

Women's Rights Through Information Sensitization and Education (WISE)

Norwegian Refugee Council in Liberia

Liberia, a nation of approx 4.5 million people is still recovering from a 14 year devastating conflict (1989-2003) which claimed the lives of 200,000 people, destroyed its infrastructure and displaced more than one million people. The conflict was characterized by elevated rates of sexual gender based violence (SGBV) and physical torture. The security situation remains fragile. Serious humanitarian needs persist in rural communities where returnees face significant challenges in consolidating a durable solution to their displacement.

NRC has been active in Liberia since 2003, providing protection and other assistance to support the return and reintegration of Refugees and internally displaced persons.

SGBV In the Liberian Context

The civil war left Liberia with a "culture of violence" that has come to characterize many intimate partner relationships. Laid to waste during the war, the judicial system still has little capacity to administer justice. Survivors are often stigmatized and isolated within their communities, and have limited access to the formal justice system both due to their own limitations and the low capacity of the rural courts. Many survivors are often forced by their families to access customary laws where financial compensation that is given to the family of the survivor not the survivor is often the 'punishment' for the perpetrator.

The level of violence against women in Liberia has remained alarmingly high since the end of the conflict, even as the nature of violence has changed, with statistics showing that neighbors or a family member more likely to be a perpetrator than a combatant.

What has also remained is the impact of such high rates of sexual violence. For many women and girls who experience the trauma of sexual violence, they are further violated by being shunned by their families and excluded by their communities who blame the survivor rather than the perpetrator for the violence.

Due to stigmatization or personal safety many survivors become displaced, having been forced by family or community members to leave their homes, usually with no personal items, clothing or money and little idea of how they will survive or where they will go. The 'lucky ones' are sent to distant relatives in neighbouring counties, where they are seen as an added burden to an already overstretched household. Others still are forced into transactional sex, often at the encouragement of the very family members that should be caring and protecting them from further harm. For older married women they are often deserted by their husbands leaving them not only to care for children by themselves but also to face an increase level of vulnerability and potential further abuse.

The NRC GBV Project In Liberia

The GBV Project is amongst the first of its kind for NRC and therefore considered a pilot project. Its principle objective is to enhance a durable reintegration of Liberian women and girls in communities free from violence through capacity building, awareness raising, community mobilization as well as to strengthen and support already existing networks and structures with a strong focus on increasing integration and coordination by multisectorial actors from the community, international humanitarian organizations (NGOS and UN), national organization and government ministries.

NRC's strategy for protecting vulnerable women and girls and survivors of GBV addresses the problem at three levels. First, it increases reporting rates for GBV crimes by raising awareness and building community capacity to refer GBV cases to the appropriate protection actors. Second, it addresses the severely weak capacity of the formal justice system by training and supporting officers of the Liberian National Police (LNP) on appropriate response to reported cases of SGBV and encouraging a team based approach by the officers with other response sectors. Third, it is strengthening data collection and analysis of national reporting rates of SGBV through the establishment of a national data base with the MoGD.

The project aims to fill recognized gaps in Collaboration, Coordination, Response and Prevention methods between and amongst all GBV actors.

Established: December 2008

Project areas: Montserrado, Margibi, Bong & Nimba Counties

Offices: Monrovia, Kakata, Gbarnga & Ganta

Partners: Ministry of Gender and Development (MoGD), Ministry of Justice (MoJ)

National staff: 25

International staff: 1

Contact information:

Anna Stone
Project Manager
Norwegian Refugee Council
Tel. +231 6923989
Email. pmgbv@liberia.nrc.no



SGBV Referral Pathway

A referral pathway means the places you can go for help when you are forced to do man and woman business. These places are hospital, police, counselor and court. You can go to any of these places first, in any order.

HOSPITAL
When anyone forced you to do man and woman business, you should go to any of these hospitals. The people at the hospital will check you very well and give you free medicine. And they will also give a paper called a "medical report" to take to a police. You are not to pay any money for this help.
For this support go to one of these places:
1. St Francis Hospital - Cestos City 2. Box Goozay Clinic 3. Nerevan Clinic - Central C 4. Mawehk District

POLICE
If you are forced you to do man and woman business you suppose to report your matter to the police. The police will write what happened to you and send to the hospital for check up, and also send you court if you want the matter to go to the court. They will make sure you are safe. You are not to pay any money for this help.
For this support go to one of these places:
1. WACPS Cestos City

COUNSELOR
When you are forced by anyone to do man and woman business, you should go to a trained counselor. Counselors will talk to you to cool your heart down. They will keep your story to themselves and not just tell you to the hospital, the police and how to go to the court if you want. They will keep checking on you to make sure it is alright. You are not to pay any money for this help.
For this support go to one of these places:
1. Health Counselor ph 06 493 942 2. LOAF Counselor ph 06 920 948

COURT
When anyone forced you to do man and woman business, make sure to take the matter to the court because it is against your rights and against the law in Liberia. The court will ask you to say all that person did to you, and they will also make the job bring the person who did the bad thing to you. We are not to pay any money for this help.
For this support go to one of these places:
1. County Attorney

NRC SGBV PROJECT ACTIVITIES

**Supporting Survivors of SGBV**

In 2009 NRC provided support to 112 survivors of sexual assault. The types of support provided by NRC includes:

- Transporting survivors to hospitals / clinics
- Referral to safe house for emergency accommodation
- Provision of emergency clothing and food for those that were assessed as being unable to return home
- Psychosocial counselling
- Transportation for the survivor and witnesses to court so as to give testimony
- Education costs for acutely vulnerable survivors

**Community Education Initiatives**

NRC has developed 28 groups of women and men that have an interest in GBV. Many are already active in their communities and members and leaders of civil society groups or Church / Mosque groups.

These groups, called, **WISE Women** and **WISE Men**, meet on a monthly basis where in a safe space discussions about the causes and consequences of GBV are discussed, with participants being encouraged and empowered to develop their own strategies for community awareness and prevention campaigns.

**Strengthening of Referral Pathway**

Survivors of SGBV need multiple levels of care that meets their mental, physical and protection needs. In Liberia such support is provided by over 60 response providers, with different actors based in different counties.

NRC has mapped out these response providers and is informing not only GBV actors but also community members on where survivors can go to get free and confidential support. This is being done via:

- Referral Pathway Posters
- Referral Pathway Booklets
- Referral Pathway Billboards

**Increasing Access To Justice**

A significant challenge faced by survivors of sexual assault is in getting free, fair and timely support and response from the LNP and from judicial actors. NRC, with the support of other actors including PAE , AA Pierre Training Institute, The Carter Centre and UNMIL is conducting a series of trainings on SGBV and the law for the following:

- Senior Women and Children Officers within the Liberian National Police investigation of sexual assault.
- Judges, prosecutors and defense counsel on Medical Implications of Sexual Assault.

**Coordination & Data Collection**

NRC is supporting the Ministry of Gender and Development and Ministry of Justice in 2 key areas via the following initiatives:

Coordination:

- Secondment of 4 staff to County Gender Coordinators Offices to assist with monthly coordination meetings and trainings of GBV actors.
- Resources for selected County Gender Offices
- Salary costs for Ministry of Justice GBV Liaison Officer

Data Collection:

- Development of National GBV Data Base for MoGD
- Development and roll out of national GBV data collection tools
- Secondment of NRC Data Manager to MoGD

**Gender As a Cross Cutting Issue**

The GBV project provides support to NRC projects ICLA and YEP in strengthening their gender focus particularly in the area of women's rights and preventing and responding to reported cases of SGBV.

For ICLA:

- Development of Women and Land Rights training tools
- Women only trainings on land rights
- Training of staff on referral of reported cases of SGBV

For YEP:

- Training of YEP centre leaders and students on causes and consequences of SGBV
- Training of NRC YEP staff on referral of reported cases of SGBV
- Development of GBV and Education tools

