**Case study**

# Evaluation of UN Women's Contribution to Increasing Women's Leadership and Participation in Peace and Security and Humanitarian Response

## Liberia case study

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# Acronyms

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| BIN | Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization |
| CPA | Comprehensive Peace Agreement |
| CSO | Civil Society Organizations |
| DHS | Demographic and Health Survey |
| DPKO | Department of Peacekeeping Operations |
| EU | European Union |
| GTG | Gender Thematic Group |
| LNP | Liberia National Police |
| M&E | Monitoring and Evaluation |
| MoGD | Ministry of Gender and Development |
| NAP | National Action Plan |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| OGA | Office of the Gender Adviser |
| SGBV | Sexual and Gender-Based Violence |
| SSR | Security Sector Reforms |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| UNFPA | United Nations Population Fund |
| UNMIL | United Nations Mission in Liberia |

# 1.    Introduction

The Liberia case study is one of five country case studies for the corporate evaluation of UN Women's contribution to increasing women's leadership and participation in peace and security and humanitarian response. The case study examined a selection of UN Women's peace and security work in Liberia, as well as some aspects of its portfolio concerned with violence against women and governance work relevant to the peace and security agenda. The evaluation also examined related operational and capacity issues as they arose, in agreement with the evaluation matrix areas of inquiry. The case study provides a summary of the key findings and recommendations.

# 2.    Methodology

Fieldwork for this case study was conducted in Liberia from 18-22 February 2013. Preparatory work and consultations were conducted prior to fieldwork being carried out. Some interviews that could not be scheduled during the fieldwork mission were conducted by phone or via online telecommunications subsequent to field travel. Field work was carried out by a member of the evaluation team in collaboration with a local researcher which contributed to ensuring triangulation, knowledge of the socio-political context and better coverage of the data.

During the fieldwork the country-level strategy and programming which focused on the peace and security and humanitarian response agenda was examined. More detailed observation of country office work in this area involved looking at a selection of interventions, which were decided with the country office and the evaluation team leader.

Stakeholders outside of Monrovia were interviewed through field visits to Weala and Totota (Margibi county) and Gbarnga (Bong county) which allowed the evaluation team to meet with a selection of stakeholders from across the group of relevant stakeholders at the sub-national level. Site selection was based on distance from the capital, accessibility issues and time constraints, as well as advice from the country office in terms of appropriate field sites.

Fieldwork was based on qualitative analysis, drawing on a combination of documentary evidence provided by the country office and other stakeholders, as well as interviews and focus group discussions. The fieldwork ensured that the range of relevant stakeholders identified with the country office in the inception phase were interviewed. Interviews and focus group discussions were semi-structured to address the concrete evaluation questions, but also allowed for unstructured questions appropriate to the interview, the context and in relation to the intervention or activity under observation. Interviews were guided by the evaluation matrix.

In line with guidelines provided in the handbook Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluation prepared by the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), the country case evaluation team ensured the inclusion and participation of relevant stakeholders, taking care to identify issues of power relations. The context analysis and the stakeholder mapping that was developed took account of the context-specific balance of power between relevant groups. During the fieldwork, the team was mindful of the relationship between implementers and different stakeholders in interventions, including taking into consideration the role of the evaluation team.

The country visit was relatively short and the evaluation team were only able to review a limited number of interventions. Therefore, the analysis in this report does not represent a full picture of the work of UN Women's Liberia country office. Where broader reflections have

been gathered, these are noted, but do not represent a full evaluation of the office and its position within Liberia.

# 3. Country context

## Context analysis

Liberia is located on the west coast of Africa, with an estimated population of 3.5 million. Liberia was established as an independent country in 1820 by free African Americans and freed slaves from the United States and became the Republic of Liberia in 1847. Its economy was based on extraction, which worked to benefit the small Liberian elite of American descendants (known as the Americo-Liberians) largely based in the capital, Monrovia (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2011). The centralisation of power around these elites led to the exclusion of large sections of the population from political decision-making which created perceptions of historic injustices and inter-ethnic tensions, which have been a longstanding source of conflict in Liberia.[41]

In 1980, these grievances culminated in a military coup led by indigenous leader, Samuel K. Doe. Under his rule, he increased investment in previously neglected areas and extended infrastructure beyond the capital. However, he also created a governmental system that benefited one ethnic group, Krahns, over others (OECD, 2011). Unrest continued in the late 1980s, furthered by an invasion led by Charles Taylor from Côte d'Ivoire in 1989 which led to a militia occupation which splintered into multiple competing factions. Doe was ousted in 1990 and the interim Government of National Unity was installed by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) under which Dr Amos Sawyer served as Interim President. Despite the formal ceasefire, the period saw ongoing conflict between warring factions, including those led by Charles Taylor, who was eventually elected president in 1997. Civil war broke out again in 1999, with two rebel groups, the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia, in control of large parts of the country by 2003 (ICG, 2011).

Following protracted peace talks, a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was agreed in Accra in 2003. The CPA provided for a national transitional government which would be backed by the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), a peacekeeping mission, for two years to oversee its implementation. The CPA brought to an end the 14-year civil war, which had resulted in the deaths of more than a quarter of a million Liberians and the displacement of another million. During the period, women and children were particularly vulnerable. An estimated one child in 10 was thought to have been abducted during the conflict, either to become a combatant or as forced sex slaves for combatants (Blaney et al, 2010).

## Key milestones since 2003

Key milestones since the signing of the CPA include:

- Multi-party elections in 2005, with a government formed by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, with no overall majority in the legislature. Upon her election, President Johnson Sirleaf established an inclusive cabinet comprised of members of rival political parties and civil society actors, in order to ensure some tribal, religious, political and regional representation across government (ICG, 2011). She also ensured that high numbers of

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[41] The ethnic groups in Liberia are: Bassa, Belle, Dei, Gbandi, Gio, Gola, Grebo, Kpelle, Kissi, Krahns, Kru, Loma, Mandingos, Mano Mende, Sapo and Vai.

women were appointed to ministries and other high-profile positions.[42] Many former warlords and those close to Charles Taylor remained in the legislature, however. President Sirleaf was re-elected in a second round of elections in 2011.

- The CPA also established a Truth and Reconciliation Process, with widespread consultation around the country, mandated to set out a road map for future reconciliation processes. It produced a final report in 2009, although its recommendations were seen as controversial (Weah, 2012).

- The first poverty reduction strategy, Lift Liberia, ran from 2007-2012. Following national consultation, it was replaced in 2012 by the Agenda for Transformation, which is Liberia's medium-term economic growth and development strategy, 2012-2017. The strategy has a number of pillars including: peace, justice, security and rule of law; economic transformation; human development; governance and public institutions; as well as cross-cutting issues such as gender inequality and child protection.

- In 2012, the Government of Liberia and its partners established the Strategic Roadmap for National Healing, Peacebuilding and Reconciliation (2012-2030) which set an 18-year timeframe to transform mindsets, rebuild relationships and rebuild social, political and economic institutions to sustain reconciliation and peace. Implementation is organized in six three-year programme cycles, with the first two programme cycles consistent with the Liberia Peacebuilding Programme and the Agenda for Transformation.

## Women and conflict in Liberia

Cultural life in much of rural Liberia has been governed by intricate systems of traditional chiefs and elders in the *Poro* and *Sande* secret societies (particularly found in central and western Liberia) (Government of Liberia/United Nations Joint Programme on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence [SGBV], 2011). These societies have been the main institutions for initiating young boys and girls into adulthood. For men, the emphasis is on hunting skills, how and when to initiative sexual activity, and how to provide for a family. For women, the emphasis is on teaching them how to take care of the home and to satisfy the needs and abide by the rules of their husbands. Such a system has facilitated sexual activity at an early age, something which is reinforced by findings from the 2007 Demographic and Health Survey, which found that childbirth usually began early (average age at first birth was 19 years of age, with a quarter of girls aged 15 and 19 years of age already having one child) (DHS, 2007).[43] Female genital mutilation practices have also been a core part of initial ceremonies, while marriage dowries are commonplace which reinforce women's perceived position as the property of men.

During the civil war, women and children were particularly vulnerable. Different surveys produced a range of statistics, but there seems to be common agreement of the prevalence of SGBV. For instance, a survey on gender-based violence by the World Health Organization (WHO) found that almost 94 per cent of women and girls from six of Liberia's 15 counties had experienced some form of sexual abuse. Other reports suggest that, by the end of the war,

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[42] Women have headed some strategic government ministries, including Commerce, Justice, Gender and Labour, although representation of women in the legislature has remained comparatively low (falling from 17 to 13 out of 94 seats in total). Additionally, the Inter-Parliamentary Union data puts Liberia at 101 out of 139 countries analysed in terms of women's representation.
[43] A 2013 DHS is currently being carried out, but results were not available for this report.

an estimated 40 per cent of the population were thought to have been subjected to sexual violence, with men often forced to either witness sexual violence or to commit acts (Government of Liberia/United Nations Joint Programme on SGBV, 2011; Chandler, 2010). The forced displacement of communities further increased risks for women and girls. Men were often confined to the home because of the threat of violence or abduction by militia groups. Women were therefore forced to venture outside to provide for their families, exposing themselves to increased risks of violence, trading sex for food or becoming combatants themselves.

Since the end of the conflict, legacies of trauma and violence have persisted, especially among victims of SGBV and related health problems (including rates of sexually transmitted diseases). The impacts of disruptions to traditional gender roles have also been felt: 'whereas men were previously regarded as the "provider of the family", this responsibility now shifted to women' (Government of Liberia/United Nations Joint Programme on SGBV, 2011: 34). As a result of these legacies, SGBV in Liberia has persisted, usually committed by someone known to victims and with particularly high rates among young people (Small Arms Survey, 2012). The Liberia Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) 2007 also found that 44 per cent of women between 15 and 49 years of age reported that they had experienced violence since 15 years of age, with the main perpetrators identified as current or former husbands or partners; 18 per cent of women reported some form of sexual violence (Liberia DHS, 2007).

Interviews for a study into SGBV found that 'the persistence of domestic violence, female respondents argued, is directly linked to the increased status of women, on the one hand, and men's perceived loss of power and authority, on the other' (Government of Liberia/United Nations Joint Programme on SGBV, 2011), although this has not been emphasized to the same level in other reports (Chandler, 2010; Small Arms Survey, 2012).

Prior to the signing of the CPA, the peace process was seen largely to exclude women from the main negotiations, although several groups and movements emerged, often from the grassroots, to mobilise for peace (Wamai, 2011). One well-known example was the Mass Movement, initiated by Liberian women affected by the war. It was an all-women movement of around 1,000 local women, characterised by peaceful protests (including sit-ins at the peace talks themselves) and spearheaded by Leygmah Gbowee, who went on to win the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of her efforts. As a result of the war, women's roles have changed to some degree, as is the case in many conflict-affected states (Pillay et al, 2002).

Several international conventions have been ratified by Liberia to address SGBV.[44] Liberia is also seen as something of a pioneer since the war. It was the first post-conflict country to develop a national action plan (NAP) for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325, and UNMIL was the first United Nations peacekeeping mission with a mandate to mainstream resolution 1325. Within the Ministry of Gender and Development (MoGD), the National Secretariat oversees implementation of the NAP. Several important policy initiatives have been undertaken including:

- Legal reforms, including on inheritance and amendment to the law on rape, which addressed property rights for women and ramifications of violence against women and girls, including stronger definitions of rape and increased penalties for perpetrators;

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[44] These include: the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1984), United Nations Security Council resolutions 1325 (2009) and 1820 (2008), all of which reaffirm states' responsibility to undertake efforts to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls.

- Efforts to reform the security sector, including improved training and procedures; and

- Judicial reforms, including the creation of the special Court E and the fast-track court processes to deal with cases involving women and children.

Nonetheless, progress remains slow. SGBV violence remains high, with low prosecution rates (Chandler, 2010; CSO, 2011; Government of Liberia/United Nations Joint Programme on SGBV, 2011). New programmes, policies and laws have not yet signified any fundamental changes for women. For instance, rural communities still turn to customary justice institutions to resolve disputes, including matters of domestic violence, rape and other forms of sexual violence. This can result in processes of reconciliation (including the admission of wrongdoing, public apology, the imposition of a fine) which, although relatively fast, accessible and cost-effective for many are based on patriarchal belief systems and fixed gender norms and values. Moreover, the justice sector as a whole faces acute shortages of trained personnel, as well as instances of corruption (Government of Liberia/United Nations Joint Programme on SGBV, 2011) which demotivated some women and girls from seeking to take cases to court.

Finally, there was little widespread economic improvement, especially for rural women. With constrained state resources, there was insufficient support to address women's experiences and trauma from the war (as both survivors and combatants). Moreover, quotas on female representation in the security sector (especially in the armed forces and the police) set out in the NAP have not yet been met, although this takes time and indicators suggest it is progressively increasing.[45]

## Key stakeholders

Key government ministries that lead on issues of women's peace and security include the MoGD, which has worked closely with the President's Office on a range of initiatives for women. Other important ministries include the Ministry of Justice, the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization (BIN), the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Liberia National Police (LNP) and the Armed Forces of Liberia. Historically, security institutions have had very poor reputations in Liberia, and since independence, have been viewed as having 'mostly served as political instruments of the respective government and oppressed major sectors of Liberian society'. During the civil war, both the Armed Forces and the police committed 'grave atrocities' which led to low levels of public confidence following the end of the war (Jacob, 2009: 53). Since the CPA, there is a perception of improved scrutiny, and improved quality of personnel and efforts to professionalise the armed forces, including progress in increasing the representation of women within the armed forces.

The women's movement in Liberia continues to grow, especially following international recognition of women's mobilization around the peace process and because of the need to continue to support women and girls who have historically been marginalised. UN Women works with a number of key women's non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including the Women's NGO Secretariat, and networks which operate at the subregional level (e.g. Mano River Women Peace Network) and regional levels (such as the Women's Peace and Security Network/ Women's Peace and Security Network-Africa, Women in Peacebuilding Program/ Women in Peacebuilding Programme). UN Women also works with a number of community-

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[45] Current representation of women includes: Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization 30 per cent, LNP 17 per cent, Ministry of National Security 13.4 per cent, Ministry of Justice 13 per cent and Armed Forces 3.7 per cent (DCAF Workshop Report, May 2011).

based organizations in the key regions in which it delivers programme activities.[46] It also partners with organizations which do not exclusively focus on women, such as Action Aid Liberia. These organizations may be involved in advocacy, as well as offering a range of services to women in the areas of peacebuilding, economic empowerment and so on.

In general, nationally based organizations are much more present in urban parts of the country, while few have a constant presence in rural areas (although other UN Women partners, not listed here, would have more presence). The growth, development and expansion of women's organizations dates back to the early stages of the crisis in Liberia, but they have faced numerous operational challenges including: limited human resource capacities to provide the services needed to contribute to the overall recovery process and to hold government accountable; poor coordination among women's organizations and other civil society organizations (CSOs) in the country, narrowing opportunities for information sharing and lesson learning; and limited capacity-building which significantly undermines performance. At the local level, there are a number of rural structures and locally based groups and networks which also lack capacity and have been prioritized for support by the MoGD.

UN Women's engagement with women's peace and security takes place within the context of an integrated mission and where a number of United Nations entities contribute to elements of the peace and security agenda. There is a perceived lack of understanding among stakeholders about what the new mandate involves for UN Women, and the implications for how it engages with relevant stakeholders. This is a potential source of tension with other United Nations entities (such as the Department for Peacekeeping Operations [DPKO]) and where there is a multiplicity of stakeholders with an interest in women's peace and security. However, these are evolving relationships – and notably as regards UNMIL, the Office of Gender Advisor (OGA) and UN Women. Currently the United Nations Gender Thematic Group (GTG) is country office-chaired by UN Women and UNMIL/OGA as part of the One United Nations approach.

Some have argued that this multiplicity of actors in the past led to a lack of comprehensive strategy for the reform process (with little coordination, harmonisation and cooperation between different reform areas and within the donor community), and specifically for the lack of an overall strategy for bringing gender into the security sector. Thus, Jacobs notes that 'OGA activities referred to particular aspects of gender concerns, but without a clearly defined overall vision' (Jacobs, 2009: 58). Some interviewees felt that it had been challenging for UNIFEM to play this role, where other United Nations entities and UNMIL had greater overall resources and a higher profile in relation to peace and security more broadly and gender specifically, through OGA. The transition to UN Women, therefore, represented an opportunity for the new entity to take a more proactive coordination role on gender, although required close engagement with OGA as drawdown of UNMIL proceeds. Moreover, informants noted that UN Women at the corporate level needed to provide clearer instructions on how to conduct the new coordination role at country level, including clarifying this with the Special Representative and other United Nations entities. This is particularly important in the context of Liberia as a Delivering as One United Nations country.

Usefully, there were signs of some United Nations entities already recognising this changed mandate and UN Women's niche within the Delivering as One approach. Specifically, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) recently reviewed its programmes in line with

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[46] A full list is not provided in this section. The UN Women country office maintains an approved list of organizations, from which it identifies specific local partners for projects/programmes.

changes to its global strategy, and refined its focus to aspects of sexual and reproductive health (with SGBV covered where it relates to this), in part in recognition of UN Women's defined role on women's leadership, peace and security. There appeared to be greater complexities in defining mandates in relation to other entities (e.g. DPKO), and greater support at the corporate level could be directed towards this, including to clarify mandates of the different entities. UNMIL is mandated to report to the Security Council, through which it reports on gender as part of the integrated mission. At the time of the fieldwork the division of labour between entities was unclear – therefore resulting in insufficient coordination on activities.[47]

A number of bilateral donor agencies also provide assistance in Liberia. One of the largest of these is the United States, (through the United States Agency for International Development [USAID] and other State Department funds) which, due to its historic ties, has maintained a significant presence in Liberia. In 2011, it had estimated spending of $218 million[48], spread across various programmes including support to the Economic Support Fund and for global health and child survival, food aid, peacekeeping operations and military assistance.[49] Other significant donors include Denmark, the European Union (EU), Germany, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Italy, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom (UK). Since 2005, assistance has averaged 114 per cent of gross national income, making Liberia highly aid dependent (OECD, 2011). The evaluation team did not have access to any specific evaluations of the work of these agencies for women's peace and security, and review of these was beyond the scope of this evaluation.

# 4. UN Women strategy and programming in Liberia

## Background

UN Women has been working in Liberia since 2004, in line with the UN Women Global Strategic Framework and the West Africa Regional Strategy. UN Women country office-chairs the GTG with UNMIL/OGA, comprised of all United Nations entities in Liberia.

## Thematic priorities and programme work

UN Women's programme in Liberia currently focuses on three pillars of work:

1 Economic empowerment;

2 Women's peace and security, including women's leadership; and

3 Gender mainstreaming of public policies and programmes.

There appears to have been a clear evolution in UN Women's priorities and focus in Liberia in recent years. The most recent strategic plan (2012/2013) identifies two clear areas of focus, women's economic empowerment and women's leadership in peace and security, which represents a narrowing of focus for the UN Women country office (UN Women Liberia, 2012).

The 2011 Country Strategy emphasized enhancing women's access to and participation in decision-making in peacebuilding, as well as strengthening women's economic empowerment, supporting key ministries to engender their national policies, strategies and guidelines, and providing greater leadership for gender equality within the United Nations

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[47] UNMIL was not interviewed during the fieldtrip, but a telephone interview was conducted in June 2013.
[48] Unless otherwise stated, currency refers to United States dollar.
[49] The USAID factsheet is available from http://transition.usaid.gov/locations/sub-saharan_africa/countries/liberia/liberia_fs.pdf .

system. Based on interviews conducted in Monrovia, UN Women's work on economic empowerment was well known within Liberia.

UN Women also leads a number of joint programmes including the Liberia Joint Programme for Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment; Liberia's Joint Programmes on Food Security and Nutrition, Adolescent Girls; and Prevention and Response to SGBV. The country office has also supported the establishment of the Association of Women in Cross Border Trade, active in all 15 counties and with over 1,000 members.

UN Women's work on women's peace and security reviewed for this evaluation focused on a three-pronged approach. Firstly, it sought to build on a 'peace huts' model which empowers community women for conflict resolution. Secondly, it worked with some security institutions, especially the LNP and the BIN, to develop gender policies and training. Thirdly, it supported the development of the NAP for Liberia and aspects of its implementation (for example, through support to the National Secretariat), as well as providing support to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Liberia process. UN Women also provided support to the UN country team to ensure gender was prominent in the development of Liberia's 'One Programme' United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) which are looked at below.

Support provided by the country office was in line with the West Africa regional strategy (UNIFEM, 2010) which recognized high levels of political commitment across the region, and highlighted the importance of a focus on implementation of commitments to gender mainstreaming and on strengthening the capacity of national gender machineries and sectoral ministries. The focus on local-level peacebuilding usefully complemented this focus on operationalizing gender commitments, and was in line with the regional-level commitment to support gender-sensitive post-conflict strategies, including reconciliation.

## Transition from UNIFEM to UN Women

The process for transitioning to UN Women is still underway. Progress has been made in refining strategic priorities, with the appointment of a new Country Representative, and with new staffing (the country office should comprise a workforce of 20 by the end of 2013). In addition, as set out in the section above, there is evidence (from UN Women strategic documents and confirmed by interviews in Monrovia) that this transition was perceived as helping refine UN Women's strategic focus. For instance, a UNFPA representative recognized that UN Women now has a refined focus in relation to women's peace and security, and was recognized as a United Nations leader in this field. The perception of a strengthened and clearer mandate for UN Women, compared to UNIFEM, was recognized in a number of other interviews too.

At the strategic level, there was recognition that the entity is evolving from a role as a fund with investment and responsibility for aspects of women's peace and security, to an entity where such issues are unequivocally in its mandate. As previously noted, this requires a shift in approach and resourcing for both the country office and other United Nations entities which is likely to take time and may be challenging, particularly in terms of how to define the space for UN Women in relation to others (such as DPKO and OGA) and in the context of an integrated mission. Given that internal gender mainstreaming activities of the mission were directly related to mandated priorities affecting the external political/peacebuilding process, informants noted a need for clarity and agreement on the coordination and division of responsibilities between the UNMIL/OGA and UN Women. The shift towards a more focused mandate seems to be seen by the key stakeholders interviewed as a positive one which could help address some of the coordination challenges identified in the past (see

below). However, there may be a need for greater support from headquarters and at the corporate level, including support for the country office as it moves to take on its new mandate and also in terms of how to communicate and work effectively with other United Nations entities.

The new focus on women's peace and security seemed to be a strength for the Liberia country office, which had been working on these issues for several years and was now able to focus on and refine this work. It also seems well suited to the Liberia context, given levels of need and available resourcing, where a more in-depth, long-term focus on select core issues may be more sustainable. Review of the previous West Africa regional strategy (UNIFEM, 2010) and the UN Women Strategic Note 2012/2013 (UN Women, n.d.) suggests a long list of priority areas for country offices in the region, including women's leadership and political participation, economic empowerment, women in peace and security, gender issues in national and local planning, and budgeting and supporting local women's organizations to influence global policies. The Liberia country office appeared to be prioritizing the areas of women in peace and security and economic empowerment (although this was not examined as part of this review), and a narrower focus on some core, and often interlinked, areas seemed to be a helpful approach given the prevalence and damaging nature of these dynamics.

At the administrative and financial level, a number of changes were already underway, and the priority appeared to be embedding these. The country office now has delegation of authority; it is a decentralised office and is nearing its full complement of staffing. With these changes, it was envisaged that the office would have greater programme management capacity, including financial management, which would help address some of the implementation challenges identified as historic weaknesses (see below). It would also allow the office to operate more independently and with increased delegation of authority, although further support may be needed, including for capacity-building to adjust to new roles and systems. There was some sense that this process was relatively drawn out, including from UN Women partners who felt, for instance, that funding decisions and disbursements were still delayed due to the need to go through the regional office.

Most external stakeholders were aware of the transition process at the general level (for example, change of name). Some, particularly those who were not UN Women partners, lacked a clear understanding of precisely what changes were underway, and of UN Women's priorities and planned future work. The lack of visibility of the transition process beyond UN Women's immediate partners and stakeholders was therefore highlighted, which could have been addressed through wider communications.

## Description of selected programmes and activities

The evaluation focused on experiences of one global programme and one joint programme, namely:

- From Communities to Global Security Organizations; and
- The EU, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UN Women joint programme on women, peace and security.

It also briefly looked at support for the development and implementation of the Liberia NAP and explored general perceptions of UN Women's strategy, partners and impacts. These areas were identified by the country office staff and the evaluation team, in part because of the focus on community peacebuilding (not covered in other country case studies) and as an

example of how a global programme, also implemented in other countries reviewed for the overall evaluation, was adapted at local level.

The global programme, From Communities to Global Security Organizations (UNIFEM, 2009), runs from March 2010 to March 2013 (with a no-cost extension to March 2014). It's objectives are:

- To ensure that women (including the most marginalized in conflict contexts) are able to contribute to and benefit from security measures and peacebuilding, peacemaking processes at the community, national, regional and global levels, through:

  - Actively engaging women in peacebuilding initiatives on a community and national-level, by strengthening community approaches to prevent SGBV and respond to the needs of survivors.

  - Using security sector reforms (SSRs) in Liberia to create more secure environments for women by way of protection, access to justice and local reforms.

The EU, UNDP and UN Women joint programme runs from February 2012 to January 2014 and has the following objectives (UN Women, 2012):[50]

- To ensure greater participation of women in peacebuilding and post-conflict planning, including through:

- Strengthening the capacity and coordination of the relevant EU and United Nations institutions and actors (through supporting a technical committee and harmonised accountability frameworks for resolution 1325, as well as knowledge-building events);

- Support to CSOs and women leaders to participate in peacebuilding and post-conflict planning processes, conduct inter-ethnic peace dialogues, gain access to peacebuilding funds and micro-grants and lead high-visibility advocacy initiatives.

The global and joint programme have a shared core emphasis on supporting the establishment of 'peace huts' at the local level to support community women's participation in peacebuilding. A wide range of activities have been associated with these programmes including construction of some of the peace huts, training for community women in peacebuilding and economic empowerment activities, sensitisation in communities, and in some cases, support for saving and loans or micro-credits at the local level.

In addition, under the global programme, technical support was provided to develop gender policies, handbooks and training for national security institutions (principally BIN and LNP), as well as for improved recruitment and retention of female staff within these agencies. For the joint programme, there as also a commitment by the partner agencies to ensuring they would work more effectively together.

In relation to the development of Liberia's NAP, support was provided to the MoGD, including capacity support to the national Secretariat, to develop communication strategies, production of accessible materials and other awareness raising support.

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[50] UN Women (2012). 'Women Peace and Security Implementation'.

# 5.    Findings

## Theories of change

UN Women Liberia's support to women's leadership, peace and security had an overall theory of change which focused on improved accountability for women's security and rights and increased voice in peacebuilding. It did so through creating demand at the community level (working with communities to strengthen their voices and agency) and working at the macro level to build the capacity of state institutions to respond through improved services for women, increased accountability and recognition that women's security is a public security issue. UN Women is therefore committed to working at these two levels to achieve change.

Drawing on project documents and interviews, the figure below attempts to articulate the general theory for change in a diagrammatic form which cuts across the individual programmes evaluated and brings together the two strands identified above. Not all inputs and underlying assumptions were explicitly outlined in project documents, so some have been extrapolated from interviews with UN Women staff, other partners and various project documents.

**Inputs**
**Macro level:**
- Technical assistance to national security institutions (e.g. LNP, BIN) to develop gender policies and manuals.
- Support for improved recruitment and conditions for female staff within security institutions.
- Purchase of some equipment for LNP (e.g. motorbikes, mobile phones) and community women (e.g. sewing machines).

**Community level:**
- Construction of peace huts in select locations.
- Peacebuilding training and economic empowerment training (e.g. sewing or baking skills) delivered to community women.
- Sensitization and engagement of male leaders.

**Outputs**
**Macro level:**
- Key security institutions (e.g. LNP, BIN) have increased capacity to develop and implement gender policies.
- Greater numbers of women are recruited and retained within national security institutions.

**Community level:**
- Community women have increased voice and capacity to address women's peace and security at the community level, including through greater economic independence.
- Male leaders (e.g. police, elders, etc.) are more supportive of efforts to address women's peace and security.

**Outcomes**
1. Women are actively engaged in peacebuilding initiatives at a community and national level.
2. SSRs in Liberia create more secure environments for women.
3. Greater partnerships are facilitated among external and national actors.

**Strategic Plan Goals**
UN Women Global Strategic Plan DRF:
Goal 1: Women's increased leadership and participation in the decisions that affect their lives.
Goal 4: Women's leadership in peace and security.

**Underlying assumptions:**
- Government of Liberia and other parties to the conflict are amenable towards or supportive of the inclusion of women in peacebuilding processes.
- UN Women has the capacity, credibility and expertise to support women's engagement in these processes.
- Improved gender policies will be operationalized within security ministries.
- Women want to work within current security institutions and can be supported to do so.
- The concept of peace huts is universally understood and well accepted by local leaders.
- Women's economic empowerment and peace and security will be mutually reinforcing.

The approach above was in line with the new strategic priorities set by UN Women globally, and recent strategic documents for the Liberia office show a clear and consistent focus on these two dimensions (UN Women Liberia, 2011; 2012). At a general level, this theory of change seemed to resonate well with the Liberian context and the particular challenges for women. In particular, it is striking that the global programme (of which Liberia is only one country) was adapted to draw upon locally relevant understandings and institutions, focused on historical notions of the 'palava huts' in Liberia as somewhere to resolve conflict, and using this as a base for community engagement. At a national level, support to particular security institutions capitalized on a conducive enabling environment, with strong political will from the President to key individuals and champions with whom UN Women has worked, including senior women within relevant ministries.

A number of innovative aspects of this theory of change stand out (and are discussed in more detail in the following sections) namely that it:

- Built on pre-existing local institutions and understandings, through the traditional 'palava hut' system;

- Adopted a process-driven approach, with investment particularly at the community level in facilitating and supporting women's agency and voice to collectively address issues of peace and security

- Linked peacebuilding and economic empowerment activities, providing an additional incentive for women to participate.

This adaptation to local realities appeared to be particularly impressive in the context of implementing a global programme where initial priorities and objectives were set at the global level.

While the general objectives and envisioned outputs and impacts for programmes therefore seemed to be well defined, there were remaining gaps in terms of how effectively programmes were implemented. In part, this reflected capacity gaps within UNIFEM and, as the transition process is underway, UN Women. Crucially, it also reflected gaps in terms of the overall management of the global programme. One particular reported challenge was the prevalence of project rather than programme funding and the substantive gap (of around one year) between funding for Phase I and Phase II. The absence of bridge funding had significant knock-on effects in terms of maintaining links with partners, maintaining core activities and the sustainability of activities overall. It was particularly challenging where a process-driven approach had been adopted, particularly at the community level, which required ongoing and longer term investment, and was severely disrupted by shorter periods of funding and gaps in the process.

Moreover, while implementation was identified as a key priority in the 2008-2009 and 2010 West Africa regional strategies for UNIFEM, there did not appear to have been sufficient guidance (including tools, lesson sharing from other countries, capacity-building support and so on) to support the country office implement the programme, something which was particularly needed as the Liberia office transitions to UN Women, in the process refocusing some programmes and continuing with commitments to deliver.

There have been some knock-on impacts for the ability to implement programmes. For instance, support was provided to establish (and often to construct) peace huts in communities, and women were given some training in peacebuilding to strengthen their ability to mediate and resolve conflicts, contributing to reductions in SBGV and increased voice and participation. However, field visits in Weala and Totota revealed differences in the

mandates of the peace huts, how women themselves understood their roles within these mandates, and differences in the wider enabling environment (levels of support within the community, from the police and male leaders and so on).

These challenges reflected the lack of resources for embedding this approach (and the funding gaps described above). It was particularly challenging where local-level implementing organizations did not have strong skills in peacebuilding at the outset and, as a result, levels of training and familiarity with related issues were diverse and needed greater attention, even in the limited number of field sites visited. In recognizing some of these gaps, UN Women has prioritized more standardised approaches for peacebuilding training (from which one could more easily compare results/outcomes) in Phase II through which a shared understanding of the mandate and remit of the peace huts themselves could be developed as part of an implementation strategy (and could be facilitated by lesson sharing of similar community peacebuilding efforts in other countries in the region).

It also reflected the need for UN Women to manage its partnerships at the national level and to have greater flexibility in how resources were deployed. For instance, the MoGD prioritized support to rural structures, including for women's peace and security which influenced the selection of local partners and operations at local levels. In practice, it meant that in some regions support for peace huts has been based on pre-existing processes in communities, whereas in others, the approach was developed in communities identified by the Government and lacked this pre-existing capacity or agency. Deploying additional resources and capacity to support areas which had weaker capacity was useful, but was not possible where there were gaps in funding and fairly prescribed project funds. The need for greater flexibility in how resources can be used and deployed is therefore emphasized.

In addition, the country office sought to innovate by combining peacebuilding activities with support for women's economic empowerment, another key priority for the UN Women office which brought together two key aspects: high levels of economic need and threats and vulnerabilities for women. UN Women staff stated that this linkage was also demand driven, as the country office responded to requests for greater economic empowerment activities in its work with women in River Cess communities.

However, how these two dimensions link together, including within the project documents and overall theory of change, was not explicitly explained. The reporting requirements for this global programme were a challenge as they focused on reporting against the original log-frame (often in quantitative form) and did not allow much space for flexibility or for capturing emerging issues within the programme cycle.

A key priority should be allowing for greater reporting of qualitative issues which arise as part of programme implementation. It would enable fuller reporting of the range of possible impacts and facilitate more purposeful monitoring of any unintended impacts or potential risks. For instance, a recent report on SGBV highlighted how women's increased economic independence in Liberia may have in part contributed to greater risks and vulnerabilities of women (as men feel their roles changing and react against this, including through violence) (Government of Liberia/ United Nations Joint Programme on SGBV, 2011). The evaluation team were unable to determine whether these risks were being monitored, which could be worthwhile, even if to disprove the statement. Moreover, at the local level, women involved in the peace huts initiative (from the select field sites visited) did not always have a clear understanding of the remit of the huts: some felt it was economic empowerment, others that it was women's peace and security. Refining understanding of how these sit together, and communicating this to a range of partners including at the local level, may therefore be useful.

Finally, it may be useful to review UN Women's choice of partners as part of the transition process. The country office appeared to have a strong relationship with the Minister for Gender and the MoGD, as well as some good links to champions within the BIN and the LNP. However, questions were realized as to whether and how UN Women had effectively engaged with the full range of women's CSOs also working on these issues (something also noted in Wamai [2011] as a general challenge across the international community). A lack of effective engagement could lead to missed opportunities, considering the significant profile of these organizations and their innovative approaches to women's peacebuilding and leadership efforts in Liberia. These are discussed further in sections below.

## Evaluation questions

### Dimension 1: UN Women's policy and strategic direction

In what ways had UN Women influenced policies and practice (within the United Nations system as well as in key external agencies) in relation to women's political participation and leadership in peace and security?

There have been significant reforms for women's peace and security in Liberia over the last decade. Rightly, these have largely been internally driven, through the leadership of the President and key ministries, and work of key women's organizations. The role of external agencies has been secondary, through facilitative roles, which is testament to the political will and momentum fostered within Liberia in the post-conflict period.

During the interviews, UN Women partners and implementers confirmed that the country office was seen as being largely supportive of their agendas, helping to facilitate local and national priorities rather than imposing an external agenda. In so doing, UN Women contributed to a range of recent reforms, from the creation of specific gender policies to the creation of a national Secretariat, to support the Liberia NAP for resolution 1325.

Nonetheless, identifying the specific strategic impacts of UN Women on these significant areas of reform was challenging in a context which has remained dominated by the integrated mission and the presence of UNMIL who had its own mandates and remits as a peacekeeping mission. Some interviewees felt that the UNMIL's OGA had historically been more visible in promoting women's participation and leadership in peace and security, including through integrating gender into support for SSR. Concretely, support for the revision of the LNP gender policy was initiated by OGA, which resulted in the first LNP gender policy in 2006. However, other observers noted that, in practice, UNMIL's effectiveness was mixed, citing delays in considering gender issues for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR), such as the specific needs and issues for women combatants (Wamai, 2011). However, UNMIL was commended for its work in global peacekeeping, through which the eligibility criteria on access to DDR support was revised to include the category Women Associated with Fighting Forces, a first in peacekeeping practice.

Despite moves towards a Delivering as One approach, interviews suggested that there was still a general picture of largely fragmented approaches and the need for greater support at the corporate level in terms of both supporting country office transition and in communicating this effectively to other United Nations entities. In this context, there were particular challenges for UNIFEM, who received less overall resourcing and staffing than other agencies with one interviewee indicating that UNIFEM had to 'fight for a seat at the table'. Thus, the transition to UN Women was seen as being very positive, but one which could benefit from greater support to institutionalize these changes across the United Nations system.

Other United Nations entities already appeared to recognise potential complementarities between their work and that of UN Women. UNFPA, for instance, noted that its strategic priorities have shifted towards reproductive health, allowing greater space for UN Women's niche in governance and leadership. Entities seemed eager for UN Women to build a specific niche in, for example, women's leadership and participation and building key strategic alliances for influence around these, rather than women's issues more broadly.

In this respect, it was important to note that, despite international attention to women's mobilization in Liberia (including around the Mass Action movement), there was a very limited sense that donor agencies (including but not only UNIFEM) had helped support or facilitate this.[51] In fact, interviews and focus group discussions suggest some within civil society felt sidelined in the past due to perceived preferential relationships with government. Interviews suggested the need for UN Women to have a strong understanding of some of the political sensitivities within and between various women's groups and movements, and that as part of the transition process, there may be new opportunities for it to play a more facilitative, brokering role, including between women's groups and government. There may also be real potential for UN Women to support greater collaboration among women's groups with several interviewees suggesting the challenge would be to encourage civil society to collaborate to realise change rather than compete for funds. Other research supported this assertion and noted gaps in building more collaborative approaches within and between women's groups and networks to ensure longer term effectiveness (Caeser et al., 2010).

## How sustainable were the efforts and results of UN Women policy influencing and engagement?

Assessing issues of sustainability remain a challenge in Liberia, as the focus on women's leadership for peace and security is relatively new (since the late 2000s), in line with UN Women's transition and changing global strategies.

There were, however, some positive signals. As noted above, most interviewees felt that UN Women (and UNIFEM) had provided support to facilitate their own strategies and plans, allowing for a strong sense of local ownership (particularly within key Ministries). Ownership was further reinforced through the knowledge transfer from external consultants, funded by UN Women, for instance through the development of gender policies in partnership with security Ministries. Moreover, community-level support usefully built on locally grounded concepts, such as the *palava* huts concept, which connected ideas already familiar at the local level which will likely contribute to greater sustainability as opposed to approaches seen to be enforced from outside or follow the interests of external funders.

Interviews also highlighted some sustainability challenges. Across the programmes, support appeared fairly piecemeal and limited by constrained resources (staffing and funding), particularly where support had been reliant on project funding and where there had been significant gaps between phases of funding. As a result, partners reported that funding was often for short periods of time (i.e. three to six months) and spread thinly across activities. In addition, there were reports of significant funding delays, forcing partners to pre-finance some of their activities. Taken together, this appeared to have undermined the ability to really embed approaches and programmes in communities.

Furthermore, sustainability was also questioned where resourcing gaps contributed to inconsistencies in the approach taken, including at the community level (which should feed

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[51] The lack of international assistance for aspects of the women's movement was discussed in Gbowee with Mithers (2013).

back into national level engagement), as discussed above. In practice, at the community level, this resulted in a wide range of activities occurring around the peace huts but no clearly agreed understandings of the mandates and roles they should have. Without this, there were risks of a proliferation of models, many of which were poorly understood within communities, and which did not prove to be sustainable beyond the life cycle of the individual programmes.

One aspect which could be explored further, and where sharing of lessons from other countries and technical support from headquarters would be beneficial, pertains to data collection. The need to address data gaps and reporting on SGBV was identified in the West Africa regional strategy (2010) and gaps in data were identified by several interviewees for this evaluation. Some very useful baseline data was captured as part of individual programmes but, according to interviews, UN Women does not currently have access to broader SGBV reporting (collated by the MoGD). As far could be determined, partners have not routinely collected and shared data, for instance on SGBV incidences and follow-up at the local level. Supporting partners' efforts to improve their data collection and working with MoGD to improve the dissemination of data that has been collected, including aggregating information from different organizations, could be particularly useful for supporting sustainable and long-term responses, and could benefit from technical support on data collection as well as support for engaging with government to strengthen transparency and information sharing.

> To what extent did the recent policy/strategic direction reflect the lessons learned from policy engagement on peace and security and humanitarian response since 2008 and how fit for purpose was it for the new UN Women mandate?

Liberia has, in many ways, been at the forefront of reforms for women's peace and security in the post-conflict period, as seen in its progress in electing its first female President, developing the first NAP for resolution 1325, and in innovations like the secondment of the all-female police unit. However, as previously discussed, there were challenges where there were perceived to be fragmented or uncoordinated responses across United Nations entities, and no overall lead on these issues. Moreover, there were several criticisms of the extent to which support given for SSR and the initial peace talks allowed space for women's active participation (including in negotiations around the CPA, and initial reform programmes for the army and the police) (Wamai, 2011).[52] During the transition period, UN Women can build on this experience by addressing core historic gaps in coordination and leadership on women's peace and security, but its ability to do this depends on the effectiveness of the Delivering as One approach and the willingness of other United Nations entities to recognize and respond to this changed mandate. Greater support will be required, as emphasized above, and it will take time for changes to become embedded.

In addition, UN Women's approach to link national level reforms to local-level peacebuilding efforts is particularly innovative, and could be a useful source of learning for other country offices as part of a renewed focus on the implementation of existing commitments. Efforts to bring together work at multiple levels into one overall theory of change seemed well suited to the country context, which reflected the need for longer timeframes and recognized that change needed to occur at several levels for improvements in women's peace and security to be realized.

For the future, and to enable greater lesson learning for other country offices, it may be particularly useful to articulate more explicitly the potential linkages and areas of connection

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[52] Since then, support by UN Women/UNIFEM and others sought to address this, particularly through gender policy development and support for training and recruitment of women as part of SSR. However, perceptions of this historic weakness remain.

between these two levels. At present, implementation relies on treating community and national-level support as two separate components. However, looking ahead, there may be opportunities for greater coordination or opportunities for shared learning between the two. For instance, UN Women partners at the local level provided examples where personnel within security institutions (such as BIN) perpetuated forms of sexual harassment against women; were not aware of the support for gender policies or codes of conduct; nor did they have channels to share this feedback with UN Women or with BIN or other government actors. Facilitating links of these kinds, and facilitating information sharing between different levels at which UN Women support operates, may therefore be key. One potential platform would be to work through and with prominent women's CSOs and groups, to help aggregate feedback from the local level which could then be used for advocacy and monitoring at the national level.

Finally, although the evaluation did not look in depth at the process around the NAP for resolution 1325, several interviewees gave feedback on this process. The overriding view was that the NAP had been too ambitious, seeking to include a long 'wish list' of issues, and was not well grounded in assessments of what was practicable or feasible in a given timeframe. Several interviewees felt that it lacked an *implementation* plan, in terms of both an analysis of the costs of implementation and identification of the key responsibilities of different actors to implement it. At present, the National Secretariat (based within the MoGD) lacks sufficient capacity to address these issues effectively, and has focused largely on a coordination function, including the organization of meetings for various committees. Later this year, discussions will begin on the next NAP. Here, there is a potential role for UN Women to support greater discussion on a smaller set of action points, grounded in what is implementable and can be monitored, and building on its experience, for example around the peace huts initiative, to ensure greater attention is paid to issues of how to operationalize these plans.

### Dimension 2: UN Women's policies, programming and operations

To what extent did UN Women's programmes achieve the expected results? What explains variations?

As noted above, the evaluation examined a global programme, aspects of a joint programme with the EU and aspects of support for the NAP for resolution 1325. Overall, experiences and achievements were mixed, although many programmes are still underway, and overall, it is hard to assess or predict likely outcomes and impact.

Some of the key achievements identified so far have mainly focused on the input level (i.e. delivery of specific activities). The results of outputs were still emerging, as progress was still needed to support implementation of key policies and strategies, and embed clear understandings of the mandates and roles of the peace huts themselves which partly reflects the different phases of the programme and the current stage of implementation. Outputs achieved to date included:

- Establishment of a national secretariat, to support greater coordination of the NAP;

- Development of gender policies for BIN and LNP, and more gender-sensitive human resource strategies;

- Creation of new meeting spaces for community women, including physical construction of peace huts in some locations;

- Strengthened capabilities of community women, through training in both

peacebuilding, conflict resolution and economic empowerment skills; and

- Some improved sensitisation, for instance of local male leaders (chiefs, village elders, policemen).

Key factors which are likely to contribute to greater effectiveness include:

- The focus on a *process* driven approach, which invests in facilitating and supporting local women's groups and communities to come together to discuss (and address) issues of women's peace and security. Such an approach usefully built on locally appropriate, grounded structures such as notions of the peace hut. There were also key features of a broader enabling environment, which were conducive to ensuring greater effectiveness and impact including high-level political support for women's peace and security from the President and key ministries (e.g. MoGD). After the transition process, and as part of the Delivering as One approach, there will be greater opportunities for UN Women to play more pivotal roles in these issues going forward.

- As noted above, the majority of the partners and implementers interviewed (those already receiving or who had received support in the past) felt that UN Women had worked effectively with them and had been aligned to their priorities and plans which was important for effectiveness.

Key potential challenges which have been referred to in previous sections can be summarised as follows:

- Broadly, some of the key features of the main theories of change in use seemed sound and well grounded in the local context. However, implementation gaps have resulted from the prevalence of short-term project funds and gaps between funding phases, which have undermined the possibility of embedding a more process-driven approach. Reporting requirements constrained reporting on how different inputs needed to interact to realise change (described above), including the links between different levels (local, national, peace/security and economic empowerment).

- These gaps have contributed to differences in terms of how peace huts were understood, and the types of activities perceived to be within their mandate. In some cases, they appeared to be operating almost as courts, with their own powers of arrest and punishment (e.g. Totota), whereas in others, they were primarily sites for shared economic activities. Such a lack of clarity facilitated the creation of a range of parallel structures in an environment already characterised by institutional multiplicity (i.e. adding new layers to customary and legal structures that already existed). Instead, clearer understanding seems to be needed of the mandates, roles and responsibilities of the peace huts and how they should relate to other legal and customary processes.

- Development of a clearer understanding has been further undermined by various logistical delays, in part reflecting the reported delays in funding, contributing to delayed starts to programme activities and poor coordination between partners.

The global programme analysed for this evaluation was effectively adapted, in its activities and approach, to key features of the country context (and is discussed in further detail below). The useful assistance and support provided by individual staff at headquarters as part of this programme was recognized.

UN Women staff reported challenges of adapting globally set programmes to diverse local contexts and undertaking significant efforts to appropriately adapt and modify to the country context. They also reported challenges of fairly fixed templates for reporting, which focused predominantly on quantitative reporting rather than allowing for more qualitative assessments and reflection on the underlying theories of change and how to adapt these within the programme cycle. Furthermore, they did not feel that the current global policy adequately addressed key local issues, such as issues of economic empowerment in relation to women's peace and security. UN Women country office staff indicated that a more flexible reporting system would be preferable, as well as reporting on both quantitative and qualitative results, and reporting on processes of implementation and adaptation.

As discussed in several sections above, funding delays and piecemeal funding undermined the country office's ability to effectively translate global programmes in programmatic work. A particular issue identified related to the timeframes for programming and the timeframes in which change is thought to be observed. Given the multiple barriers and multiple levels at which support was needed, there was a strong sense of a need for longer timeframes for resourcing and for reporting on impacts (of at least five years or more).

There was evidence of important efforts to adapt programmes to the local context in Liberia, for instance through building on pre-existing institutions (such as peace huts), cultivating strong strategic partnerships with some stakeholders (e.g. MoGD) and working with local structures (such as local rural structures, chiefs and village elders, local police).

However, gaps remained, for instance in how this is adapted at very local levels. While UN Women reported that it had selected communities in partnership with the MoGD and followed MoGD policy to support local rural structures, not enough support (in terms of resourcing and capacity-building) was available to engage with the realities of very low capacity at this level. This was particularly evident where UN Women supported partners who lacked some of the relevant skills, for instance working with those with skills in economic empowerment but not peacebuilding.[53]

As previously noted, one of the key strengths of the programme was its process-led approach, despite requiring strong implementing partners, and sustained support and funding. It may also benefit from greater involvement of umbrella groups or those with core capacity in peacebuilding activities (for instance, scaling up work with women's groups like the Women in Peacebuilding Programme, the Mano River Women's Peace Network and, to a lesser extent, the Women's NGO Secretariat of Liberia).

Finally, a detailed baseline was carried out in 2011, in part in response to an independent

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[53] Capacity-building support was provided to these partners to build the appropriate skills, but may have overlooked other organizations which already had expertise in this area.

evaluation for DFID, which noted the lack of baseline information for monitoring as part of the programme monitoring framework (McLean and Kerr-Wilson, 2009; Atsu et. al., 2011). This was used to support Phase II of programme implementation. However, it was not clear whether this information had been effectively shared or discussed with local partners (those interviewed were not aware of it).

## How effective was UN Women at identifying and using key opportunities and partnerships at country level?

Issues of partnership were examined in detail above. As noted, UN Women appeared to have cultivated some strong government partners (principally with MoGD and BIN), which have had influence at the national level. However, there were remaining challenges in terms of embedding the Delivering as One approach and ensuring that other entities recognized UN Women's changed mandate and role.

In addition, there may be greater opportunities to engage with wider networks of civil society and various women's movements, given their recent history in Liberia and contributions to women's peace and security. While some key opportunities were identified – such as support to the national Secretariat for the NAP – others include making connections and facilitating information sharing between community and national levels, and supporting greater coordination and collaboration within and across civil society groups and networks.

## How effective were UN Women programmes at fostering and strengthening national ownership through country engagement of intended outcomes regarding improved leadership and participation of women in relevant peace and security and humanitarian response intervention?

UN Women was clearly seen to support fostering national ownership, specifically through the MoGD. However, there were two gaps to date. Firstly, opportunities were missed to build wider partnerships, including with civil society which affected UN Women's reputation in some places. Secondly, support appeared to be largely piecemeal (especially at national levels) to the specific interests of a select number of stakeholders, which did not allow for optimal strategic planning and positioning of these issues with key stakeholders.

Moreover, there may be greater scope for UN Women to play a more 'critical friend' role with some of key allies. For instance, MoGD information currently collated on SGBV as part of the work of the SGBV Task Force is not made publicly available, nor is it shared with key partners like UN Women. MoGD reports that it only releases information to those who contribute to the dataset (in order to incentivise compliance), which significantly reduced opportunities for the data to be used more effectively. Supporting key partners to be more transparent and share information more effectively would therefore help to utilise existing strong partnerships in effective ways.

## In what ways did the new mandate and reorganization provide opportunities to improve programme effectiveness and coherence between UN Women policies and operational engagement?

As the UN Women office was still in a process of transition, it was too early to identify the ways in which the new mandate provides new opportunities to improve effectiveness and coordination. However, early signs point to the following as potential entry points:

- The clearer, more focused vision may allow for more strategic engagement and a clearer sense of the added value of UN Women in Liberia. However,

additional support may be needed to ensure that other stakeholders (including other United Nations entities) fully recognise this new role and increase the visibility and awareness of the new entity;

- Some interviewees hoped that the new mandate and reorganization would help address bureaucratic constraints, including delays and challenges in processing funding, although this process was not yet complete; and

- An increased staff presence and new leadership will open up new opportunities to build relationships with, for example, key civil society groups.

## Dimension 3: UN Women's organizational capacities, resources and structures

### How adequate were UN Women human and financial resources to engage effectively in conflict-affected countries?

Partners and staff believed that poor staffing and financial resourcing and the country office's reliance on project funding significantly limited operational capacity in Liberia, in particular when there were significant funding gaps or lags. With the transition towards a more focused mandate, the country office may need further support to strengthen its own skills and capacity vis-à-vis different peacebuilding approaches, political analysis, relationship building and brokering.

The UN Women country office identified key priority areas for the future in terms of communications and advocacy skills. Recruitment should focus on those with adequate technical skills and expertise and key political and relationship-building skills, who can help embed and take forward both the new mandate of the office (through strong networks and relationships with other agencies and partners) and the process-driven approaches already developed by the country office.

### How fit for purpose was UN Women in terms of the technical skills of its staff and its broader capacity to fulfil its mandate?

It was difficult to assess how 'fit for purpose' UN Women was from the relatively short evaluation visit and review. Overall, there were clear signs that the office was moving in the right direction, with some key foundations for it to build upon. Looking ahead, it is likely to be important to continue strengthening the strategic vision of the office so it can make better use of a range of strategic partnerships and links between different areas of support. Interviewees suggested that the new Country Representative already has a good reputation in some of these areas, which could usefully be built upon.

There may be greater scope for support at the global level and in headquarters to better facilitate effective working of the UN Women country office including more flexible reporting systems to allow for fuller two-way feedback and learning, particularly around programme implementation, and greater involvement in developing programmes that speak to country needs. There were also requests for stronger support in tracking implementation, including through increased technical assistance around monitoring and evaluation (M&E), which should be linked to changes in funding models and timeframes to ensure effective resourcing, particularly for more process-driven approaches.

## How effective was UN Women at coordinating gender-related work across United Nations entities and other key partners?

Resource constraints and the stronger visibility of other United Nations entities (such as UNMIL) have historically limited the ability of UN Women/ UNIFEM to ensure that work on women's peace and security was coordinated and that there was accountability for women's rights. There may be greater opportunities for this through the Delivering as One approach and where other entities have refocused their mandates (e.g. UNFPA), as well as through UN Women's growing visibility following its transition to a stand-alone entity. Greater corporate support would be useful in communicating changes to other United Nations entities and the Resident Coordinator, and to ensure that the new mandate is recognized and responded to.

However, expectations for UN Women's ability to coordinate gender-related work should remain realistic given the likelihood of ongoing resource constraints, and UNMIL's continued presence in Liberia. Stakeholders noted the need for clearer corporate guidance on UN Women's coordination role, which was unclear at the country level. Moreover, concrete recommendations were made about the need for an agreement between UN Women and the DPKO on the coordination of women, peace and security activities in the field. Specifically in Liberia there appeared to be good reason for UNMIL/OGA and UN Women to better clarify the division of labour regarding programming areas, and the nature of the relationship between UN Women and UNMIL/OGA.

In this context, UN Women in Liberia may be more effective in clarifying its specific niche (e.g. around women's leadership for peace and security) and seeking to exploit it further, both through greater coordination across United Nations entities and through widening the set of key stakeholders with whom it engages.

In country office-chairing the GTG with UNMIL/OGA, there were also good examples of coordination. For example, in 2012, a Gender and SSR Task Force was established in response to the need to improve United Nations coordination regarding gender-sensitive SSR. According to stakeholders, the Task Force could facilitate the transition of UNMIL-led gender-related SSR to the United Nations country team, and coordination between UNMIL and UN Women would be important in this process.

## How effectively did UN Women manage risks in its operations? What strategies worked best?

Despite significant signs of progress and upholding of the peace process, there continued to be high levels of risk for women in Liberia, including a lack of support for dealing with the effects of the conflict (e.g. trauma, reproductive health problems as a result of sexual violence and the prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDs). High levels of SGBV have also persisted following the war and, whereas during the conflict they were perpetrated by combatants, recent reports suggest they are now committed by someone known to victims, with young girls particularly at risk. It was suggested that this reflects changes to established gender roles, combined with the legacies of violence (Government of Liberia/ United Nations Joint Programme on SGBV, 2011: 44; Small Arms Survey, 2012).

In this context, very careful risk analysis and monitoring is required to ensure that any support helps ameliorate these risks and does not unintentionally exacerbate them. At present, these risks do not seem to be systematically monitored, either within specific programmes or across key portfolios.

While detailed baseline information was mapped in 2011 (Ame Atsu, 2011), it was not clear how the trends in sexual violence identified were used for follow-up monitoring (i.e. there was

no information as to whether these trends have moved in a positive or negative direction since then, based on the documents reviewed). There may also be unintentional risks which implementers and programme staff need to be aware of, for example whether the increased economic empowerment of women further increases their risks or vulnerabilities, as it cannot be assumed that these will always work together.

UN Women staff acknowledged that, historically, there had been gaps in risk management and monitoring, in part due to a lack of sufficient resources (including gaps in project funding) and staffing. With the transition process underway, it was hoped that these would be addressed and that, with corporate support, efforts could focus on more strongly embedding systems of risk management and monitoring as core parts of programme implementation at all levels.

> How fit for purpose were UN Women's M&E and reporting systems? Do they adequately capture lessons learnt on results and impact?

The evaluation team did not receive any full evaluations of the programmes analysed and only a limited number of monitoring reports. Monitoring systems currently in place appeared to be largely isolated within each programme, with varying degrees of comprehensiveness and coverage. In general, current donor and headquarter reporting focused more on quantitative reporting than facilitating robust internal systems which allowed for tracking of broader effectiveness. Corporate support could therefore be further directed towards embedding learning and reflecting on theories of change in use, including as part of regular reporting.

Even where programmes were implemented over three or more years (as was the case for the global programme), there were limited opportunities for the country office to learn and adapt the global programme approaches, although there were signs that this was beginning to happen, e.g. linking economic empowerment to women's peace and security. Flexible and adaptable funding and reporting models which can support more agile programming will be required.

## Overall analysis, and implications for policy, programming and practice

UN Women Liberia's support to women's leadership, peace and security analysed for this evaluation focused on a theory of change which usefully combined working at multiple levels. On one level, it sought to facilitate mechanisms for women's mediation, conflict resolution and oversight at community levels in order to strengthen women's voice and reduce their vulnerabilities, with a focus on SGBV. On a related level, it works to strengthen the numbers and positions of women within particular security institutions, as well as specific support for the implementation of the Liberia NAP.

The approach was in line with the new strategic priorities set by UN Women at the global level and resonated well with the Liberia context and the particular challenges for women. It was especially striking that the global programme had been adapted to draw upon locally relevant understandings and institutions, focused on historical notions of the 'palava hut' in Liberia, with a strong focus on supporting women's agency to address security problems.

Supporting women-led initiatives in this way was innovative and a useful source of lesson-learning for other country programmes. Furthermore, the locally grounded, agency-focused approach could prove more sustainable than those which are externally imposed or without such a clear, process-driven approach which aimed to mobilise women's own actions. At a national level, support to particular security institutions has effectively capitalized on an enabling political environment, with strong political will from the President and key individuals and champions within relevant ministries.

Innovative aspects of this programme included:

- Building on pre-existing local institutions and understandings, such as the traditional 'palava hut' system in Liberia;

- The process-driven approach which has facilitated and supported local level women's groups and communities to come together; and

- Linking peacebuilding and economic empowerment activities, to create added incentives for women to participate.

Although strong foundations for UN Women's transition have been laid, gaps (in terms of how effectively programmes have been implemented) should be addressed to maximise the possible outcomes and impacts. These gaps were discussed in detail above and can be summarised as follows:

- There are significant challenges as a result of funding gaps and short-term project funding, which constrain the ability to effectively implement a process-driven approach over the long-term;

- Variances and inconsistencies in the overall implementation strategies of programmes therefore arise, as shown by the differing understandings and mandates of peace huts in different areas and differing types of peacebuilding training, as well as the different skills and areas of expertise of implementing partners;

- There have also been historic gaps in the articulation of and reporting on different elements of the theories of change used, and of the connections between different levels of dimensions. These include interconnections between community and national levels and between support for women's economic empowerment and women's leadership in peacebuilding. Rather than focusing predominantly on quantitative measures of impact, reporting requirements should actively encourage reporting on implementation processes, unintended or arising issues and impacts, and more qualitative data,.

- The country office appeared to have struggled to influence and coordinate with others, particularly in the context of an integrated mission, and support may be needed to ensure that other United Nations entities are aware and recognise the changed mandate of UN Women.

- There may also be greater opportunities, particularly with the new mandate, to widen the scope of UN Women's partnerships and engagement with a range of stakeholders including those in civil society. Resourcing and support may be useful in supporting this process of reaching out to others.

## 6.    Recommendations

In light of the analysis above, the evaluation proposes the following recommendations:

### Dimension 1: UN Women's policy and strategic direction

UN Women Liberia should be supported to more clearly articulate its vision, which should then be communicated effectively to key partners and stakeholders in Liberia in order to raise its visibility (through meetings, events and short publications). UN Women at the corporate level should provide clearer instructions on how to conduct the new coordination role in

Liberia, including communication from headquarters to the Resident Coordinator and other United Nations entities on this changed mandate.

As part of articulating its vision, support for a strategic review of the current theories of change in use should be prioritized so that the linkages envisaged between different activities and dimensions can be more clearly articulated in order to realise long-lasting change. This is relevant both for UN Women's overall policy and strategic direction in Liberia and for individual programmes.

Overall, there is an ongoing need and appetite for further policy guidelines, capacity-building support and tools to support the country office to take on the new UN Women mandate. Support should focus on how to work with others, including within the United Nations system; a more focused remit; and prioritizing the implementation of existing commitments (with sharing of tactics, ideas and lessons on how was done across a range of contexts).

A strategic review of partnerships would be useful to explore potentially widening the types of key partnerships currently managed by the UN Women office, in line with the new mandate. Women's groups interviewed for the evaluation, who were not UN Women partners, suggested it could engage in more ongoing exchanges and engagement with relevant stakeholders to explain its current priorities and programmes. It would also be an opportunity to hear the priorities and plans of other organizations; explore strategic opportunities to facilitate women's groups' participation in key reform processes; and explore ways to support the collective action of women's groups and networks, including facilitating links and networks (within civil society and with government). A focus on implementation could help facilitate links with civil society, to support their monitoring and advocacy efforts to hold decision-makers accountable for commitments made thus far.

## Dimension 2: UN Women's policies, programming and operations

In relation to the specific programmes examined:

- Ensuring programme rather than project funding, linked to longer timeframes (five years or more) in recognition of the likely timeframes involved in supporting process-led change processes is a key priority for the country office.

- Long-term programme support would help build links across community and national-levels and between different dimensions (economic empowerment and women's peacebuilding). There was limited scope for the office to report on these linkages (for instance, in reporting to headquarters) and as a result, they were not always clearly articulated.

- Existing programmes should be reviewed and consideration given to including new implementation partners to ensure that programmes have the necessary expertise (for instance in peacebuilding) and capacity. It also help to identify priority areas where increased resourcing and support might be needed, and should be linked to more flexible funding approaches which allow resources to be redirected as needed.

- As part of the transition, ensuring a delegation of authority, including improved financial processes, was identified as a priority, to ensure more timely disbursements of funds and greater flexibility for the office.

- More support may be needed to further adapt global programmes to local contexts with a particular emphasis on implementation and operationalization of proposed reforms.

## Dimension 3: UN Women's organizational capacities, resources and structures

Key priorities for strengthening the organizational capacities of the office include:

- Increasing its work on data collection and transparency (for its own programmes and for those of key partners, for instance in government). There seem to be high information gaps and asymmetries, including a lack of data collection at local levels for women's peace and security, which UN Women programmes and partners could usefully help to address. Technical support and advice on working with others would be particularly useful here.

- Bringing in greater communications expertise and experience including skills in networking, brokering and relationship-building in order to navigate the multiple types of partnerships and coordination roles necessary around issues of women's peace and security.

- Acknowledging the need to strengthen monitoring and risk management systems at the level of individual programmes and across portfolios. This should be part of support to improve on project management, including management of funds (and timely disbursements), as well as stronger project level monitoring, evaluation and learning methods. It will require increased staff time and resourcing, and could be usefully supported by technical assistance, and mentoring and advisory support from headquarters. It should be grounded in reflections on the core theories of change and their effective implementation, with a strong learning component so that programming can be adapted over time to lessons learned.

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## Interviews

| Organization | Function/ Title |
| --- | --- |
| Action Aid Liberia (women rights, advocacy, capacity-building) | Country Director |
| Bassa Women's Development Association (phone interview); (focus on women's rights and economic empowerment) | Coordinator |
| Bureau of Immigration and Naturalisation | Commissioner |
| Children's Smile (Psychosocial counselling, skills trainings) | Executive Director |
| DEN-L (Development Education Network Liberia) with Finance and Administration, Assistant Director of Programmes (educational development, capacity building, policy advocacy) | Executive Director |
| Foreign and Commonwealth Office | Political Officer |
| Liberian National Police | Chief of Gender Affairs and Deputy |
| Communications Office, Liberia National Police | Director |
| Liberia Women's Media Action Committee (media development for women journalists, policy advocacy) | Director |
| 1325 National Secretariat, MoGD | Coordinator |
| Research/Technical Services, MoGD | Deputy Minister |
| MoGD | Former Minister |
| UNFPA | Gender Adviser |
| UNMIL (2004-2008 ) and current Director, *Medica Mondiale* | Former Gender Adviser |
| UN Women Liberia | Country Representative |
| UN Women Liberia | Programme Officer |
| Weala, Margibi County | District Commissioner |
| Women's NGO Secretariat of Liberia (a membership organization of women | Executive Director |

| | |
|---|---|
| NGOs, CSOs and CBOs involved in advocacy, capacity-building and networking) | |
| UNMIL | Senior Gender Advisor |

Focus group discussions:

- Meeting of approximately 35 women in the Weala peace hut, including the chair person.
- Meeting of eight women and one man in the Totota/ Women in Peacebuilding Programme: peacebuilding, advocacy, skills training peace hut, including the assistant chairperson.
- Group of five women from the women's cross border trade association: economic empowerment Gbargna (Bong county) including the President and Vice-President.
- CSO focus group discussion with 22 women from approximately 20 organizations, identified through an e-mail circulated to the membership of the Women's NGO Secretariat of Liberia, requesting participation in a focus group discussion. Organizations represented included:[54] Touching Humanity In Need of Kindness (empowerment programmes, support to adolescent girls, skills training); Society of Women with Aids in Africa-Liberia (HIV and AIDS support and advocacy); Mano River Women Peace Network (peacebuilding, advocacy at the regional level); Community Sustainable Development Organization (economic empowerment); Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia (legal aid, policy advocacy, legal support); Women's NGO Secretariat of Liberia (women's NGO network); We For Self (economic empowerment); Women In Peacebuilding Network (peacebuilding); Center for Liberian Assistance (support to adolescent girls); Liberia Needy Women and Children Organization (economic empowerment, advocacy); Liberia Girl Guides Association (work with adolescent girls); Liberia Women Media Action Committee (media development, support for female journalists); Islamic Women Development (skills training, economic empowerment); Aiding Disadvantaged Women and Girls, Medina Women (skills training, economic empowerment); Voice of the Voiceless (faith based, working with women in the Church); *Medica Mondiale* Liberia (health and legal support for SGBV, psychosocial counseling, advocacy and awareness raising); Liberia Women Empowerment Network (network for HIV-positive women); West Point Women for Health and Development Association (women empowerment, conflict resolution)

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[54] Not a complete mapping of the range of activities these organizations were involved in.

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