

»» Materials on Development Financing



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Storyline

Empowering women facilitates peace and prosperity in communities How assisting survivors of sexual and gender-based violence paves the way to justice, rehabilitation and development

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“Every successful home has a strong woman”, claims Karyee J. Williamson, who is a journalist and community activist in Polar Town in Grand Gedeh County. That is how he summarises the benefits he has seen when women are empowered. He is a youth leader and proud of the fact that he and his fellow male and female town elders learned about women’s rights and gender roles. This newfound awareness has triggered beneficial changes for their wives, mothers, sisters and daughters – and subsequently for themselves and the entire community.

“Now I can put some money aside to send my children to school, improve my little shop and help buy better seeds for our farm!” says Sophia Nenneh, celebrating the economic empowerment she is experiencing as it fosters her self-confidence and contributes to the well-being of her family.

Raising communities’ awareness of women’s rights and assisting survivors of sexual and gender-based violence promotes peaceful reintegration of communities. The established self-help support structures and local savings and loan associations provide sustain-able measures for empowering women over the long term, which stimulates development within the entire community.

Drastic effects of a cruel civil war

Williamson’s statement demonstrates how dramatically the situation has changed considering the severe effects of 14 devastating years of civil war that raged in Liberia between 1989 and 2003. By the time this war came to an end in 2003, over 250,000 out of the three million people had died. Abductions, torture, rape and other human rights abuses were committed on a massive scale. According to estimates, at least one out

of every ten children was abducted and forced into service as a child soldier or sex slave. The United Nations assumes that 50–70 per cent of women have been raped – often this involved gang rape, sexual torture and mutilation. But Liberia is now transforming towards sustainable development. Despite the country’s remarkable recovery since 2005, the peace, basic human rights and freedoms that the women and girls of Liberia expect continue to be undermined by increasing cases of sexual and gender-based violence. Statistics from the 2008 population and housing census show that rape and domestic violence accounted for over 70% of all reported cases in Liberia.



The story's protagonists include ...

- SGBV survivors **Felicia Dwulah** and **"Sadia"** tell their individual stories
- **Sam M. K. Paye**, Liberian National Police, Regional Commander of the Women & Children Division, provides a background in law enforcement and prosecution of SGBV perpetrators
- **Jolly Moses**, supervisor of the One-Stop Centre for SGBV survivors, explains how women and girls who are survivors of rape receive medical care, psychosocial support and access to legal aid from one source.
- **Isaac Williams**, County Attorney in Grand Gedeh, explains the challenges of legal prosecution and justice achievements with regard to SGBV
- Town Elders and Community Activists: **Samuel Poor**, **Karyee J. Williamson**, **Sophia Nenneh** and **Benetor Voity Kloe** from Polar Town; **John Zean**, **Ce-cilia Saye**, **Henry Neawray**, **Doris Pough** and **Helen Joyce** from Gaye Town; **Brenice Gaye** and **Alice Paye** from Gleplay Town; and **Rebecca Kelleh** from Slieh Town
- **Caroline Bowah-Brown**, **Elisabeth Green** and **Florida Clarke** provide information on medica Liberia's holistic approach with regard to SGBV survivors and empowering women
- **Sinikiwe Dube**, RRP Field Coordinator for KfW's executing partner Welthungerhilfe, shares her acknowledgement of the achievements gained by empowering women



Polar Town elders enjoying a meeting in their Palaver Hut, which KfW helped to build.

Rehabilitating and reintegrating Liberia

Since 2005, the German Government has been contributing to Liberia's reconstruction by funding KfW's Rehabilitation and Reintegration Programme (RRP), which targets South East Liberia. The fifth phase of this programme is currently being implemented (see the box for more information). In addition to rehabilitating infrastructure, improving agricultural production and providing professional

training for youth, KfW is supporting survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and contributing to empower women with the help of executing partner medica mondiale. This organisation supports girls and women in war and conflict zones affected by SGBV and promotes women's rights. medica mondiale nationalised its Liberian organisation to create medica Liberia in 2015. Caroline Bowah-Brown, Director of medica Liberia showed her appreciation when she said, "KfW has rightly selected South East Liberia, which has been marked by marginalization and exclusion; RRP is supporting people's rights and human dignity!"

Violence against women destroys society

One legacy of the war – and a problem for society as a whole – is the high level of sexual violence against women and girls. However, women rarely report having been raped because they are ashamed and/or afraid of social exclusion. When they do, the perpetrators usually escape punishment. The judiciary is inefficient and corrupt, and misogynist traditions are widespread. Most people know nothing about existing legislation and there is little acknowledgment that assaults on women amount to serious human rights violations. Further threats to women empowerment are harmful traditions that continue to be practised, such as female genital mutilation (FGM), a cruel circumcision ritual committed by secret societies, or the arbitrary accusation of witchcraft that leads to mob violence and lynching. When KfW began to take measures to empower women and assist survivors of SGBV through medica mondiale, the situation was highly fragile and still characterised by violence. It has remained complex ever since. However, increasing awareness and advocacy at community, regional and national levels is facilitating a visible shift towards increased knowledge of the law, human rights and peacebuilding options.

Is it possible to return to normal life?

"After all I went through during the war and afterwards, I became presi-



Reintegration and Recovery Programme (RRP) in South East Liberia

The RRP is a development programme of the Republic of Liberia, supported by the Federal Republic of Germany through the German Development Bank KfW. Traditionally marginalized counties in South East Liberia were selected as the intervention zone: Grand Gedeh, River Gee, Sinoe and, recently, Maryland.

The RRP has been implemented since 2005 and is currently in its fifth phase. The programme aims to contribute to socio-economic recovery in the South East and consolidate the peace process in Liberia while improving living conditions. The RRP's scope covers the rehabilitation of infrastructure (feeder roads, bridges, markets, and water and sanitation facilities), the improvement of agricultural production, professional training for youth as well as empowering women and providing assistance to SGBV survivors. It also includes capacity building for governmental staff.

The RRP's executing agencies are Welthungerhilfe (leading), Oxfam and medica Liberia, the national branch of medica mondiale. medica Liberia provided consultancy services to ensure the implementation of all project components was designed to be gender-sensitive.



Felicia Dwulah.

dent of my community's women's group, and even men seek my advice", expresses Felicia, satisfied with her personal achievements. She has not only survived acts of cruel violence committed against her, she has regained her footing in life. Felicia Dwulah is 47 years old today. In 1999, like so many other Liberians, she was marching through Sinoe County, seeking refuge from severe fighting and the feared atrocities committed by various battle groups attacking communities and mugging people. It was then that she fell into an ambush. Many of her displaced companions were killed immediately; meanwhile, she was raped by the entire gang of fighters. Horrified by what had hap-

pened to her, she continued to flee and discovered that she had become pregnant through the rape. As if that were not enough, she continues her story, saying “while I was pregnant, I was raped again!” On her way to Côte d'Ivoire with numerous other Liberian refugees, she had to deliver her baby without the help of a midwife or any other medical support. Other displaced women helped her go through labour, but it sorely aggravated the injuries caused by the rapes and led to a fistula. “People were afraid of me”, Felicia still sobs about this devastating experience of being stigmatized and treated as a leper due to her fistular incontinence for so many years. It was only in 2009, shortly after her return to Liberia, that she met medica mondiale community outreach workers during one of their community awareness campaigns addressing sexual and gender-based violence and its consequences.

Trauma-sensitive support for SGBV survivors and communities

medica mondiale, which reorganised to create the national agency medica Liberia from 2015 onwards, takes a holistic approach to provide a set of services to SGBV survivors like Felicia to help them overcome their trauma through psychosocial counselling and medical assistance. In addition, legal aid is offered whenever survi-

vors of violence, abuse or maltreatment pursue the perpetrators of the crimes. Socio-economic support enables women to find their way back into community life through access to training and a starter kit that helps ensure their own livelihoods. A peace component has enabled communities to settle their disputes and handle any forms of violence with training.

Felicia “was repaired”, as she puts it, when she benefitted from two surgeries facilitated by medica Liberia. Moreover, she was able to overcome her long-lasting trauma from rape, displacement and stigmatisation by participating in psychosocial counselling sessions. She gained self-confidence and skills to start soap-making, which gave her a livelihood and also facilitated the construction of her own little home. Today, neighbours and town elders frequently ask her for advice about difficulties that arise and problems within the families or the community. Felicia has been appointed the president of a community group of 60 women, which put her on the board of the community in Kavalala District in Grand Gedeh County. She has found her way back to a meaningful life full of valuable recognition and the abilities to master that life. She feels empowered both politically, practising her right to participate in the community and vote, and economically as she ensures her own livelihood despite the difficulties women in rural areas continue to face.

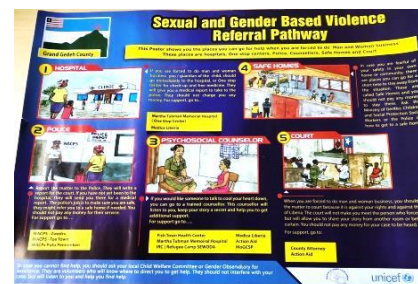
Task force and referral pathway

As part of a task force that includes other key actors like UNICEF, medica mondiale helped to establish a referral pathway that makes it easier for SGBV survivors to access support after they experience rape or sexual assault. This pathway connects medical service providers, psychosocial support and legal aid to enable rapid assistance. The Liberian National Police, judiciary system staff and health facilities have been trained to provide fast and competent support to SGBV survivors. With support from UNFPA, a so-called One-Stop Centre (OSC) was established in Zwedru, Grand Gedeh to provide a discreet space within the Tubman Hospital. This space facilitates confidential ac-

cess to medical care, psychosocial support and legal aid, which begins with a police investigation for survivors of rape and sexual assault. The OSC staff have also been trained through the KfW programme.

Help in one place

“The One-Stop Centre is free of charge” announces Jolly Moses, who managed the one in Zwedru and has now become the supervisor of all OSCs in Monrovia. The medical examination and all further medical and psychosocial counselling sessions are free of charge for the patients and based on their obtained consent. Medical treatment is provided to the extent necessary on the spot or with a further referral to a hospital. All SGBV survivors arriving within a delay of 72 hours after the rape has taken place are provided with HIV/Aids post-



Orientation for SGBV survivors.

exposure prophylaxis (known as a PEP-kit).

Punishment for perpetrators

Whenever the SGBV survivor so wishes, her case is reported to the police for investigation and further prosecution of the perpetrator. The Liberian National Police’s Women and Children Division is the counterpart on the law enforcement side. Regional Commander Sam M. K. Paye shares his concerns about persisting constraints on pursuing prosecution as many witnesses or even SGBV survivors change their testimonies when they experience pressure from family and communities. Very often, families of violated children and women still have the tendency to accept payments from perpetrators in order to end or “compromise” cases. This practise not only perpetuates sexual crimes but also complicates investigations. But Paye also notes a clear

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SGBV (Sexual and Gender-Based Violence)

- “SGBV” is an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person’s will, and that is based on socially ascribed (gen-der) differences between males and females. SGBV is a violation of universal human rights.
- The nature and extent of specific types of GBV vary across cultures, countries, and regions. Examples of GBV include, but are not limited to, sexual violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, forced prostitution, domestic violence, human trafficking, forced or early marriage, and harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation, honour killings and widow inheritance.
- The term “SGBV survivor” is applied to promote trauma-sensitive treatment of persons who fell victim to sexual and gender-based violence, and to fight stigmatisation while avoiding further victimisation.

trend showing that “it is now possible to receive justice” and “perpetrators do not get away unpunished anymore” as more and more rape cases are put on trial. The rise in reported rape and sexual assault cases is linked to increased awareness throughout the population that a crime has been committed and that survivors have the right to appropriate assistance. However, it is also proof that sexual and gender-based violence continues to be committed.

“Rape comes from the mind!”

KfW’s Rehabilitation and Recovery Programme started to apply the SASA! approach to respond to the continued violations of women’s rights and the damage to the fabric of society due to the consequences of SGBV. This approach mobilises communities to inspire social change. Elizabeth Green, medica Liberia’s long-serving psychosocial counsellor, explains that “rape comes from the mind. This is why, in community awareness sessions, we ask ‘What is the benefit if you don’t rape?’, ‘What are the consequences, if you don’t violate women?’, ‘What happens, if you don’t beat your wife?’” This positive way of looking at grievances in order to point out alternative options may contribute to a change in attitude, behaviour and mind-set.



Elizabeth Green (left) and other members of the medica Liberia team in Zwedru.

Justice is possible!

“I was raped”, a 21-year-old high-school graduate who wants to be called Sadia, reports shyly but very firmly about what has happened to her. Even though her family has urged her to forget about it and not continue to follow up on it, Sadia felt the need: “No, I cannot let my case go. Tomorrow it could be my little sister”. She was highly traumatised and remem-

bers, “I did not want to go outside anymore”. But through the counselling sessions by medica Liberia she regained strength and self-confidence. Sadia felt encouraged and motivated not to compromise her case but to report the criminal act; she prepared herself for the court trial. “It’s my right to do this and testify”, she felt reassured. Her rape case became a very prominent one as the perpetrator was sentenced to 25 years in prison, which recognised the particular cruelty of committing the rape at knifepoint in public in the downtown section of Zwedru.



“Sadia”

Isaac Williams, the County Attorney of Grand Gedeh sees “things have changed!” He continues, “more and more rape cases are reported and are taken to court”. He is glad that he and all relevant court staff at the magistrate court have received training through the KfW Rehabilitation and Reintegration Programme in how to treat SGBV survivors with the necessary sensitivity, cautiousness and awareness of the suffered trauma. With the support of medica Liberia, it became possible to adjust court trials for rape cases and enable “in camera” testimony. This enables survivors to testify by entering a covered box where they are shielded from onlookers. Sadia felt this was extremely helpful as she only had to speak into a microphone to testify as she recalled the horrible event in all its detail. The fact that she received justice makes her feel extremely satisfied: “I feel good, I am happy now!” The young woman regained her perspective on life and has a plan for her future despite all the humiliation she experienced, “I want to become a great nurse!” Currently she is working at a clinic as an assistant to earn enough money to enrol at university next year. Experiencing justice and

receiving strength from psychosocial counselling enabled her to regain her self-confidence and to pursue her way in her private and public life. Sadia participated in the most recent Liberian elections feeling reassured that her voice counts and needs to be used: “We all can change something!”

“Peace in the home and peace in the town”

A large number of communities in KfW’s intervention zone have been targeted with campaigns to raise the population’s awareness about women’s rights as human rights, gender equality, peace within the community and conflict resolution. One example of this is Gaye Town in Grand Gedeh. There, the town elders meet in their Palaver Hut, which was constructed by Welthungerhilfe as part of the Rehabilitation & Reintegration Programme to support the activities of medica mondiale. The Palaver Hut provides a space for community meetings, counselling sessions, training sessions for community leaders and, later on, will provide space for a community protection network, the Support Group.

Town elder John Zean states that the situation prior to medica’s intervention was very difficult for the entire community once they returned to their homes from a long displacement phase after the end of the war. Florida Clarke, medica Liberia’s long-term Psychosocial Counselling Trainer and Field Coordinator in Sinoe County, remembers that “in the beginning, women were afraid to take something away from men.” But using their community work to lay a platform for women’s rights always led to the inclusion of men, making the approach acceptable. Cecilia Saye, the Women’s Representative of Gaye Town, is still outraged: “When you said ‘no’ to your husband, he would beat you and would still force his will!” She continues, “but with medica, we started learning to exercise our rights”, referring to the effects of the awareness sessions on women’s rights and gender equality. “I passed on to my husband what I have learned!” Henry Neawray, the Town Chief, recalls the change in their community by stating,

“it is good for the town that everything has changed. We now have peace in the community, there is no trouble anymore as there is peace in the home and peace in the town!” And he adds, “When there is peace in our town, we produce more food!” The entire community seems to benefit from respecting women’s rights and the new understanding of gender roles.



The Gaye Town elders are proud of their Palaver Hut.

The Town Chief of Gaye Town proclaims, “what men can do, women can do, too. This is our motto!” He even encourages female leadership announcing, “I want a woman to become Town Chief when I step down!” as he has recognised that, “our empowered women brought more economic empowerment to us all!”

Among the women in KfW’s target groups, an increasing number are able to enjoy political empowerment; some of them have even achieved leadership in their communities, having been elected to positions like Paramount Chief, Clan Chief or Town Chief. Community mobilisation through medica Liberia, which aims to empower women, is viewed with high esteem by Welthungerhilfe’s Field Coordinator of the Reintegration and Rehabilitation Programme (RRP), Sinikiwe Dube: “medica Liberia’s work is going much further than just their component”. It is acknowledgement that mobilising women is encompassing the whole community, thus becoming an overarching positive impact for the entire RRP. It actually serves as the backbone of community mobilisation for all intervening components.

“Now we know our rights and the law!”

To strengthen community mobilisation and awareness of women’s rights and

risks of SGBV, Support Groups have been created in many communities. They serve as liaison points for the SGBV referral pathway and represent women and girls in their communities. Support Groups like the ones in rural Gaye Town, Gleplay Town or Polar Town consist of five active women who have been selected by their communities according to their engagement, credibility and ability to keep information confidential. Doris Pouh is a member of the Support Group in Gaye Town and explains how they handle cases of violence against women or children: “we listen to women’s problems” and “we keep the secret and only talk to people who need to know.” Then they ensure that the survivors of sexualized violence (SGBV) are referred to necessary services such as medical care or psychosocial counselling when the severity of the case goes beyond their capacities. But they are not only approached by women, even men in the community come to them for advice. “Men come to talk about their difficulties and quarrels with their spouses.” They try to mediate within families and bring persistent cases to the level of the Town Chief.

Things are changing

In most rural communities in Liberia, customary justice institutions have been and continue to be the preferred route for the resolution of disputes, including matters of domestic violence, rape and other forms of sexual violation. However, things are changing within the communities supported by KfW. Doris Pouh from the Support Group in Gaye Town clearly recognises the limits and shares the understanding she has gained through the medica Liberia training sessions. She says, “we only deal with cases we can handle on a community level. All other cases, such as marital rape and domestic violence, are taken to the police or medica Liberia to manage”. The internal referral pathway within medica Liberia’s organisation is functional and well connected to the SGBV taskforce at the county level. This means that survivors of SGBV can have their needs addressed and receive assistance from community volunteers and the community SGBV

Support Group, which facilitates transfers to medica’s internal services such as psychosocial counselling, reproductive health services and legal assistance. Decisions about further steps that need to be taken are made according to survivors’ wishes, especially when making decisions about legal follow-up measures. Medical needs are taken care of through referrals to health facilities to facilitate access to PEP-kits and enable medical treatment.

Women’s rights are human rights

In Gleplay Town in the Grand Gedeh countryside, the five women of the Support Group feel very much empowered by the knowledge they have gained: “medica taught us about our rights, now we know the law”. The awareness sessions conducted by medica Liberia in the community paved the way to a thorough understanding of women’s rights as human rights, the meaning of gender equality and the criminal acts of sexual assaults according to Liberian law. It took some time to convince certain people, especially the men and the elders, of the need to accept women’s rights and the need to make cases of violence against women or children public. However, the male members of Gleplay Town and many other communities have slowly come to understand and convince themselves of the beneficial functions of the Support Groups as they protect the rights of women and achieve acceptance of gender equality.



Beatrice is a resident of Gleplay Town.

Steps towards modernity

Moreover, town elders are enjoying the stimulating effects on their community and “the huge step they have taken into modernity”, as they put it. Brenice Gaye from the Support Group in Gleplay Town shares an insider’s

perspective on how gender roles have shifted in their community: “Now our husbands also fetch water from our wells, make fires or carry the babies!” In Polar Town, another Support Group member, Benetor Voity Kloe, expresses her understanding of women’s rights. “I should have a choice and I should be heard!” Sophia Neeneh, the Women’s Chairlady and also part of the community Support Group, is satisfied with the development achieved: “My husband and I are now making decisions together!”

Self-help structures

The Support Groups have gained overall respect in their communities and are well known and recognisable. Whenever they go out to mediate or raise awareness within their town, they wear their Support Group t-shirts emblazoned with the KfW and medica Liberia logos as well as their title “Support Group Women” boldly displayed. Community members see them appear in “uniform”, as they put it, and pay attention, knowing that things are “getting official”.

The Town Chief of Gaye Town refers to his community’s Support Group as “the eyes of the government. They know the law and they advise us!” “We go where the problems are”, confirms Alice Paye from the Support Group in Gleplay Town. Whenever necessary, women who fall victim to violence are met discreetly and treated prudently if they need further referrals. SGBV survivors returning from their treatment, counselling or stays in a safe home are approached in a trauma-sensitive manner, the way medica Liberia taught them to help them back into community life. The Women’s Chairlady Helen Jayee in Gaye Town says, “We welcome her back as she is still part of the community and we take care of her, we try to encourage her, and the entire community helps through the Support Group!”

Savings & loans for sustainability

A revolving fund concept has been introduced in order to make the Support Groups sustainable and increasingly independent from KfW’s funding and medica Liberia’s support. The

idea was derived from the traditionally practised “susus” (savings groups) and is applied in the same manner. A fund circulates among the Support Group members and other women in the community. This serves not only to motivate the members of the SGBV Support Groups and engaged community women, but gives them access to income. To ensure that it is not confused with the mandate of the Support Group, it is called a Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA). Every participating woman has her share and contributes on a weekly basis. The VSLA group makes joint decisions about how much money is to be saved and determines the interest rate that must be paid on loans granted. Benetor Voity Kloe, Support Group member and also the secretary of the VSLA in Polar Town, remembers, “Before, we would run around, trying to get a personal loan so that we could send our children to school! Now we, the women of the VSLA, can pay for our children’s school fees ourselves!” Participating women and their families are relieved to have found a way to make more out of their small incomes and invest in micro-businesses such as food stalls, little boutiques for household items, small-scale production of soap or clothing, or for farm seeds and equipment. Benetor concludes, “My children are happy and I am happy, no more running around”.



Stronger together with self-help, Support Group women in Gleplay Town.

Women bring prosperity to communities

The Town Chief of Polar Town sees the prosperity in his community. “It is now possible to expand farms, increase productivity and make money!” And most of all, “this we owe to our women!” Not only is the VSLA improving the livelihoods of the women taking part, but there is also a social fund included in the savings scheme. It provides continuous support for women in distress due to suffered violence or sexual assaults by taking measures like providing payment for transport from their remote villages to distant health centres or to attend court trials in the county’s capital. The established VSLA groups have excelled in their commitment to improve their living conditions; the women have achieved a strong sense of self-worth: “We are important as women, we have the power, we can also be in charge!” This is the way Rebecca Kelleh, a VSLA member in Slieh Town, Grand Gedeh puts it.



Rebecca Kelleh is a VSLA member in Slieh Town.

Shift towards positive masculinity

In line with the SASA! Approach, more and more men are included in community campaigns to raise awareness about fighting SGBV. Increasing reliance is placed on their transformed attitude and behavioural changes as well as on an altered mind-set within the community. Male change agents are identified among the men in the community, often those who are well known as especially aggressive and disrespectful of women’s rights. Florida Clarke, medica Liberia’s psychosocial trainer explains, “They think violence is the way out”. medica Liberia training teaches men about the importance of mutual respect for human rights and how to settle disputes in a peaceful manner.

The male change agents are becoming community volunteers who promote peaceful cohabitation and the importance of protecting women's rights in their communities. In Polar Town, the community is already identifying themselves entirely with their empowered women. Not only do they appreciate how women Support Groups are supporting SGBV survivors and each other in family disputes, but their achievements through the Village Savings and Loan Association are highly acknowledged as significant contributions to the community's development. Their education about women's rights and human rights provides mutual understanding. Thus, the town elders are claiming "We are women, we know our rights!" – even though most of the people singing in the Palaver Hut are men.



Photos

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