excluded from higher positions as well as decision-making bodies; this exclusion is the product of cultural and social gender norms that disadvantage women and gender-based violence and discrimination in the workplace. These obstacles hamper women's opportunities in their professional life and restricts their economic empowerment.

Action(s): Thoroughly evaluate the labor reforms that were implemented in 2015, paying particular attention to the integration of gender transformative elements in the design, data collection, and analysis of Liberia's work environments. Through a comprehensive assessment of this reform and a mapping of the current situation of women who work in the formal sectors, the specific needs and difficulties would be identified and ultimately addressed through policies.

Results and Impact: It is expected that this evaluation and assessment would identify key gaps in Liberia's 2015 labor reform, mapping the next steps to guarantee the protection of women in the workplace and their participation in decision-making bodies and institutions.

Actors Involved: Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP) and Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSPP).

3.2.6. Women and Education: TVET

Problem I: Gender-based occupational segregation in the workplace and male domination of STEM fields

make it impossible for women to advance economically and fully participate in the country's technological development.

Action(s): Establish vocational guidance programs for female students and work placements; educational activities that promote female leadership and women's interest in technology and engineering; and educational scholarships for girls and young women, including students who are young mothers.

Results and Impact: This would increase the number of students enrolled in technical, scientific, engineering, and mathematical careers and create collaborative bridges among educational institutes, the private and industrial sector, and associations that promote women in STEM.

Actors Involved: Ministry of Education (MoE); Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSPP); Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI); Ministry of Labor (MoL); Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS); organized civil society actors and associations such as SMART Liberia, Women in Tech Liberia, and Girls Aid Liberia; as well as private sector actors.

Problem II: The working conditions of women teachers in Liberia do not take into account the additional domestic, care, and childcare responsibilities of women. Moreover, working conditions such as distant school locations, delayed payments, and overcrowded classes make women's work more precarious and discourage their participation in the education sector at levels beyond primary education.

Action(s): Implement assistance programs for female heads of households that provide childcare services; financial vouchers to cover transfers when relocated to new workplaces; and wage parity with their male counterparts. In addition, educational authorities should implement flexible training programs that enable women to obtain administrative and other positions such as those in secondary education.

Results and Impact: These strategies would improve the working conditions of women teachers and lead to an increase in their presence in administrative positions and the secondary education sector.

Actors Involved: Ministry of Education (MoE); Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSPP); and Ministry of Labor (MoL).

3.2.7. Women, The Environment, and Climate Change

Problem I: Sea-level rises pose serious implications in terms of not only loss of land and displacement of communities, but also damage to infrastructure, in large part because they multiply the risks of already-present flood and erosion. This is also a critical challenge for the country because Liberia’s coastline hosts about 58 percent of the country’s population and is essential for fishing and agricultural activities.

Action(s): Engage policymakers and community members early and substantively. According to previous studies on sea-level rise prevention and mitigation, “engaging all affected stakeholders in the policy-making process is needed to ensure the development of a shared vision of risks. Once this has been achieved, it is possible to discuss and manage trade-offs across stakeholders, who can be differently affected by the economic and social impacts of sea-level rise, as well as the options to address it.”⁸ In this sense, it is important to promote open dialogue and organize workshops with community leaders and members of coastal communities in order to raise awareness of such risks as well as understand their specific needs and concerns regarding coastal adaptation. This engagement should consider that communities may feel threatened by adaptation measures because their homes are often the most significant material and financial possession they have; considering that men and women in these zones also face different barriers and have differentiated needs, recognizing this is therefore particularly important from a gender perspective.

Results and Impact: The implementation of this recommendation would support overcoming cognitive barriers and increasing preventative knowledge on the risks that sea-level rises pose to populations located in coastal zones; further, they would help the GoL and communities determine specific adaptation strategies to not only prevent further degradation of the coastal region, but also allow coastal communities to develop strategies that would preserve their sources of income and livelihood.

Actors Involved: Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) of Liberia; Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSP); Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP); international development partners; and non-governmental climate-focused organizations.

Problem II: In Liberia, women are disproportionately concentrated in the least productive sectors, with almost 90 percent of them employed in the informal sector and agriculture, which increases their likelihood of suffering the most adverse consequences from climate change.

Action(s): As previously addressed, there is also a need to increase women’s participation within the formal sector — through a planned and structured transition from the informal to formal sector — and invest in overall education and TVET-specific activities so that the vulnerability of women to climate change shocks is minimized.

Results and Impact: This would boost women’s participation in the formal economy and skilled labor, thereby improving their overall working conditions and diminishing their vulnerability to climate change impacts.

Actors Involved: Ministry of Education (MoE); Ministry of Labor (MoL); and Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSP).

Problem III: There is a worrying gap in sex-disaggregated data and official statistics in Liberia that would allow for further analysis of the consequences of climate change on women as well as the extent to which these climate-related impacts have been included in decision-making processes for both climate change adaptation and mitigation.

Action(s): Target investments and increase sex-disaggregated data collection processes that seek to identify the differentiated impacts of climate change on men and women, as well as their inclusion in climate change mitigation and adaptation decision-making processes.

Results and Impact: The collection of this data would result in a greater understanding of the different challenges and barriers that men and women face in terms of climate change impacts and environmental hazards, and how women’s inclusion in decision-making processes could be designed and implemented.

Actors Involved: Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSP); Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP); Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) of Liberia; and the Liberia Institute for Statistics and Geo-Information Services (LISGIS).

3.2.8. Gender-Based Violence and Human Trafficking

Problem I: Many of the youth from the current generation were raised in the midst of Liberia's two armed conflicts, having lived and experienced violence perpetrated during that time. Violence against children is one of most widespread forms of violence perpetrated among Liberians, with more than 85 percent of children aged 1-14 years having experienced at least one type of physical punishment or psychological aggression by caregivers. Child marriage is still a reality in some regions of the country, and is more predominant among low-income families. FGM is also a common and widespread practice among the population, with religion being a primary reason for its endurance and maintenance. Although FGM has decreased overtime, more than 50 percent of women aged 45-49 years have been circumcised, and these rates reach up to 78 percent depending on the county.

Action(s): Government and civil society partnerships should employ gatekeeper-centered approaches focused on fostering gender and social norm transformations, particularly amongst low-income communities, by mainly engaging religious and traditional leaders. In order to involve these leaders in discussions and decision-making processes, they must first be asked to critically reflect on and analyze ingrained patriarchal attitudes and behaviors and make personal commitments that mirror broader objectives for gender justice. These strategies have proven to be highly effective in similar settings. In Malawi and Nigeria, countries with high levels of child marriage, the engagement of traditional and religious community leaders succeeded in transforming social norms and mentalities.⁹

In terms of FGM, the Liberian Government, development partners, and civil society organizations must work collaboratively towards challenging the discriminatory reasons why FGM is practiced. Previous work carried out by Plan International in Malawi demonstrates that educating girls on the rights of their own body; increasing the visibility of the risks behind FGM; challenging religious traditions that still engage with this practice; and encouraging the involvement of fathers in the upbringing of their daughters, have all proven to be effective.¹⁰ It is also essential that the topic of FGM be included in Liberia's current education curriculum and public forum. This inclusion should be done in collaboration with health professionals

in order to increase awareness amongst students, parents, and teachers of the detrimental effects that FGM has on the development of girls from a young age to adulthood. Funding and building the capacity of CSOs and community development associations to implement and institutionalize the prevention of early marriage and FGM is also fundamental to prevent and combat both practices.

Results and Impact: By informing families how child marriage, FGM, and violent punishments represent a threat towards the development of both girls and boys, and the elimination of harmful social norms, it is expected that these practices would disappear in communities that know little about the hazards behind these customs, and girls' and women's access to education and economic empowerment would increase; IPV would naturally decrease as well.

Actors Involved: Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSP); Ministry of Education (MoE); Ministry of Health (MoH); international development agencies; and grassroot civil society organizations, including traditional local leaders.

Problem II: Liberia is marked by traditional gender norms which still dictate not only behavioral rules that both men and women must abide by, but also the level of violence experienced by women and girls. VAW, particularly violence perpetrated by intimate partners, is still commonly accepted by communities, including women. The percentage of women who have experienced at least one form of physical violence since age 15 increased by 16 percent from 2007 to 2019-20. Women who are divorced, separated, or widowed are the most likely to have experienced physical violence, and this violence is mainly concentrated in urban spaces.

Action(s): Develop the concept of an integrated system to tackle VAW and challenge traditional gender norms. This concept would be articulated by actions among governmental and non-governmental institutions and services, including community-leadership engagement, and should be placed at the core strategy of the GoL. Strategies should aim at preventing the occurrence of violence and the creation of policies that guarantee the empowerment of women's autonomy, their human rights, accountability of aggressors, and qualified assistance to women in situations of violence. This integrated system must aim to accomplish the following four axes of action: 1) combating VAW; 2) preventing VAW; 3) assisting victims of violence; and 4) guaranteeing their rights (CPAG).

Civil society organizations play an important role when it comes to combating and preventing VAW, particularly by promoting courses on challenging traditional gender norms and re-education and social reintegration of male offenders. On the other hand, governmental agencies have a duty to protect and assist victims of domestic violence by guaranteeing their rights under the law and providing housing, education, work, and social security when these victims are forced to leave their homes.

Results and Impact: By focusing on the implementation of an integrated system that follows the aforementioned four axes of action (CPAG), Liberia should be able to witness a decrease in overall violence and rely on an effective judicial system when it comes to prosecuting male perpetrators, thereby safeguarding women's rights and preventing new cases of violence from occurring.

Actors involved: Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection; Ministry of Education (MGCSP); Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP); non-governmental agents (women's organizations, feminist NGOs, women's movements, women's rights councils, other social councils, etc.) that monitor and execute policies aimed at women; services and programs aimed at holding aggressors accountable; universities; government agencies at the national, regional and municipal level responsible for guaranteeing women's rights; and specialized and non-specialized services to assist women in situations of violence.

Problem III: In terms of human-trafficking, there is a lack of statistical data that allows for an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in Liberia.

Action(s): Invest in data collection mechanisms focused on documenting the dynamics behind such practices should be integrated in the strategy of Liberia's national statistics office in order to better understand how and why this phenomenon occurs.

Results and Impact: In doing so, the GoL would possess a greater understanding of the different reasons and patterns of how and why women and girls — as well as men and boys — are trafficked, laying the foundations for strategies aimed at preventing and combating this practice.

Actors Involved: Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSP); Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP); Liberia Institute for Statistics and Geo-Information Services (LISGIS); and centers for combating the trafficking of women and girls.

3.2.9. Women, Migration, and Displacement

Problem I: Even though many Liberian refugees and internally displaced persons benefited from repatriation and reintegration initiatives, there is not enough data to understand the difficulties and complexities faced by Liberian migrants, refugees, and internally displaced persons who have returned.

Action(s): Initiate a national mapping of returned Liberian refugees and migrants to better understand the dynamics of Liberia's reintegration process, the challenges returnees currently face, and the factors that have improved or worsened their living conditions. It is fundamental to have gender-disaggregated data that permits the identification of the specific challenges faced by migrant women and girls.

Results and Impact: It is expected that through this mapping, the collected data would lead to identifying and addressing the key areas in which action is needed to improve the conditions of Liberian women and girls who have migrated and returned to their home country; protect their rights; and guarantee their equal treatment.

Actors Involved: Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA); Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSP); Ministry of National Defense (MoD); and Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services (LISGIS).

Problem II: Forced internal displacement due to environmental disasters is a growing risk for Liberian communities, and even though women are key actors in disaster risk reduction processes, they are often excluded from decision-making spaces focused on this issue. This leads to women becoming more vulnerable to climate change-related impacts and consequently the possibility of internal displacement, thereby perpetuating a cyclical issue that requires additional research.

Action(s): Improve the understanding of risks of environmental disasters and their relationship to internal displacement, so as to better respond to the needs and vulnerabilities of the Liberian population. This can be done by advancing the collaborative work of the government, developing partners, and civil society in this area, and any type of collaborative body. Moreover, grassroots women's organizations should be directly involved in disaster risk reduction decision-making bodies, including, for example, women from Peace Huts, who already have expertise on conflict resolution and often, forced displacement.

Results and Impact: It is expected that through this process, women and girls would gain a better understanding of the risks that environmental disasters pose on their communities. They would also be empowered to actively participate in the design and implementation of strategies that address environmental disasters and their impacts, and prevent forced internal displacement.

Actors Involved: Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA); Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSPP); and Ministry of National Defense (MoD).

Problem III: There is not enough data to understand the complexities faced by migrant and refugee women and girls who have arrived in Liberia, as most of the information is not sex-disaggregated. This situation makes it impossible to have an accurate assessment of the specific needs and challenges of women and girls from foreign countries living in Liberia.

Action(s): Conduct a national survey for migrants and refugees needs to better understand the dynamics of their integration process into Liberian society, the challenges they face, and the factors that have improved or worsened their living conditions. It is fundamental to have gender-disaggregated data that permits the identification of the specific challenges faced by migrant women and girls.

Results and Impact: It is expected that through this mapping, the collected data would lead to identifying and addressing the key areas in which action is needed to improve the conditions of migrant women and girls; protect their rights; and guarantee their equal treatment.

Actors Involved: Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA); Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSPP); Ministry of National Defense (MoD); and Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services (LISGIS).

3.2.10. Women and Health: COVID-19 and Other Epidemics' Impact, Response, and Recovery Implications

Problem I: Maternity death rates remain high in Liberia. Different factors lead to the prevalence of these high rates including a lack of access to health facilities and previous knowledge of maternity healthcare. These conditions are especially true for women who live in rural areas and have physical constraints in terms of distance and access to medical centers with trained specialists in maternity health.

Action(s): Significant investment to establish and maintain adequate health facilities in all districts of Liberia (rural and urban) with trained personnel for maternity-related consultations. These facilities would be located in local communities, and they should have basic equipment and medicine to address the main complications that arise for pregnant women. Moreover, they should offer all the basic services (particularly electricity and water), and in cases where these services are scarce, an agreement can be made with the energy sector to install solar panels and alternative forms of energy to sustain the running of these centers. In parallel, there is a need to encourage the use of maternity services and consultations. Informative brochures and checklists should be provided to new mothers, in which they outline possible problems that can arise during pregnancy, what and who to look for when it occurs, as well as important check-up dates with specialized doctors and.

Results and Impact: The main expected impact is a decrease in Liberia's maternal mortality rate and the provision of necessary services and information to pregnant women.

Actors Involved: Ministry of Health (MoH); Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSPP); local hospitals; development partners; and antenatal workers.

Problem II: There is a general feeling of distrust from the population in terms of government programs created to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a fear that funds allocated to providing emergency relief programs are being lost to corruption. Many Liberians have suffered economic and social consequences from the pandemic, particularly women who, being a large part of the workforce in the informal economy, were threatened by increasingly unstable incomes. It is crucial for vulnerable Liberians to access a secure and reliable source of information that clearly explains which programs they can access for assistance.

Action(s): Create a public online record with detailed information on the funds expected to be allocated for each special government program and initiative to address the COVID-19 pandemic. For each expense listed, the online record would include receipts and contracts granted, how the program was developed, and how many people it has benefited. In the same portal, there should also be a section where the Liberian population can consult the requirements, procedure, and timeline for each of the different programs. This section should consist of different

categories including one for programs that specifically target women.

When determining the beneficiaries of the programs, those with most vulnerable conditions, such as single head of household mothers, should be prioritized. This information should also be available through flyers and physical records for those who have limited access to online services. The information should be made known to community leaders who would then transfer the information to their community.

Results and Impact: This online record would build trust in the government's pandemic response and create an accountability mechanism for how national and international investments are being managed by the GoL in response to the crisis. Additionally, this central source of information would reinforce the ability for those who have been the most affected by COVID-19, particularly women, to be well informed on the types of resources made available to them by the government's assistance programs.

Actors involved: Ministry of Health (MoH); Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSPP); local hospitals; development partners; and antenatal workers.

Endnotes

1. Brinkerhoff, 2010.
2. Brinkerhoff, 2010.
3. UN Women, 2011.
4. UN Women, 2018b.
5. Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, 2020.
6. Louis et al., 2020.
7. Cities Alliance, 2020.
8. OECD, 2019, p. 7
9. Richardson, 2017; CDavid, 2020.
10. Plan International, n.d.

Annex

Table I. Chapter 1 Main Indicators

SDG	Indicator	Female	Male	Total (Rank)	Year	Source
General						
	Population of Liberia	2.51M (49.7%)	2.54M (50.3%)	5.05M	2020	World Bank ¹
	Human Development Index (HDI)	0.45	0.51	0.48 (175)	2019	UNDP
	Gender Inequality Index (GII)	-	-	0.65 (156)	2019	UNDP
	GINI index	-	-	35.3 ^a	2016	World Bank ²
	Multidimensional poverty headcount			62.9	2013	UNDP
	GNI per capita (2017 PPP US\$)	1,242	1,275	1,258	2019	UNDP
1.1.1	Employed population below international poverty line. Age 15+. (%)	47.30	43.10	45.10	n.d.	UN Women
1.2.1	Proportion of population living below the national poverty line (%)	-	-	50.90	2016	World Bank ³
1.4.1	Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI)	-	-	0.32	2013	UNDP
Women's Participation in Decision-Making: Macro-level						
16.7.1	Ratio for female members of parliaments (Ratio of the proportion of women in parliament in the proportion of women in the national population with the age of eligibility as a lower bound boundary), Lower Chamber or Unicameral	0.22	-	-	n.d.	UN Women
16.7.1	Ratio for female members of parliaments (Ratio of the proportion of women in parliament in the proportion of women in the national population with the age of eligibility as a lower bound boundary), Upper Chamber	0.07	-	-	n.d.	UN Women
5.5.1	Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament	11.7	-	-	2019	OCHA ¹
	Percentage of employers by sex (modeled ILO estimate)	0.9	1.9	-	2019	OCHA ²
5.5.2	Proportion of women in managerial positions	20	-	-	n.d.	UN Women
5.5.2	Proportion of women in senior and middle	20.10	-	-	n.d.	UN Women

	management positions					
Health						
3.1.1	Maternal mortality ratio	742	-	-	2019-20	DHS
3.1.2	Proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel (%)	80	-	-	2019-20	DHS
3.2.1	Under-5 mortality rate ^c	91	96	93	2019-20	DHS
3.2.2	Neonatal mortality rate ^c	30	45	37	2019-20	DHS
3.3.1	Number of new HIV infections per 1,000 uninfected population by sex and age	0.49	0.43	0.46	n.d.	UN Women
	Contraceptive use of currently married women aged 15-49 (any modern method)	24	-	-	2019-20	DHS
3.7.1	Proportion of women of reproductive age (aged 15-49 years) whose need for family planning satisfied by modern methods	47.8	-	-	2019-20	DHS
3.7.2	Adolescent birth rates per 1,000 women (age 15-19 years)					
	a) Girls aged 10-14 years ^d	4	-	-	2019-20	DHS
	b) Women aged 15-19 years ^e	128	-	-	2019-20	DHS
Education						
	Literacy rate, aged 15-49 years (%)	52	75	-	2019-20	DHS
	Children out of primary school (Number of primary-school-age children not enrolled in primary or secondary school)	77,218	82,261	-	2017	OCHA ¹
	Share of female teachers (%) Education level: Primary	18	-	-	2017	OCHA ¹
	Share of female teachers (%) Education level: Secondary	6	-	-	2017	OCHA ¹
4.c.1	Proportion of teachers who have received at least the minimum organized teacher training (e.g. pedagogical training), pre-service, or in-service required for teaching at the relevant level in a given country and education level (%) Education level: Primary	74	69	-	2017	OCHA ¹
4.2.2	Participation rate in organized learning one year before the official primary entry age (%)	78.73	78.86	78.80	n.d.	UN Women
Cultural norms						
5.2.1	Proportion of ever-partnered women and	45.6	-	-	2019-20	DHS

	girls aged 15 years and older subjected to physical, sexual, or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months					
	a) Physical violence	34	-	-	2019-20	DHS
	b) Sexual violence	6.9	-	-	2019-20	DHS
	c) <u>Psychological</u> violence	35	-	-	2019-20	DHS
5.3.1	Proportion of women aged 20-24 years who were married or in a union before age 15 and before age 18					
	a) before age 15	5.8	-	-	2019-20	DHS
	b) before age 18	24.9	-	-	2019-20	DHS
5.3.2	Proportion of girls and women aged 15-49 years who have undergone female genital mutilation/cutting	38.2	-	-	2019-20	DHS
16.2.1	Percentage of children aged 1-17 years who experienced any physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by caregivers in the past month ^h	85.1	85.2	85.2	2019-20	DHS
	Percentage of women and men aged 15-49 who agree that a husband is justified in beating his wife for any of the five reasons ^j	37	25	-	2019-20	DHS
Women's Participation in Decision-Making: Micro-level						
5.6.1	Proportion of women <u>age</u> 15-49 years who make their own informed decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use and reproductive health care ^f	58.8	-	-	2019-20	DHS
	Percentage of currently married women who participate alone or jointly with their husbands in decisions about the use of their earning	89	-	-	2019-20	DHS
Financial Services						
8.10.2	Proportion of adults (15 years and older) with an account at a bank or other financial institution or a mobile-money-service provider ^f	12	21.3	16.7 ^b	2019-20	DHS
5.b.1	Proportion of individuals who own a mobile telephone ^g	46.7	60.6	53.7 ^b	2019-20	DHS
17.8.1	Proportion of individuals using the Internet ^h	22	36.4	29.2 ^b	2019-20	DHS
Formal Employment						
	Labor force, female (% of total labor force)	48	-	-	2019	OCHA ²

	Labor force participation rate (% of female/male ages 15 and above) (modeled ILO estimate)	72	80.3	-	2019	OCHA ²
	Wage and salaried workers (% of female/male employment) (modeled ILO estimate)	8.41	33	-	2019	OCHA ²
8.5.2	Unemployment rate (% of total labor force) (modeled ILO estimate)	2.17	3.54	3.3	2019	World Bank ⁴
8.6.1	Proportion of youth (aged 15-24 years) not in education, employment, or training (%)	16.7	8.9	13.2	n.d.	UN Women
	Youth unemployment rate (relaxed definition)	41.3	28.3	35.0	2012	SWTS Liberia
Informal Employment						
	Proportion of informal employment (% of total employment by sex)	96.7	90.3	93.4	2014	ILO
8.3.1	Proportion of informal employment in non-agriculture employment (%) (ILO harmonized estimates)	95.2	85.5	90.1	2014	ILO
5.4.1	Proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic chores and care work (all locations)	6.30	2.70	-	N.D.	UN Women
8.7.1	Proportion and number of children aged 5-17 years engaged in child labor	34.3	29.3	31.7	2019-20	DHS

Notes:

a Data are based on primary household survey data obtained from government statistical agencies and World Bank country departments. For more information and methodology, please see PovcalNet (research.worldbank.org/PovcalNet/index.htm)

b The total is calculated as the simple arithmetic mean of the percentages in the columns for males and females.

c Expressed in terms of deaths per 1,000 live births for the 5-year period preceding the survey

d Equivalent to the age-specific fertility rate for girls aged 10-14 years for the 3-year period preceding the survey, expressed in terms of births per 1,000 girls aged 10-14 years

e Equivalent to the age-specific fertility rate for women aged 15-19 years for the 3-year period preceding the survey, expressed in terms of births per 1,000 women aged 15-19 years

f Data is available for women and men aged 15-49 years who have and use an account at bank or other financial institution; information on use of a mobile-money-service provider is not available

g Data is available for women and men aged 15-49 years only.

h Data is available for women and men aged 15-49 years who

have used the internet in the past 12 months. The total is calculated as the simple arithmetic mean of the percentages in the columns for males and females.

i Data is available for children aged 1-14 years only

j The five reasons correspond to when 1) She argues with him; 2) She burns the food; 3) She goes out without telling him; 4) She neglects the children; or 5) She refuses sex with him.

Sources: Elaborated by the authors with data from LISGIS, 2021 [hereby cited as Liberia Demographic Health Survey (DHS) 2019-20]; ILO, 2020a [Data retrieved on 2021-06-21. Original sources: Labour Force Survey 2010 (LFS) and School to Work Transition Survey 2012, 2014 (SWTS)]; UN Women & Women Count, 2020; UNDP, 2020; OCHA1 (n.d.) [Data retrieved on 2021-06-17. Original source: The World Bank]; OCHA2 (n.d.) [Data retrieved on 2021-06-17. Original source: International Labour Organization (ILO)]; De Mel, Elder & Vansteenkiste (2013) [Original source: SWTS-Liberia, 2012]; World Bank Group1, 2020c; World Bank Group2, 2021f; World Bank Group3, 2021e; World Bank Group4 [ILO, 2020a. Data retrieved on June 15, 2021.]

Table II. Chapter 2 Main Indicators

SDG	Indicator	Female	Male	Total (Rank)	Year	Source
	Employment in Agriculture (% of total employment by sex)	45.6	42.4		2020	AfDB ¹
2.1.2	Prevalence of severe food insecurity in the adult population (%).	89.50	86.70	-	n.d.	UN Women
2.2.1	Prevalence of stunting among children under 5 years of age (%)	27.90	31.80	29.80	2019-20	DHS
2.2.2	Prevalence of malnutrition among children under 5 years of age (%)	7.40	8.20	7.80 ^a	2019-20	DHS
7.1.1	Proportion of population with access to electricity ^a	24.7	23.6		2019-20	DHS
7.1.2	Proportion of population with primary reliance on clean fuels and technology ^a	1.1	1.2		2019-20	DHS
	Women, Business and the Law Index score	83.75	-	-	2020	World Bank ¹
	Firms with female participation in ownership (% of firms)	37	-	-	2017	World Bank ²
	Firms with female top manager (% of firms)	20	-	-	2017	World Bank ²
4.c.1	Proportion of teachers who have received at least the minimum organized teacher training (e.g. pedagogical training) pre-service or in-service required for teaching at the relevant level in a given country and education level (%) Education level: Primary	74	69	-	2017	OCHA
	Share of female teachers (%) Education level: Primary	18	-	-	2017	OCHA ¹
	Share of female teachers (%) Education level: Secondary	6	-	-	2017	OCHA ¹
16.2.2	Detected victims of human trafficking for other purposes, by age and sex (number). Age: All ages	-	-	6	n.d.	UN Women
16.2.3	Proportion of population aged 18-29 years who experienced sexual violence by age 18 (% of population aged 18-29).	4.2	-	-	n.d.	UN Women
	New Internal displacements due to disaster	-	-	3,700	2020	IDMC
	International migrant stock at mid-year (Country of destination Liberia)	37,253	50,694	87,947	2020	UNDESA
	Share of female migrants (% of international migrant stock)					

Notes:

a Based on the sex of the household head.

Sources: AfDB1 Socio Economic Database. Data retrieved on 2021-07-26.

World Bank1 : Women, Business, and the Law (wbl.worldbank.org.). Data retrieved on 2021-07-26.

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