From the Sidelines to the Forefront

Ensuring a Gender-Responsive Foundation for Liberia’s National Decentralization Process:

A Review and Analysis of Barriers, Opportunities and Entry Points

A Study by the Governance Commission and Ministry of Gender and Development and UN Women

February 2014
This study is dedicated to Sheelagh Kathy Mangones, UN Women Representative to Liberia, who sadly passed away on 4th February 2014 while attending an Africa regional meeting in Addis Ababa.

Ms. Mangones was a humanitarian, dedicated to promoting the cause of women’s empowerment world-wide. Passionate about women’s participation at all levels, Kathy was committed to ensuring that Liberia’s decentralization opens new opportunities for Liberia’s rural women.

This tribute is in recognition of her relentless efforts in promoting women’s empowerment and participation during her time in Liberia. She will be missed.
Table of Contents

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS ........................................................................................................... 5
FOREWORDS .................................................................................................................................................. 7
PREFACE ...................................................................................................................................................... 8
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ............................................................................................................................... 9
DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS .......................................................................................... 10
SECTION I: INTRODUCTION ....................................................................................................................... 12
    Background ............................................................................................................................................. 12
    Goals and Objective of Study ................................................................................................................ 11
    Methodology ......................................................................................................................................... 12
SECTION II: Liberia’s Commitments to Gender Equality .......................................................... 15
    Gender Equality .................................................................................................................................... 15
    Effective Participation of Women in Decision-Making ....................................................................... 16
    Equitable Development ....................................................................................................................... 18
SECTION III: Barriers and Challenges to Women’s Representation and Participation in Local Governance ................................................................. 20
    Acknowledging Women’s Marginalization and Exclusion in Liberia ................................................... 20
    Structural Barriers .............................................................................................................................. 22
    Institutional Barriers ........................................................................................................................... 28
SECTION IV: Why Gender-Responsive Local Government is Critical .................................................. 29
    What is Gender-Responsive Local Governance? .............................................................................. 29
    Why is Gender-Responsive Local Governance Important? ............................................................... 30
    Key Messages ....................................................................................................................................... 31
SECTION V: Opportunities and Entry Points to Build a Gender-Responsive Decentralization Process and Structures ............................................................................... 36
    Civic Education and Sensitization ....................................................................................................... 36
    The Legal and Regulatory Framework/Political Decentralization ....................................................... 40
    Institutional Framework and Human Resource Capacity Development ............................................. 45
    Fiscal Decentralization and Financial Management ............................................................................... 48
    Administrative Decentralization and Sector Devolution .................................................................... 51
Local Development Planning and Budgets ................................................................. 53
Monitoring Systems and Accountability Mechanisms........................................ 57

SECTION VI: Strategies, Best Practice and Tools to Support Women’s Representation and Participation in Local Governance.............................................................. 60
  Overcoming Barriers to Women’s Participation.................................................. 60
  Building Capacity of Women to Compete as Candidates ................................... 61
  Increasing Effectiveness of Women’s Representation and Voice ....................... 62
  Ensuring Men’s Support for Women’s Participation in Local Governance.......... 64

SECTION VII: Conclusions and Recommendations.............................................. 66
  Conclusions ......................................................................................................... 66
  Recommendations ............................................................................................ 67

ANNEXES
  Annex A: Proposed Features of Local Governance in Liberia ......................... 73
  Annex B: Bibliography ...................................................................................... 74
  Annex C: List of Interviews ............................................................................. 80
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviations and Acronyms</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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Foreword by the Governance Commission

Women in Liberia have been kept on the margins of national decision-making and governance processes since the establishment of the state in 1847. Though not always supported by national laws, traditional practices demand that women should look up to men for leadership. Liberian women attained the right to vote in 1948, but traditional practices kept them on the sidelines. Today, things are changing for the better. The role of the Liberian women’s movement in the resolution of the Liberian civil war, and their current roles in the state reconstruction process are obvious examples of this reality. Gradually, women are no longer being regarded in the same way they were seen decades ago.

The representation of women in national decision-making institutions has improved since the end of the civil war. The private sector has also recorded an increase in women managers. In the public sector for example, at the end of 2013 women made up 11.6 percent of the members of the Legislature, and 30 percent of senior cabinet ministers. At the local government level, women accounted for 33% of Superintendents; 4.5% of District Commissioners; 21% of mayors of cities, and 2.5% of paramount chiefs. Yet, much needs to be done to empower Liberian women. Their participation in national and local institutions needs to be increased if they must meaningfully contribute to local and national development programs. One way is through special national programs that provide quality and accessible education to increase women’s capacity for higher levels of production and leadership in the economy and in politics. An array of approaches for the empowerment of women need to be considered, including the introduction of strong affirmative action laws and practices to protect women’s representation and participation in the range of national and local institutions and endeavors.

Liberia’s decentralization program seeks to empower women at all levels of governance. The National Policy on Decentralization and Local Governance and its legal and regulatory framework provide the enabling environment for participation of women, people with disabilities and other marginalized groups where socio-economic development impacts really matter. How these provisions are fully implemented to enable women take advantage of the new and emerging opportunities are key questions of concern. This is why it was important to conduct this research and investigate the barriers, analyze opportunities, determine entry points and recommend policy options in the implementation of the decentralization program. The goal is to lay a gender-responsive foundation to take Liberian women from the sidelines to the forefront of state building and nation building.

Dr. Amos Sawyer
Chair, Governance Commission
Preface by the Ministry of Gender and Development

Liberia’s decentralization program presents a unique and important opportunity for us to strengthen women’s participation and leadership in local governance and decision-making. As stressed in Liberia’s National Action Plan on the implementation of UN SCR 1325, the consolidation of peace in Liberia relies on the full and active participation of women at all levels. But beyond women’s participation, to truly establish Liberia’s democracy at a local level, local governance must promote women’s empowerment and leadership, as well as protect the rights of women and girls.

The idea to conduct a study that investigates barriers to women participation in local governance, analyze extant opportunities and explore potential entry points for women has been an idea long conceived. This study is just the beginning of efforts aimed at engaging decentralization reforms in Liberia with issues that concern women – rights, representation, and participation.

This study is a success today because of the sacrifices, commitment and hard work of several individuals and institutions including our collaborating partners, the Governance Commission, UN Women, and the United Nations Mission in Liberia UNMIL. The Governance Commission conceptualized the idea for this study and provided technical support in collaboration with UNMIL. Funding for technical and logistical support was provided by the UN Women. We remain profoundly grateful for their commitment to gender mainstreaming in decentralization and all of Liberia’s state-building reform initiatives.

The views and opinions in this study were collated from interviews and focus group discussions with women and community-based civil society organizations around the country about their present condition and how women can be empowered to enhance their active participation in the governance process of building sustainable peace and democracy in Liberia.

As the Ministry of Gender and Development, we look forward to working closely with our counterparts to implement the recommendations and support women’s leadership and participation in the decentralization process.

Julia Duncan Cassell
Minister, Ministry of Gender and Development
Acknowledgements

This Study would not have been possible without the active involvement and participation of a number of key partners and stakeholders. UN Women would like to acknowledge the leadership of the Governance Commission in identifying the need for this Study and for its partnership in preparing the Study. We also thank the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Gender and Development for their close co-operation and important role in informing and guiding this Study so that it meets their future needs.

We thank our United Nations (UN) partners from the UN Mission in Liberia and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) for actively participating in this Study and for sharing their insights and recommendations.

UN Women would also like to express our deep gratitude to all the women (at the national and local levels) whose voices are echoed throughout this Study and whose testimonies provide compelling evidence of why women’s participation is essential for achieving sustainable and equitable local development.

We would also like to recognize the significant contributions made by the various researchers involved in this study; Delawit Amela Akilu, Younger Johnson of the Governance Commission, Jo Anne Bishop and Mahmoud Koroma of UN Women.

We hope that this Study will provide useful information and inspiring examples to support the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Governance Commission in their efforts to design and implement processes and structures to ensure the effective participation and inclusion of all of Liberian men and women in the decentralization reform process.

Sheelagh Kathy Mangones
UN Women Representative to Liberia
Definition of Key Terms and Concepts

Administrative Decentralization involves the transfer of responsibilities for planning and management of public/government functions to sub-national governments or to sub-national agencies of central government in the sub-national units.

Decentralization is the political (electoral), fiscal, and administrative devolution of both power and resources from the central government to local government units.

De-concentration (a form of administrative decentralization) is the transfer of responsibility from a hierarchical central agency to sub agencies in the political units. In this type of decentralization, the decentralized agencies remain dependent on the central government.

Devolution refers to the transfer of specific functions to local authorities together with the legal basis, capacity for the generation of material and human resources and discretionary decision power. The decentralized agencies in this context have little reliance on the central government, unless prescribed in the legal basis for the devolution.

Fiscal Decentralization involves a level of resource reallocation to local government which allows it to function properly and fund allocated service delivery responsibility, with arrangements for resource allocation usually negotiated between local and central authorities.

Gender refers to the social characteristics or attributes and opportunities associated with being male or female. These roles, responsibilities, opportunities, privileges, expectations and limitations assigned to males and females are socially constructed based on a range of factors including age, religion, ethnicity and social origin. Though deeply rooted in every culture, with wide variations both within and between cultures and different contexts, they are not static and are changeable over time.

Gender Analysis is a systematic way of looking at the different impacts of development, policies, programs and legislation on women and men that entails, first and foremost, collecting sex-disaggregated data and gender-sensitive information about the population concerned. Gender analysis can also include the examination of the multiple ways in which women and men, as social actors, engage in strategies to transform existing roles, relationships, and processes in their own interest and in the interest of others.

Gender Equality describes the concept that all human beings, both women and men, are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes, rigid gender roles, or prejudices. Gender equality means that the different behaviors, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favored equally. It does not mean that women and men have to become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born female or male.

Gender Equity means that women and men are treated fairly according to their respective needs. This may include equal treatment or treatment that is different but considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities. In the development context, a gender equity goal
often requires built-in measures to compensate for the historical and social disadvantages of women.

**Gender Mainstreaming** is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or Programs, in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic and social spheres, such that inequality between women and men is not perpetuated.

**Gender Responsive Budgeting** is an attempt to analyze the impact of government programs and budgets on poor women and men, girls and boys, and assess how people respond to them. Gender budgeting initiatives do not propose separate budgets for women or for men but focus on gender awareness and mainstreaming in all areas of budgeting and at all levels.

**Gender-Sensitive Indicator** can be a measurement, a number, a fact, an opinion or a perception that focuses on a specific condition or situation, and measures changes in that condition or situation over time. The difference between an indicator and a statistic is that indicators should involve comparison with a norm. Gender-sensitive indicators measure gender-related changes in society over time; they provide a close look at the results of targeted gender-based initiatives and actions.

**Sex** refers to the biological characteristics that define humans as female or male. These sets of biological characteristics are not mutually exclusive as there are individuals who possess both, but these characteristics generally differentiate humans as females and males.

**Sex-Disaggregated Data** can be defined as data that is collected and presented separately on women and men. It is quantitative statistical information on the differences and inequalities between women and men. There is widespread confusion over, and misuse of, the terms gender disaggregated data” and “sex-disaggregated data”. Data should necessarily be sex-disaggregated but not gender-disaggregated since females and males are counted according to their biological difference and not according to their social behaviors. The term gender-disaggregated data is frequently used, but it should be understood as sex-disaggregated data.
SECTION I: Introduction

Background

The Government of Liberia has embarked on a historical process to bring itself closer to the people. The decentralization process has been viewed by some as “revolutionary” as it entails a transformative change in the way the country is governed and in the way decisions are made and resources are managed. The primary goal of this decentralization is to strengthen local self-governance, expand local participation in the affairs of the government and provide equal opportunity for all citizens of Liberia to participate and have a stake in the development process in order to accelerate the pace of improvement in the quality of life of all Liberians.¹

A number of important steps have been taken to pave the way towards establishing a system of participatory local governance. A key driver of the decentralization reform process has been the Liberian National Vision 2030 which envisages that in 17 years, decentralized democracy will be on a solid foundation. Launched by the President, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, on January 5, 2012 in Salala District, the National Policy on Decentralization and Local Governance has been the cornerstone of the decentralization reform process and reflects the government’s commitment to bring itself closer to the people through a decentralized, gender-sensitive, participatory and accountable system of local governance. The Policy provides for the creation of local government structures in each of the 15 counties and sets out processes to enable effective devolution of power (political decentralization), responsibilities (administrative decentralization) and resources (fiscal decentralization) to the counties.²

To provide the necessary legal and constitutional basis for decentralization, a Local Government Act (LGA) is currently being drafted to give effect to the National Policy, establish political and administrative structures in local governance, ensure sources of revenues in support of local government administration and operations and provide for the democratic elections of local government officials.³

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² Ibid.  
The Liberia Decentralization Support program (LDSP) and Liberia Decentralization Implementation Plan (LDIP) establish the framework, structures, processes and resources necessary to achieve devolution of select areas by 2017. According to the LDIP, the actual implementation of the decentralization reform process is envisaged to take place incrementally in three distinct phases with the first two years (2013-2014) dedicated to communicating change, supporting the required legal reforms for local election (including Constitutional amendments) and restructuring sub-national units to bring them to sustainable levels. The second phase (2015) will involve local elections and capacity building programs for local government. “Real devolution” will take place in the final phase (2016-2017) with the practical transfer of powers, functions and resources to local governments and intensive capacity building efforts for staff and elected leaders at all levels.4

For women in Liberia who remain marginalized in many aspects of Liberian society including at institutional, political, economic and social levels, the decentralization reform process is truly revolutionary and holds enormous promise. If implemented in a gender-responsive manner, decentralization provides an unprecedented opportunity for women to compete for positions in local government and to influence planning, policy and budget decision-making processes. The Decentralization Policy and draft Local Government Act include a gender equity measure which sets out two seats in every County Council, exclusively for women. While this new measure presents a historic opportunity for Liberian women, initial signs of political resistance to this measure have already been manifested.5 Therefore, ensuring the necessary political support for this measure, preparing women as candidates and building support among communities and families to enable women to participate in local governance structures and processes will be challenging but critical endeavors.

While the commitment of gender equality is reflected in the decentralization policies and plans, gender has remained on the periphery of the reform process. At the county-level, women are largely unaware of the planned decentralization process and scheduled consultations with rural women have been postponed until mid-2014 by which time, it is expected that the Local Government Act will have already been presented to legislators. In order to bring women from the sidelines to the forefront of planned decentralization reforms, increased efforts are therefore needed to provide opportunities for women’s effective participation and influence.

**Goals and Objectives of Study**

Recognizing that the decentralization process presents an important opportunity to further promote gender equality and equity in the development of Liberia’s sub-national governance system, the Governance Commission (GC) has identified the need for a comprehensive review of gaps and opportunities for women in the decentralization process and requested support from the United Nations (UN) in Liberia. In response to this request, UN Women, in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender and Development (MOGD) and UNMIL, has commissioned this Study in order to support

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5 During the Governance Commission’s Seminar for Political Parties on the LGA (held in Monrovia on October 23, 2013), members of political parties voiced strong concern over the use of affirmative action measures to support women’s increased political representation.
the Government of Liberia, and in particular the GC and the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), in their efforts to ensure that a gender perspective is integrated throughout the decentralization reform process.

The overall goal of this Study is to provide the GC, MIA, MOGD and other relevant stakeholders with a substantive review and analysis of gaps and opportunities that need to be addressed in order to establish a gender-responsive foundation for Liberia’s decentralization reform process and to harness the full potential of women to contribute to the process. The specific objectives are:

- To provide an overview of the legal and policy framework for gender-responsive decentralization;
- To identify key barriers to women’s representation and participation in local governance;
- To present key messages highlighting the importance of gender-responsive governance;
- To propose a framework for integrating a gender-perspective in local governance based on identified opportunities and entry points;
- To identify strategies and measures to support women’s effective representation and participation in governance structures;
- To provide strategic and actionable recommendations to key stakeholders responsible for the decentralization process.

Throughout the Study, best practices from other countries in implementing gender-responsive decentralization and local governance are integrated in order to provide concrete and practical examples to inspire and inform Liberia’s reform process.

**Methodology**

This Study was prepared in two phases. The initial phase was carried out in August and September 2013 by a team consisting of an international consultant on gender and governance and the GC’s designated Gender Focal Point. This phase included initial consultations as well as the development of a report on Gender Mainstreaming in Decentralization and Local Governance by the Gender Focal Point.

Based on evolving needs, a second phase was required to further develop the Study including undertaking research to highlight international good practice and to build the case for gender-responsive local governance. During this phase, which took place between October and December 2013, a second international consultant was engaged who worked in close collaboration with the GC and UN Women staff to develop this Study.

The methodology for this Study included a comprehensive documentation review and an extensive consultation process involving interviews with key stakeholders and partners in the decentralization process, field visits to meet with local women and leaders and attendance at relevant events and consultations organized by the GC.
**Documentation Review**

Over 80 documents were reviewed and analyzed during the preparation of this Study including legal and policy documents as well as studies and reports from other countries. The desk review included a substantive review of key documents related to the decentralization process and relevant literature on gender equality, decentralization and local governance specific to Liberia and collected from the experiences of other countries. A complete list of documents reviewed is included in the bibliography in Annex B.

**Consultation Process**

Throughout the development of the Study, more than 100 stakeholders and relevant actors in the decentralization process were consulted in order to hear their views, perceptions and suggestions on how to achieve gender-responsive local governance. During the first phase of the Study, interviews were conducted with policy-makers, decision-makers, implementers, women legislators, civil society, public training institutions and international partners. In order to ensure coverage of the diversity and differences among local communities, field visits were undertaken to three geographically diverse counties including Maryland, Grand Cape Mount and Grand Bassa. During these consultations, the previous Study team met with:

- a) National Government agencies and offices which have a strategic role to play in the decentralization process such as, MIA, the Liberia Institute for Public Administration (LIPA) and the Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services (LISGIS);
- b) County and District-level government authorities including Superintendents, District Commissioners and County Gender Coordinators in order to gain an understanding of their views about opportunities and constraints for women’s participation in local governance structures and processes;
- c) Traditional Chiefs in order to discuss the effects of local customs and traditions, cultural norms and traditional gender roles on women’s participation;
- d) Women leaders and civil society groups: regarding their perceptions and perspectives on their roles, needs and priorities related to the decentralization process.

During the second phase of the Study, a total of 54 individuals (39 women and 15 men) were consulted. Interviews were conducted with senior government officials from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, MoGD and the GC as well as representatives from UNMIL and UNDP in order to further clarify their needs and expectations about the Study and solicit their views and suggestions about how to integrate gender into the decentralization process. The Study Team also participated in two separate consultation meetings organized by the GC on the Local Government Act including a seminar with political party leaders and members on 23 November 2013 and a dialogue with women political leaders on 3 December 2013.

Building on the county-level consultations from the first phase, the Study Team conducted two further focus group discussions, including one with 16 rural women from Bong, River Cess and River Gee counties and a second in Nimba County with 15 market women. These discussions provided an opportunity to speak with women from rural counties about their women’s involvement in and understanding of the decentralization process, their views about the role and importance of
women’s participation in local governance and barriers they face in participating in local governance structures and processes as well as their suggestions for overcoming these barriers.

**Figure 1: Breakdown of Stakeholders Consulted during Phase II**

During both consultation phases, interview questions were formulated for each of the stakeholder groups in order to guide the discussions and solicit the required input for the Study.

In order to provide an opportunity for early feedback on the Study, a draft version of the Study was shared and discussed with key stakeholders including the Governance Commission, MIA and MOGD in early December 2013. The input and suggestions from these discussions has been reviewed and incorporated into the final version of this Study which will be widely circulated among decision-makers, participants and stakeholders of the decentralization reform process in order to help inform and guide efforts to establish gender-responsive local governance in Liberia.
“The Committee urges the State party [Liberia] to pay special attention to the needs of rural women and ensure that they participate in decision-making process, including community decision-making processes and development planning and have equal access to basic services and infrastructure.”

CEDAW Concluding Observations for Liberia, July 31, 2009

SECTION II: Liberia’s Commitment to Gender Equality

Gender Equality

The Government of Liberia has enacted and developed a range of laws, policies, plans and programs to contribute to women’s empowerment and gender equality through its national, sectoral and local government policies, plans and programs. Article 11 of the Liberian Constitution sets out the right of all citizens to life, liberty, security and property and provides for the fundamental rights and freedoms of all persons irrespective of ethnic background, race, sex, creed, place of origin or political opinion and guarantees the right of all persons to equal protection of the law. The duty of the State to ensure equal access to educational opportunities for all citizens is stipulated under Article 6 and Article 8 which obliges the State to ensure non-discriminatory employment and livelihood opportunities for all citizens.

6 Liberia’s commitment to gender equality is also reflected in its ratification of international and regional instruments, treaties and conventions including:

- The Vienna Declaration and Program of Action in 1993;

The Government of Liberia has recently adopted a number of policies and programs to advance gender equality and equity. The National Gender Policy of Liberia was adopted in 2009 to address gender inequalities and the marginalization of women in Liberia. The policy seeks to promote equal access to political and economic resources through mainstreaming gender in national development processes; enhancing women’s and女孩’s empowerment for sustainable and equitable development;

and creating and strengthening gender-responsive structures and mechanisms in which both women and men can participate and benefit from development programs on an equal basis.\textsuperscript{10}

In line with its commitments under United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325\textsuperscript{11}, the Government of Liberia developed and officially adopted the 2009-2013 Liberian National Action Plan for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325. The Plan provides a framework to promote human rights and security for women and girls and to strengthen coordination and coherence of gender mainstreaming. It also seeks to develop and institutionalize economic, social and security policies to empower women and girls to participate fully and effectively in Liberia’s peacebuilding and development processes at all levels, including decision-making. Mirroring UNSCR 1325, the plan builds on the four pillars of protection of women and children from sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV); prevention of SGBV; promotion of women's human rights; and women’s participation in peace processes.\textsuperscript{12} In order to address sexual and gender-based violence, Liberia has also adopted a National Plan of Action on Gender-Based Violence.

At an institutional level, the National Gender Forum and MOGD are the lead national machineries for promoting gender equality, women’s advancement and children’s rights in Liberia. MOGD was established in 2001 under the Gender and Development Act with the mandate to advise the Government on all matters affecting the development and welfare of women and children; coordinate gender mainstreaming efforts to ensure that both women and men gain from development programs; integrate women as equal partners with men in the development of the country; and monitor and report back on the impact and progress of national policies and programs on women and children. In order to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment at a local level, MOGD’s structure also includes county-level Gender Coordinators.

**Effective Representation and Participation in Decision-Making**

Liberia’s commitment towards ensuring effective representation and participation of women in decision-making and political structures is reflected within its laws, policies and the international and regional treaties which the county has ratified. A fundamental principle underlying the Liberian Constitution is that every adult citizen has the right to participate, either personally or through an elected representative, in the making of decisions that affect his or her life, and to take part in peaceful political activity, including membership of a political party.\textsuperscript{13}

In terms of policy frameworks, Liberia’s National Gender Policy calls for specific interventions to address structural inequities and marginalization of women in elective and appointive structures and systems of governance. The Policy also recommends the formulation and implementation of gender capacity building programs for different actors at national and local levels, including women leaders

\textsuperscript{11} Adopted by the Security Council at its 4213th meeting, on 31 October 2000
\textsuperscript{13} Analysis of Women’s Political Participation and Integration of a Gender Perspective in the 2011 Electoral Process in Liberia, 2011, p. 13.
and the need to broaden the scope of affirmative action to enhance its effectiveness in reducing gender disparities.\textsuperscript{14}

Liberia’s National Action Plan for the Implementation on UNSCR 1325, also provides an important framework for promoting women’s full participation in all conflict prevention, peace-building and post-conflict recovery processes at community, county, national and sub-regional levels.\textsuperscript{15}

The Agenda for Transformation (AfT), which is Liberia’s first medium-term development strategy for achieving its longer-term vision for 2030, includes clear commitments towards increased political representation of under-represented groups including women:

- Pillar 1 (Peace, Security and Rule of Law), stipulates that “public institutions will take care to achieve fair representation and to empower local and community organizations”\textsuperscript{16} and to ensure “enhanced participation across society and especially from marginalized groups such as women, children and youth.”\textsuperscript{17} It is also stipulated that “everyone, including marginalized groups such as women and youth, will participate in decision making in a free and fair society.”\textsuperscript{18}

- Under the sector goal of “peace and reconciliation.” Pillar 1 also states that “genuine opportunities to participate in peace-building, reconciliation, and political processes must be created for everyone, particularly marginalized groups such as unemployed youth and women.”\textsuperscript{19}

- The goal of Pillar 4 (Governance and Public Institutions) is to “create transparent, accountable and responsive public institutions that contribute to economic and social development as well as inclusive and participatory governance systems.”\textsuperscript{20} Pillar 4 also requires that “employment in the public sector will be based on merit, and various groups of society will be fairly represented in politics at the national and local levels.”\textsuperscript{21}

- AfT identifies gender equality as a cross-cutting issue and aims to “[i]mprove the socioeconomic and political status and capacity of women in Liberia” through efforts to “increase women’s participation in the community decision-making process.”\textsuperscript{22}

Through its ratification of UN and AU treaties, conventions and instruments, Liberia has made clear commitments to ensure effective representation and participation in decision-making and to undertake positive measures and affirmative action to achieve this aim. CEDAW declares that there should be no form of discrimination against women in terms of equal political participation and Article 7 calls on all state parties to take all measures necessary to protect women against inequity. CEDAW’s general recommendation No. 23 on women and political and public life also recommends that States parties undertake special measures to achieve a balance between women and men holding publicly elected positions and to ensure that barriers to equality are overcome, including

\textsuperscript{16} Republic of Liberia, National Gender Policy, Republic of Liberia, 2009.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p. 44.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid. p. 49.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid, p. 49
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p. 106.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid, p. 40.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid. p. 143.
those resulting from illiteracy, language, poverty and impediments to women’s freedom of movement.\textsuperscript{23}

The 	extit{Beijing Platform for Action} sets out measures to ensure women’s equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making. Specific actions to be taken by government include: establishing the goal of gender balance in governmental bodies and committees, as well as in public administrative entities, including, \textit{inter alia}, setting specific targets and implementing measures to substantially increase the number of women with a view to achieving equal representation of women and men, if necessary through positive action, in all governmental and public administration positions. Under Article 9 of the African Union Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, Liberia has committed to “ensure increased and effective representation and participation of women at all levels of decision-making.”

Finally, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Protocol A/SP1/12/01 on Democracy and Good Governance\textsuperscript{24}, stipulates under article 2(3) that Member States (including Liberia) shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that women have equal rights with men to vote and be voted for in elections, to participate in the formulation of government policies and the implementation thereof and to hold public offices and perform public functions at all levels of governance.

**Equitable Development**

Under Liberia’s Constitution, the importance of citizen’s participation in the management of the economy and development processes is clearly stated under Article 7:

> “The Republic shall, consistent with the principles of individual freedom and social justice enshrined in this Constitution, manage the national economy and the natural resources of Liberia in such manner as shall ensure the maximum feasible participation of Liberian citizens under conditions of equality as to advance the general welfare of the Liberian people and the economic development of Liberia.”\textsuperscript{25}

Liberia’s commitment towards equitable development is also reflected in the Government’s long-term national development vision \textit{Liberia Rising 2030}. Launched in December 2012, it sets out to turn Liberia into a middle income country by 2030, characterized by peaceful and inclusive politics, a diversified economy, stable institutions and an educated citizenry.

Liberia’s medium-term development strategy, \textit{Agenda for Transformation}, also articulates equitable development as a core priority for Liberia. An overarching objective for the period 2013-2017 is increased inclusiveness for a more equal and just society and gender equality is mainstreamed as a cross-

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\textsuperscript{23} CEDAW General Recommendation No. 23 on women and political and public life (16th session, 1997).
\textsuperscript{24} ECOWAS Protocol A/SP1/12/01 on Democracy and Good Governance, Supplementary to the Protocol relating to the Mechanism For Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security
\textsuperscript{25} Constitution of the Republic of Liberia
cutting issue across all four pillar areas (security and rule of law, economic transformation, human development and governance).²⁶

Adopted by the United Nations in 2000, the Millennium Goals (MDGs) are eight time-bound targets to end extreme poverty by 2015. While all of the MDGs are directly related to women’s rights, MDG3 specifically requires countries to support gender equality and women’s empowerment. While the target is to eliminate gender disparity in educational attainment, indicators for this goal also include the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments. This last indicator recognizes the critical need for women to participate in decision-making at the political level before change towards this goal can be fully realized.

Although Liberia’s legal and policy framework provides a strong platform for advancing gender equality in the local governance reform process, a number of gaps remain and increased measures and efforts are needed to enable full implementation. Such gaps, along with legal reform measures needed to support women’s increased participation in local governance, are discussed further in Section V.

²⁶ Agenda for Transformation, pp. 38, 40 and 127.
SECTION III: Barriers and Challenges to Women’s Representation and Participation in Local Governance

Decentralization is often presented as an important vehicle for increasing women’s political participation and ensuring that their needs and priorities are reflected in laws, policies and budgets developed by local governments. Unfortunately, there are significant structural and institutional barriers including deeply entrenched traditions, customs and stereotypes that hinder women’s participation in politics and governance at all levels in Liberia. Unless, these barriers are identified and addressed in the development of laws, policies, institutions and budgets at the local level, it is unlikely that the decentralization process will be able to succeed in achieving its aim of equitable and inclusive governance processes and structures.

This section highlights the ways in which women in Liberia are politically, economically, socially and culturally marginalized and provides an overview of the different structural and institutional barriers that impede the ability of many women to effectively participate in local decision-making processes.

Acknowledging Women’s Marginalization and Exclusion in Liberia

Women in Liberia have played a historical role in securing peace and in contributing to the national economy. At an international level, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and peace activist Leymah Gbowee were recognized and awarded a Nobel Peace Prize in 2011 for their non-violent role in promoting peace, democracy and gender equality in Liberia. Following the election of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Liberia again made history as the first African nation with a female president. Liberian women have also played a vital role in the economy and are major players in the agriculture sector, providing 80% of agricultural labor force, 76% of cash crop production, 93% of food crop production and 85% of all marketing and trading. As major players in the agriculture sector, they provide all marketing and trading services, and link rural and urban markets through their informal networks. Despite these achievements, women remain marginalized in many aspects of the Liberia society including at institutional, political, economic and social level:

27 National Gender Policy, p. 22.
Women have lower rates of school attendance and completion which is reflected in the literacy rate – 41 percent for adult women compared to 70 percent for men and 26 percent for rural women compared to 60 percent of rural men.29

Women’s political participation is low. In the 2011 elections, 10 percent of the seats in the House of Representatives were won by women and for the Senate, the number was even lower with only 6.7 percent of women winning seats, marking a decrease from the 2005 elections where the figures were 12.5 and 16.7 percent respectively.

While the current system of political appointment has enabled women to make up 40 percent of Superintendents and 25 percent of City Mayors, they only comprise three percent of District Commissioners and under two percent of paramount chiefs.30

Women and youth are currently underrepresented in existing county-level decision making bodies, in particular the County Development Fund and Social Development Fund management committees and the County Councils.

Women lack equal access to land. According to the World Food Program, 56 percent of female-headed households own land, compared to 68 percent of male-headed households, while almost double the number of men (33 percent) compared to women (16 percent) own land.31 Although the law allows women to inherit land and property, the lack of oversight by formal governance institutions allows traditional patriarchal institutions to deprive women from real access to land and property.32

Liberia’s legal system is based on two parallel systems – a statutory and customary one. Discriminatory attitudes towards women are especially prevalent in the informal system and undermine and challenge women’s rights. Because the majority of cases affecting women are adjudicated, interpreted and applied by men at the customary level, women are more at risk of being subjugated to rulings that are predicated on their perceived roles and not on their rights.33

Regulatory practices in Liberia still impede women to a greater extent than men in obtaining the necessary access to credit, training, information and agricultural extension to perform their economic roles.

Unfortunately, a significant number of women in Liberia face marginalization and discrimination which is often either under-estimated or in some cases overlooked or even denied. Because Liberia has a female Head of State and a number of women holding key public positions at the executive level (which still

29 Source National Gender Policy, p. 11.
33 Ibid, p. 20.
falls short of the 30 percent target set by the African Union), there is a common and misled view that “women are everywhere” in terms of holding positions of influence and power. During a recent consultation the Governance Commission organized with political party leaders on the Local Government Act, this sentiment was expressed by a number of the male political leaders who stated that “at no level of Liberia society are women marginalized.” This view was also reflected during consultations conducted by the Study Team at the county-level. Despite these perceptions, Liberia lags significantly behind other countries in realizing its gender equality obligations and ranks 142 out of 155 countries according to UNDP’s globally accepted Gender Equality Index and 108 out of 142 countries in terms of representation of women in national parliament.

Structural Barriers

Women in Liberia are confronted with various structural constraints that hinder their effective participation in governance and community leadership at the local level.

Traditional Norms and Values about Women and Gender Roles

While local government has the potential for greater engagement with women (who are often confined through their domestic responsibilities to public engagement close to home), because of its closeness to society, local government institutions are often more influenced by traditional authorities and patriarchal values and norms, which in some instances serve as a significant barrier to women’s inclusion and participation in decision-making processes and structures. Like most African societies, the Liberian society is patriarchal where men serve as the traditional and cultural heads of homes. Men’s influence in the home extends into the public sphere where they constitute the majority of decision-makers at a national, county and local level. This socially constructed role given to men has reinforced a social norm that often excludes women from exercising influence and fails to recognize the value of their knowledge and participation in politics and governance.

Traditional attitudes and patriarchal norms about women and gender roles often hinder women’s access to power and resources and limit their participation in local government decision-making processes. Discriminatory cultural and traditional practices related to ownership of property and land titles have also further exacerbated unequal power relations between women and men. Because participation in governance and politics is often regarded by women and men as a “man’s affair”, even in cases where women have the requisite educational and skill levels to participate in local governance, tradition and deeply-rooted stereotypes often hold them back from playing the role they would like. Many of the local women the Study Teams spoke with stated that women

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36 Inter-Parliamentary Union. (2013, November 1). Women in National Parliaments, Retrieved 8 November 2013 from Inter-Parliamentary Union Website: http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm
37 According to the 2008 Population and Housing Census, 73 percent of households were headed by males compared to 27 percent by females.
attend meetings to fulfill quotas but are expected not to talk, and if they decide to speak, they often encounter resistance. This is coupled with the fact that women are often unwilling to challenge traditions, especially when they impact on social relations and lead to negative perceptions that a woman’s political involvement can bring to her family.

Negative and harmful traditional and cultural practices in Liberia are particularly severe at the local level and hinder women’s participation in governance and politics. An example of this is the traditional masquerade that must meet the Chief before it carries out its ceremonial activity in the village. Women are supposed to stay indoors when the devil comes out as they are not allowed by tradition to meet the devil. Such traditions present a direct barrier for women and as such, often discourage women from considering vying for leadership positions in their community.

Prevalent gender stereotypes not only define the roles that women and men play and the work they do but also influence who participates in and benefits from development. The women’s groups who participated in the Study Team’s focus group discussion in Grand Cape Mount County expressed the fact that socio-cultural traditions make it difficult for women to speak out in public as women are expected to listen but not talk. Many of the local women interviewed during the Study pointed to the example of their exclusion from the planning and decision-making processes related to the County Development Funds. Even for the women who attended meetings and were brave enough to speak out and identify their needs and priorities, women were largely excluded from decisions and information about allocations and expenditures of these funds.

For women who are able to participate in politics and public life at the local level, they often face ridicule and harassment for transcending conventional gender roles. During the 2011 elections, callers to radio stations (mostly males) waged verbal attacks and insults against female candidates, discussing them as unmarried, separated or divorced, or describing them as barren while other intimated that women had roles to perform at home and not in politics. Because traditions and gender stereotypes are so deeply ingrained and entrenched in attitudes, institutions and social relations and structures in Liberia, challenging them is a long term process and often special measures are needed to overcome them.

“Decentralization works so far as our traditions permit. We aspire to chieftaincy but how can that be when we cannot meet the devil”.

Emmon Quaye, River Cess County

“Women’s groups are not informed about the county development planning process and they don’t know how the decisions of the county are taken.”

Nettie G. Doepoe, Gender Focal Point, Grand Bassa County consultation (May 2013)

“Culture is a great barrier – it prevents women from speaking out boldly.

Participant of Focus Group Discussion in Grand Bassa County

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38 Study Team consultation in Tienmi, Grand Cape Mount County, May 11, 2013.
39 Horowitz, p. 33.
**Poverty and Economic Dependency**

Gender inequalities in socio-economic status are high at the local level with families headed by females constituting 73.4 percent of the poor and 54 percent of the informal sector.\(^{41}\) These inequities serve as significant barriers to women’s participation in local governance. Poor women face a high opportunity cost in participating in local governance, especially if it displaces income generating opportunities\(^{42}\); therefore, without economic independence and livelihoods, women are likely to face resistance from their husbands in their desire to participate in local governance institutions and contest elections.

**Low Educational Levels and High Illiteracy**

Important efforts are being made to close the gender gap in school enrolment rates through Liberia’s Universal Primary Education Program and the enrollment ratio of girls to boys in the primary and secondary schools stand at 86%. Despite these higher gender ratios in school enrolment, the 2007 Liberia Demographic Health Survey shows significant percentages of Liberians have little or no education, with females being less educated than males. Forty-two percent of women and 18 percent of men have never attended school. Nineteen percent of men have completed secondary school or higher and while only eight percent of women have accomplished the same. For both women and men, urban residents are better educated than rural residents.\(^{43}\) The low school attendance and complete rates also correspond with high rates of illiteracy with only 26 percent of rural women being literate compared with 61 percent in urban areas.

High school drop-out rates have also been a key contributing factor to low levels of education and literacy among women and girls. The causes for school incompletion include early marriage (whereby women on average marry five years earlier than men)\(^ {44}\), high rates of teenage pregnancy (32 percent)\(^ {45}\) and lack of sensitization about the benefits of formal education.

Low educational and literacy levels constitute a major impediment to women’s participation in local governance. Without an education, they struggle to compete for jobs which place them at a disadvantage economically in terms of lacking the necessary resources to compete in local politics. Women with low literacy also face challenges casting a vote in elections and participating in decision-making processes that are often dependent upon written documentation. During consultations with rural women in Grand Cape County, women expressed the concern that without

> “How do you guarantee that the vote you cast is for your preferred candidate if you do not know the spelling of their name or cannot recognize the number against their party symbol on the ballot paper?”

Ma Annie Kruah, President of Liberia Rural Women, Nimba County


\(^{42}\) Horowitz, p. 31.

\(^{43}\) Liberia Demographic Health Survey 2007.

\(^{44}\) According to the 2008 Population and Housing Census, the Singulate Mean Age at Marriage is 23.5 years for females and 28.3 years for males (p. 17).

adequate support to develop their capacities, even basic skills such as literacy, they would be limited in fully participating in the new public spaces that will be opened up through decentralization.46

Women’s low levels of university-level education, which are often due to traditional barriers and the burden of reproductive work, hamper their access to leadership and decision-making positions in government institutions. For example, under the current version of the Local Government Act, Superintendents are required to possess a university degree and District Commissioners, City Mayors and Commissioners must also have a college or university degree.47

Low levels of education and literacy also hinder women’s access to information concerning allocation of public funds and service delivery programs. This can restrict their ability to make well-grounded decisions about public services they use, and to influence public action either as citizens or representatives. The low levels of education represented in the rural/urban divide could also mean that in cases where women are considered, it is women from the urban centers who would be drafted to serve in the rural posts.

Lack of Confidence

Without education and literacy, many women lack the confidence needed to compete for local politics and participate in public discussions. The link between illiteracy, confidence and participation is strong for many women. An example frequently cited by rural women is that fact that when they are required to sign in, they feel unwelcome or uncomfortable to attend discussions and meetings and often this fact alone can discourage them from participating. Often standards for women and men without “book” are different overall and women feel more inhibited by illiteracy and even in instances where women have education, they often have tradition working against them. Traditions and patriarchal norms that exclude women, combined with low educational and literacy levels also have a direct impact upon women’s confidence to participate in local governance. By interiorizing traditional and societal norms, women often doubt their ability even if they are able.

Time Constraints and Conflicting Priorities

In Liberia, traditional family roles and socially constructed norms generally require women to fulfill all or nearly all household and childcare responsibilities. In such instances, women’s work within the home often limits their ability to participate in politics or governance structures. By becoming politically active or participating in community affairs as engaged citizens, women are hampered in their tasks of taking care of others and their responsibility for the household and often lack support

46 Study Team consultation in Tienmi, Grand Cape Mount County, May 11, 2013.
47 Liberia draft Local Government Act
from their husbands or family. Due to time and resource constraints, it is difficult for women to take time away from home to attend meetings or to run for political posts and to finance the costs of travel and childcare and the opportunity costs for time spent in local politics is high. For women, political participation does not mean an excuse for them to stop their roles in the same way that it would for a man. While it is rarely easy for women to transfer their domestic responsibilities to their husbands, men can often leave their tasks to their wives. For women who work outside of the home, given the double burden they often have, there is little time left to be involved in government activities.

**Limited Access to Financial Resources and Social Networks**

A major impediment to women’s participation in governance and politics at the local level is their limited access to financial resources. The costs of transport and childcare often hinder women from being able to attend planning meetings or to serve in local government institutions.

Limited financial resources are also a significant barrier to women’s participation in politics. Without financial means, women who chose to contest elections are unable to print promotional materials and cover logistics costs such as transport reach voters in towns and villages during campaign periods. Analysis of women’s political participation in the 2011 elections conducted by MOGD and UNMIL describes how the campaigning for the elections was monetized, with constituents making demands on all candidates. According to the analysis, female candidates observed that a majority of them lost – 92 out of 101 female contestants for the Legislature – because they did not have the money to “splash out.”

Limited access to professional networks and social connections also present a significant hurdle for women who run for office. Without access to political circles and resources, women are hampered in their efforts to run effective and successful campaigns.

**Limited Political Experience and Lack of Information**

Because public sector activities are usually seen as the male domain, women often lack experience on how to campaign. MOGD and UNMIL’s analysis of the 2011 elections also revealed that while women candidates did their best to campaign, they faced significant challenges:

"No poor man or woman becomes a leader. Politics is about money. It helps you to get access to constituents, to get access to scattered villages, to provide refreshments when people attend rallies and meetings, to provide T-shirts to supporters and to mobilize the youth."

Honorable Mariamu B. Fofana, Chair of the Gender and Children’s Development Committee, House of Representatives (in UNMIL Analysis of Women’s Political Participation, p. 24)


Men who were interviewed observed that women do not campaign as vigorously as men do; that they are not very visible and undertake fewer campaign activities. Gender roles and responsibilities also affected women’s ability to campaign effectively. Wives and mothers, in particular, were unable to campaign before 6 p.m. because of their gender roles at home, while male candidates, in contrast, campaigned until midnight. This practice created an uneven playing field for the sexes.  

Because many women have not had the opportunity to fully develop their political capacities, they often lack confidence in their own political capabilities. During the 2011 elections, the majority users of media outlets were male candidates and in addition to having a limited understanding about the power of the media in political campaigning, some female candidates were also not confident enough to debate issues with male contenders on electronic media.

Another related barrier is the low levels of knowledge about local government rules and procedures, government structures and policies as well as women’s limited legal literacy to read and understand local laws and acts.

**Intersecting Issues that Compound Structural Barriers**

Cutting across the structural barriers identified above are the issues of age, class, language and disability. In rural areas, these issues intersect with gender and further compound the challenges of tradition, low education, and high illiteracy, lack of confidence, resource limitations and political connection. Young women are often disproportionately disadvantaged over young men and therefore find it difficult to speak out, especially if an older man is present. Often issues of importance are taken to elders who can also exclude women from the process. Unlike older women who are seen as post-motherhood and post-sexual, younger women are often subject to greater judgment regarding traditional gender roles and probity.

In terms of the intersection of gender and class, while women in Monrovia generally have higher educational levels, greater access to resources and lower traditional pressures, rural women face greater structural barriers which translate into higher levels of exclusion and marginalization.

In Liberia there are 16 major ethnic communities, each with its own language and because rural women are often confined to their homes to fulfill their domestic responsibilities, they have less exposure to different languages and dialects used within the larger community and region. As a result, the use of different dialects in local governance structures and processes can exclude women from speaking and participating. Overall, spoken dialects are more dominant among women and women are often less comfortable and confident to speak in English at formal meetings and events than men who lack English fluency.

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51 Ibid., p. 24.
Compared with men, a higher proportion of women are affected by disabilities and face increased challenges in participating in politics and accessing opportunities.

**Institutional Barriers**

There are a number of institutional barriers (including the legal and regulatory framework at the national and local level as well as institutional practices and policies) which limit the ability of Liberian women to effectively participate in local politics and governance structures. In terms of legal barriers, while Liberia’s Constitution guarantees the fundamental rights and freedoms of all citizens irrespective of sex, there is no definition of discrimination in Liberia’s Constitution or legislation (in line with article 1 of CEDAW) which covers both direct and indirect discrimination, nor is there any legislation embodying the principle of equality between women and men such as a specific Gender Equality Law. The Election Law falls short in providing the necessary legal provisions and measures (including reserved seats and quotas) to overcome many of the structural barriers to women’s participation in politics and governance and efforts to amend the Law have failed to achieve clear and enforceable targets to support women’s political participation. Past efforts to secure support for the draft Bill for the Equal Participation and Representation of Women in the Political Process also proved to be an uphill battle for women in Liberia due to strong resistance they faced to proposed affirmative action measures which opponents to the Bill viewed as “favoring” women and unconstitutional.

Specific policies and regulations for increasing the number of women in non-elective senior decision-making positions are also lacking, especially in the civil service as well as policies and measures to address discriminatory behaviors and attitudes in recruitment, promotions and salaries. Further, training on gender is not systematically included in training for new civil servants and gender-friendly and safe working environments for women are not always provided.

While the Liberian government’s National Policy on Decentralization and Local Governance and the draft Local Government Act provide an important provision that would reserve two seats on every County Council for women, there remains resistance, especially in rural areas, to legal reforms that give women decision-making power over strategic resources.

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53 2008 Population and Housing Census, p. xi
SECTION IV: Why Gender-Responsive Local Governance is Critical for Good Governance and Sustainable Development

Over the last two decades, an increasing number of countries have successfully transitioned from centralized to decentralized systems of government. This has contributed to a rich supply of international experience and best practice about how to create sustainable, inclusive and democratic local governments. Decentralization provides countries with an unprecedented opportunity to shift the balance of power and resources from the central government to communities, to ensure efficiency and equitable delivery of services and to establish structures to support effective participation of citizens. Over time, experience has shown that without the active participation and inclusion of women, decentralization processes cannot succeed in establishing democratic local governments. Experience has also shown that aligning decentralization processes with the needs and priorities of women, men, girls and boys translates into better and more efficient systems of governance. As a result, gender-responsive decentralization has become recognized as an essential element of good local governance.

The aim of this section is to explain what ‘gender-responsive local governance’ means in practical terms and to provide an evidence-based overview of why it is critical for good governance and local development. In doing so, arguments for gender-responsive local governance are formulated as ‘key messages’ for lawmakers, political party leaders and the general public that can be used by the drivers of the decentralization reform process to build clear and solid case for gender-responsive local governance.

What is Gender-Responsive Local Governance?

Local governance that is gender-responsive takes into account the different needs, interests, priorities and concerns of women and men, girls and boys. These differences are used to inform all local governance processes, including policymaking, planning, budget allocation, program development, local service delivery and performance monitoring, and to directly address existing gender inequalities.

Local Governance that is gender-responsive means considering HOW and WHY local governance structures, processes, policies, programs and activities affect women and men, girls and boys differently

(Source: Gender Equality and Local Governance)

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55 Van der Leest, Kristin Jacoba, Xhelo, Rezart and Wittberger Dolly, Gender Equality and Local Governance, UN Joint Program on Gender Equality, and Equity in Governance project, Tirana 2012, p. 7.
Gender-sensitive local governance aims to:

- Increase women’s participation in politics, not only in formal political structures but also civic engagement in politics;
- Strengthen gender-awareness and capacities among both female and male politicians and civil servants;
- Deliver services that address the specific needs and interests of women and men in the community, which requires engendered economic development, development planning and allocation of resources;
- Create awareness of women’s rights.

**Why is Gender-Responsive Local Governance Important?**

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<th>Why Gender Matters: Gender Issues in Local Governance</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Environment and health:</strong> Lack of adequate services such as sanitation, sewerage and fuel impact on the environment and are also health hazards. Women are disproportionately affected because they perform the majority of the tasks around the home and care for the sick. Public health care facilities are often inaccessible. The reproductive health needs of women are also often poorly serviced.</td>
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<td><strong>Water:</strong> Women play a central role in the management of water and sanitation. Women, and to a lesser extent children, are primarily the ones who draw water for household use, transport it home, store it until it is used, and use it for cooking, cleaning, washing, and watering. Women are often responsible for negotiating with their neighbors for access to water supply, evaluate water sources, analyze supply patterns, lobby relevant authorities, and launch protests when water availability reaches dire levels.</td>
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<td><strong>Sanitation:</strong> While men participate in the decision-making on the type and building of sanitation units, their maintenance is seen as the responsibility of women since cleaning the house and toilet are regarded as women’s work. Women encourage or discourage, teach and supervise young children’s use of sanitation units. Small aspects of design can make a big difference between the use and non-use of these facilities.</td>
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<td><strong>Crime and security:</strong> In addition to the high levels of crime that affect both men and women, especially in poor areas, women are the main victims of domestic violence and sexual offences.</td>
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<td><strong>Land and housing:</strong> Although men and women are theoretically eligible for housing and land subsidies in most countries, these services are invariably registered in the names of men.</td>
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<td><strong>Electricity:</strong> Access to electricity has major implications for women, both with regard to security and fuel for cooking and heating.</td>
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<td><strong>Transport and mobility:</strong> Often women need to travel into residential areas at times when transport is planned for people travelling out. For example, domestic workers come to work in residential areas in the early hours of the morning when most residents are going out to work in the city. The domestic workers are thus forced to leave their children with relatives, and live in cramped quarters with their employers. The multiple roles of women mean they must often take several short trips in a day, often on routes that are poorly serviced and dangerous.</td>
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<td><strong>The informal sector:</strong> Women constitute the majority of informal traders especially in the so-called ‘survivalist sector’. Instead of providing simple facilities like market stalls that can help women to work in safe and hygienic environments and make a more decent return from their long hours of work, local authorities often harass women traders and charge them with breaking by-laws.</td>
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Adapted from South Africa Local Government Gender Action Plan Manual
Key Messages about Gender-Responsive Governance

The following section provides seven key messages that underline why gender-responsive local governance is necessary and important and how addressing the needs and priorities of women, men, girls and boys translates into governance that is effective, efficient, transparent and equitable.

**KEY MESSAGE #1:**
Local governments play a key role in advancing gender equality and women’s rights

Because local governments are the closest to people, they are best-placed to reduce gender inequalities and to promote models of governance that allow for a more just, inclusive and fair society for women and men. Local governments offer increased opportunities for women to participate in local development planning and to ensure that the delivery of services and formulation of budgets is informed by their needs and priorities. Gender responsive local governance which improves access, availability and quality of public services for women and girls is necessary for development and the fulfillment of women’s human rights.

**International Union of Local Authorities (IULA) Worldwide Declaration on Women in Local Government**

Women have the right to equal access to the services of local governments, as well as the right to be treated equally in these services and to be able to influence the initiation, development, management and monitoring of services. The provision of services such as education, welfare and other social services by local governments, should aim to see women and men as equally responsible for matters related both to the family and to public life, and avoid perpetuating stereotypes of women and men.

Local governments provide services utilized by individual households such as electricity, waste disposal, water, schools, health clinics and other social services. The decisions of local governments therefore have a direct impact on the private lives of women, who are most often responsible for providing for and caring for the family and home. For this reason, women’s active participation in decision-making is essential in order to ensure that they can promote and defend their specific needs and interests.

**KEY MESSAGE #2:**
“Good governance is not possible if it reflects the voice and needs of only 50% of the population”

Good governance is characterized by participation, transparency, accountability, rule of law, effectiveness, and equity. Good governance ensures that the voices of the poorest and the most vulnerable are heard in decision-making over the allocation of development resources and that political, social and economic priorities are based on broad consensus among the three stakeholders.

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the state, private sector and civil society. Positioning human rights and gender equality at the center of local governance is therefore critical to achieving good governance. Without the voice and participation of women in local governance, there is no awareness about their exclusion, discrimination and deprivation of rights and no fair share of resources.

Good local governance requires that women and men actively participate in decision-making about development priorities and hold governments accountable for meeting human rights obligations in a way that empowers women and advances gender equality. Women have the right to participate in political decision-making, for reasons of equality, democracy and legitimacy and until the interests of women have been represented at the local level, the system is not fully democratic. In its 1998 worldwide Declaration on Women in Local Government, the International Union of Local Authorities (IULA) declared that:

Systematic integration of women augments the democratic basis, the efficiency and the quality of the activities of local government. If local government is to meet the needs of both women and men, it must build on the experiences of both women and men, through an equal representation at all levels and in all fields of decision-making, covering the wide range of responsibilities of local governments.

Women’s voices need to be heard to ensure equitable and fair outcomes for women. It is therefore critical that local government structures and processes provide opportunities to empower and enable women to take part in the development of their community through their active participation and involvement in decision-making.

**KEY MESSAGE #3:**

Women’s participation in local governance is not just a rights issue; it is also an effectiveness and efficiency issue

Research and country experience has consistently shown that local governments that are more equitable, inclusive and accountable are also more effective and efficient. Good local governance requires efforts to ensure that service priorities meet the needs of all constituents and are delivered in ways that are fair and accessible to all women, men, girls and boys. Without the full and effective participation of all citizens, and a clear understanding of gaps and barriers that end-users face in accessing services, the design and delivery of essential services may fail to take into account the needs and priorities of all members of communities, including the poorest and most disadvantaged groups. This in turn can serve to further exacerbate poverty and inequities. An example cited by a rural woman during the consultation held in Bong County illustrates how women’s exclusion from local decision-making and failure to consult with women in local development planning can have an adverse effect for communities and undermine the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery:

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58 The Declaration, which was adopted in 1998 in Harare, appeals to national governments to “recognize national associations of local governments as important partners in the development, promotion and support of gender equality at the local level, and in the exchange of experiences at the international and national levels” (IULA 1998:1).

“We asked for a clinic and were excited when the government agreed to build one. Unfortunately, when the time came to build, they did not consult us and chose a location that is a 2h and 45m walk from our town, even farther than the other close satellite villages. We have a law that forbids traditional midwives from supporting women to deliver their babies in the town and those who break this law are fined LD 1,500.00. The clinic does not even have an ambulance and if they did, network coverage is a problem so we cannot call them. The big hospital is all the way in Bopolu, so what happens when a woman is in immediate labor? You save her life and pay LD 1,500.00? In some cases women have given birth on the road, some have died because of this law. If we had been consulted, this law would have been passed with exceptions. If we had been consulted, we would have also proposed solutions. The only way out is for them to build temporary homes for pregnant women to be able to wait near the centers when they are near their due date. But no one asked and no one thought we might have a good idea.”

KEY MESSAGE #4:
Women have critical knowledge about community development needs which make them an invaluable asset in local planning and management

No one knows better how to solve a problem than the people affected by it. Women know their communities and are the major users of space and services in the local community, such as water, electricity, waste disposal, health clinics, and other social services.

Women spend more of their time in the village and its neighbourhood than men, usually being responsible for the household, taking care of others and the community management. They have a vested interest in safe water, sewerage, sanitation; refuse services, fuel, and health services. Thus the conditions in which services are delivered are important issues for women. For example: as the main users of water, women are well qualified to advise on the choice of pumps, where to run the waterlines and to place the standpipes, so as to avoid basic design flaws disadvantaging women and children. Women also take responsibility for the maintenance of such services, for example, cleaning and sweeping around community water pumps and standpipes, collecting contributions, and organising for repair of equipment.

Women’s critical role in reproductive activities and their engagement in informal community management make them attractive as local planners and managers; therefore, if empowered, women can serve as a critical force or driver in the social and economic development of communities and the country in general.

“Let women and men come and take part in this money business. We know how to share money.”

Chief Morweh, River Cess Town Chief

60 Un Women Study Team consultation session in Gbarnga with rural women from Gbarpolu, River Cess and River Gee counties, 19 October 2013.
KEY MESSAGE #5:  
Gender-responsive local governance is essential for social and economic development

With a human development index (HDI) value of 0.329 in 2011, Liberia ranked 182 out of 187 countries. In order to advance human development over the long term and achieve its development goals, the Government of Liberia has set in place a comprehensive national development framework which identifies gender equality as a core cross-cutting priority. Because gender equality and local governance are inextricably linked and equally essential for socio-economic development that is equitable and sustainable; local governments have a crucial role to play in developing plans and allocating resources to meet the development needs of women, men, girls and boys. Ensuring equal access of women and men to effective public service delivery is also critical for development and poverty alleviation.

Experience of women’s involvement in politics and governance in other countries has shown a clear connection between women’s participation and pro-poor outcomes. Women are strongly linked to positive developments in education, infrastructure and health standards at the local level and where rates of gender development and empowerment are higher, human rates of development and standards of living are also higher. Maximizing the potential of women to contribute to local governance can therefore help to ensure that development priorities and allocation of resources respond to the needs of all community members.

“...women must have a say in how decisions are made.”

Ma Annie Kruah, President of Liberia Rural Women, Nimba County

KEY MESSAGE #6:  
Women are effective change agents for local government

Women often take the lead and initiate change in their own local communities; therefore if given the opportunity to participate in local governance structures and process, they can also bring innovative ideas and solutions to problems in their communities. In Liberia, women’s active role and experience in the peace-building process has shown their effectiveness as change agents and how reconstruction and reconciliation efforts take root more quickly and are more sustainable when they are involved. Women can therefore play an equally important role in the overall development of their communities if given the opportunity to participate.

A past survey of the Inter-Parliamentary Union showed women’s vision of how women’s involvement in politics makes a difference.

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63 Van der Leest, Kristin Jacoba, Xhelo, Rezart and Wittberger Dolly, Gender Equality and Local Governance, UN Joint Program on Gender Equality, and Equity in Governance project, Tirana 2012, p. 7.
64 National Democratic Institute, http://www.ndi.org/womens-political-participation
Making a Difference: Women’s Involvement in Politics

- Women noted a shift in political priorities and outcomes, behaviour and practices, and a broader and enriched political process (a crosscutting approach);
- Politics became more responsive to the people’s needs in general and to women’s needs in particular, and showed a move towards true gender equality.
- Women’s participation led to better democracy, increased transparency and improved governance.
- With a more human and gender-sensitive political approach, citizens got more confidence in politics. They also mentioned a change in political and parliamentary language and mores.

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union 2000

More women in politics can change the political system and bring significant benefits for society in general. For example, cross-country studies have found that a greater representation of women in parliament is associated with lower levels of corruption. This indicates that women are less likely than men to behave opportunistically and have less tolerance for and involvement in bribery.65

KEY MESSAGE #7: Decentralization can support women’s empowerment

Local governance is closely linked with the empowerment of marginalized groups. When local governance is gender-responsive, it provides opportunities for women to participate in governance structures and processes. Through women’s inclusion, traditional barriers and stereotypes that have excluded women from participation in politics and governance can be challenged. Women’s involvement in community-based planning processes and local politics can also provide an important springboard for their participation in politics at a national level.

Research has shown that the presence of women leaders at the local level can have a positive effect on the aspirations of young women and girls. For example, the increase in the number of women representatives, brought about partly through the legislated quotas in India’s Panchayat Raj system, led to a substantial increase in the number of young women remaining in school, showcasing how patriarchal attitudes can be transformed through positive examples.66

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66 Speech of UN Women Deputy Executive Director Lakshmi Puri at the Fourth Congress and World Summit of Local and Regional Leaders organized by the United Cities and Local Government in Rabat, Morocco, on 1 October, 2013: http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2013/10/ded-speech-on-women-in-democracy-in-morocco#sthash.t9RgOgdM.dpuf
SECTION VI: Opportunities and Entry Points for Gender-Responsive Decentralization in Liberia

This section provides an analysis of opportunities to further engender the decentralization process and existing implementation plans and frameworks set out by the Government of Liberia. Using the Liberia Decentralization Implementation Plan (LDIP) and Liberia Decentralization Support Program (LDSP), as the basis for analysis, seven key entry points for engendering the decentralization are examined in detail including:

1) Civic Education and Sensitization
2) Legal and Regulatory Framework/Political Decentralization
3) Institutional Framework and Human Resources Capacity Development
4) Fiscal Decentralization and Financial Management
5) Administrative Decentralization and Sector Devolution
6) Local Development Planning and Budgeting
7) Monitoring Systems and Accountability Mechanisms

Civic Education and Sensitization

A critical challenge in implementing decentralization will be ensuring that all citizens (women and men) are aware of and participate in the decentralization reform process including the national referendum to amend constitutional articles relevant for decentralization and the local governance elections. While significant efforts have been undertaken by MIA and the GC to raise general awareness at a national and local level about the decentralization reform process, women at the county and district-levels continue to lack information and awareness. During consultations with more than 50 rural women from five counties67 (including town chiefs and leaders of women’s local organizations) women consistently stated that they were unaware of planned decentralization reforms. Although many women attended public consultation meetings, the information has yet to fully trickle down to rural women, including those in leadership positions such as town chiefs. While specific initiatives are being planned by the GC and MOGD for specific regional-level consultation

67 The consultations were conducted in two phases (in May and October/November 2013) and involved women from Bong, Grand Bassa, Grand Cape Mount, Maryland and Nimba counties (see earlier section on Study methodology for more detail).
workshops with rural women, these have been postponed for mid-2014 which will limit their ability to review and provide meaningful input on the draft Local Government Act and to influence the reform process early on. It is therefore critical that opportunities to engage and consult with rural women are created early on so that there is a greater chance to influence reforms.

Ensuring that Liberian women and men understand the benefits of decentralization, as well as their civic duties and responsibilities for shared governance will entail significant efforts and resources. The DPSP and LDIP include components on communication and civic education which aim to enhance and deepen public awareness, knowledge, understanding, participation and ownership among key stakeholders regarding their roles and responsibilities under a decentralized governance system. Planned actions include the development of a comprehensive communication strategy targeting the general public, civil society organizations, the media, legislators, and political parties, Civil Service, Agencies and Commissions (MACs).

Because women lack awareness about the decentralization process and face a number of structural and institutional barriers that limit their access to information and opportunities, it is critical that the Government’s awareness-raising efforts are gender-sensitive and able to effectively target and reach women and men equally. At a political and community level, there is strong resistance to affirmative action measures that aim to level the playing field for women. This was apparent during national level discussions on the draft Gender Equity Bill and at Governance Commission’s consultation with political party leaders on the draft Local Government Act where the issue to reserved seats for women in County Councils was discussed. As a result, it is critical that key messages and evidence-based arguments about the importance of women’s participation in local governance are made available to the general public and key decision-makers (including senior civil servants, legislators and leaders of political parties) during the decentralization reform process.

Opportunities and Entry Points for Gender-Responsive Communication and Civic Education

1. Decentralization Communication Strategy

The development of the Government’s communication strategy for the decentralization reform process provides an important entry point to increase women’s awareness and knowledge about the decentralization reform process. However, in order to do this, the strategy will need to include specific actions and adequate resources to target and engage women. In this regard, gender expertise should be sought to ensure that the final strategy is gender-responsive and that it is informed by barriers that prevent women from obtaining information and participating in community-level discussions such as illiteracy, low education, time constraints and traditional practices and stereotypes. It is also essential that the decentralization communication strategy is used as a tool to build a strong case about the importance and necessity of inclusive and gender-responsive governance and to include key messages targeting relevant decision makers, traditional authorities and the general public.

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69 Governance Commission Consultation with Political Party Leaders on the draft Local Government Act, 23 October 2013, Monrovia.
2. Development and promotion of communication and promotional materials

The communication components of LDIP and LDSP include the development of promotional materials to raise awareness about the decentralization reform process. In addition to mainstreaming messages about the importance of gender-responsive governance into all promotional materials, resources should also earmarked/mobilized to develop specific materials that target women and underline what benefits decentralization will bring to them. Because the reserved seats for women in county councils proposed under the draft LGA provide a historic opportunity for Liberian women, Efforts to inform local women and men about this opportunity should be undertaken as early as possible to prepare women for this important challenge. In doing so, specific materials such as leaflets and posters (with a heavy use on visual images) and radio messages/programs should be developed that target women and encourage their participation and involvement in local government structures and processes. In acknowledging the high rate of illiteracy among rural women, it will be important that all promotional efforts rely heavily on the use of radio, public consultations, the use of town criers and extensive use of local vernaculars (simple Liberian English and all the sixteen indigenous languages).

In order to create a social climate supportive of gender-responsive local governance, specific strategies, measures and resources are also needed to challenge societal attitudes and traditional norms that serve as barriers to women's leadership in local governance. These might include public awareness campaigns, radio messages, educational materials and creative initiatives such as community theatre performances which set out to break gender stereotypes and highlight the value of women’s representation and participation for communities.

Increasing awareness among women organizations and civil society organizations about the decentralization reform process and equipping them with resources to support increased involvement of women in local governance will also need to be included as a priority in the Government’s communication strategy.

3. Community-level Consultations

To build public awareness and local-level support for the passage of the Local Government Act, the GC and MIA have organized a series of county-level consultation events. While efforts have been made to involve women in these events, women’s inclusion must not simply be a box-checking exercise where women attend the meeting but feel unable to speak or share their ideas. It is therefore important that the necessary conditions are in place to enable women to participate in a meaningful manner such as adapting the time and location of the consultation so that it is accessible to women and ensuring that resources and services are available to facilitate women’s attendance (such as child care and transport). Given the strong traditional barriers and gender stereotypes that often hinder women’s participation in public discussions and the lack of support they often face from their communities and families to participate, it may also be important to set targets or quotas for consultation meetings in order to ensure that women are able to attend.

During community-wide consultations, messages about the importance of gender-responsive local governance should be consistently made in order to build awareness.

“There is a need to sensitize the public that gender-responsive governance is for both women and men, not for women alone.”

Gender Focal Point, Grand Bassa County
and support for inclusive local governance structures and processes. Prior to consultations, separate meetings could be convened with men to secure their support for women’s participation in public consultation.

Because social norms and traditional values do not always give women the space and confidence to express their views and ideas publicly, until these barriers are overcome, it will also be necessary to organize specific consultations and town hall meetings for women to sensitize them about the decentralization reform process and the opportunities they have to participate.

4. Building Political Support for Gender-Responsive Decentralization

Decentralization is being driven by the highest level of government with the President as the overall champion of the reform process. The high prioritization given to the decentralization reform process provides an important platform to advocate for gender issues to be included as an important foundation for achieving good governance at the local level. Increased efforts are therefore needed to educate and inform key and high level policy and law makers about the importance of women’s involvement and participation in local governance and to build champions of gender-responsive decentralization. This requires equipping decentralization drivers and decision-makers with the necessary arguments, tools and knowledge to generate further support at a national and local level.

Under the LDIP and LDSP, specific actions are set out to foster the necessary support for the passage of the Local Government Act and the implementation of the decentralization reform process including legislative public hearings on decentralization, seminars and study tours (targeting senators, public employees, leaders of political parties, civil society and youth groups, traditional authorities and local leaders such as superintendents, district commissioners, chiefs, spiritual leaders). These planned activities provide important entry points to also build support for gender-responsive decentralization.

Regarding the organization of legislative public hearings, given the past political resistance that the Gender Equity Bill faced when discussed with men inside and outside of the Legislature70, it will be important for the GC to assist the Women’s Legislative Caucus to hold a specific public hearing on the importance of gender-responsive governance in order to build political support and consensus. This would be an opportunity not only to ensure the necessary support for the provision of the LGA related to reserved seats for women, but to also advocate for further amendments that are likely to arise out of the women’s regional consultation workshop in February 2014 and the meeting with women political leaders also planned for early 2014.

Separate informational resources about the importance of gender-responsive decentralization and the participation of women in local governance could also be prepared for legislators in the lead up to discussions on LGA. The key messages included in section IV could be used to inform these materials.

Since gender issues have been on the periphery of decentralization discussions and efforts, one way to bring these to the forefront could be through the organization of a national conference which

70 Analysis of Women’s Political Participation and Integration of a Gender Perspective in the 2011 Electoral Process in Liberia, UNMIL and MOGD, p. 25.
could be used to generate support for and knowledge about gender-responsive governance. The conference could focus on the theme of the importance of equal participation of men and women in local politics and governance and strategies to achieve this. Officials from other countries who have successfully implemented gender-responsive decentralization processes could be brought in to share their good practices.

In order to build political support and increase the capacity of senior civil servants of MACs and local leaders to implement decentralization reforms, country study visits are envisaged under the LDIP. It is important that under the planned visits, a specific visit be organized to a country where successful gender-responsive decentralization reform has taken place. Because study visits often have the effect of building champions and inspiring agents of change, such visit should include high-level and senior officials who are well-placed to move forward and support efforts to engender the decentralization process. For the other planned study visits it is also important that they take place in countries that have successfully implemented gender-responsive decentralization and that the agenda for the visit includes a component focused on how gender has been integrated into decision-making, planning and budgeting processes.

Legal and Regulatory Framework/Political Decentralization

Political decentralization refers to the process of political decision making and power distribution at the sub-national (county) level. It determines who is represented and who participates in local decision-making and establishes the gatekeepers of women’s participation and inclusion in local governance structures and processes. In implementing political decentralization, the National Gender Policy, National Policy on Decentralization and Local Governance and the draft Local Government Act provide an important foundation for gender-responsive local governance.

**Opportunities and Entry Points for a Gender-Responsive Legal and Regulatory Framework**

1. **Constitutional Reform Process**

While Liberia’s constitution confirms the principle of equality, it does not include specific provisions to support affirmative action to increase women’s political participation at the national and local level despite Liberia’s ratification of international and regional treaties and instruments which include targets for Member States. In line with international standards pertaining to women’s political participation, an increasing number of countries have introduced quotas and targets into their constitutional and legal frameworks in order to break through structural barriers facing women at national and local levels.

- **Rwanda**’s Constitution under Chapter II on Fundamental Principles, Article 9(4) requires that women are granted at least thirty percent of posts in decision making organs.71

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• **Uganda’s** Constitution prescribes, *inter alia*, the composition of Parliament to include one woman representative for every district and specifies one third representation of women on local councils at all levels (which was an increase from the previous quota of one in nine positions). Article 33(6) prohibits laws, cultures and traditions that undermine women’s welfare, interest or status.\(^{72}\) To harmonize the provisions of the 1995 constitution with decentralization, the Local Government Act was passed in 1997 which provides that 30% of the seats on local councils are reserved for women. These changes have translated into an increased number of women in local government.\(^{73}\)

• **Kenya’s** constitution includes a unique gender neutral quota that has contributed to the gender-responsiveness of its local governance structures. Article 175(c) stipulates that “no more than two-thirds of the members of the representative bodies in each county government shall be of the same gender.”\(^{74}\) It is further set out in the constitution under Article 177(1b) that a county assembly consists of the number of special set members necessary to ensure that no more than two-thirds of the membership of the assembly are of the same gender.” Under Article 197(1) it is also stipulated that no more than two-thirds of the County executive committees should be of the same gender.

• **India** applies a different affirmative action method: the reservation of a percentage of wards for all-female competition. A 1992 constitutional amendment reserved one-third of local government seats for women, and one-third of council presidencies for women. Some states also organically selected the chairs to be reserved for women. This system, designed to overcome social resistance to the public participation of previously excluded groups in local affairs, has been celebrated for its success in putting close to a million women in local early government in the 1990s.\(^{75}\)

Some states have used the local level for experimentation before applying affirmative action at the national level. For example, Namibia’s 1992 Local Authorities Act required that, depending on the size of the local authority, between one-third to one-half of candidates in local elections be women;\(^{76}\) the success of this measure led subsequently to voluntary quotas in some parties at the national level.

While previous attempts to adopt the Gender Equity Bill were met with great resistance, public and political discussions about the decentralization reform process may provide a fresh opportunity to highlight the importance of women’s participation in local politics and governance and approaches of other countries in establishing a constitutional basis for targets or quotas to equalize the imbalance between women and men’s participation and representation in government. Since the decentralization reform process requires constitutional amendments to allow for elections at a local level, and because the draft Local Government Act introduces the notion of reserved seats for women at the local level, there could be an important opportunity to re-open discussions and debates at the national level on quotas as targets for women. Additionally, if the reserved seat provision in the Local Government Act results in increased numbers of women represented at the local level, similar measures at the national level could also be advocated and lobbied for.

\(^{73}\) Uganda Local Governments Act, 1997.
\(^{75}\) 73rd Amendment Constitution of India, Constitution of India, Part IX, The Panchayats 243 and Horowitz, p. 31
\(^{76}\) Namibia Local Authorities Act, 1992, Parliament of Namibia.
2. The Local Government Act

The Local Government Act, which is still being developed and discussed, provides a key opportunity and entry point to further engender the decentralization process and local governance structures. Following significant consultation with large numbers of women, men and youth and other key national and international stakeholders, the GC and MIA have undertaken measures to further engender the draft Act. Now, in addition to the reservation of two seats for women in each county, further efforts have been made to make the Act more gender-responsive including a separate chapter (Chapter 17) on Inclusive Local Governance. The chapter sets out four key principles (participation, representation, protection and capacity-development) to guide local governments in integrating a gender perspective.

While these changes have increased the gender sensitivity of the Act, there remain specific areas where the Act should be further strengthened in order to provide an important foundation for gender-responsive local governance. Suggested amendments are as follows:

- **Gender needs to be better mainstreamed throughout the Act**, rather than only included as a separate chapter since gender-responsive decentralization is not only about representation but also about functions, roles and responsibilities.

- **The preamble should include an explicit reference to Liberia’s gender equality commitments** and mention the National Gender Policy as an important document which has informed the development of the Act.

- **Under Chapter 3, which stipulates the powers and authority of local governments, gender is absent** and should be included in the form of “Promoting gender equality and ensuring that local governance structures and processes are gender-responsive and fully address the needs and priorities of women and girls.”

- Related to the composition of County Councils, in addition to reserving seats for two women members elected county-wide, Chapter 4 (Article 4.3) also includes seats for two youth members. Because women comprise 50 percent of the youth population and given the barriers that they are likely to face in competing with male youth for the seats, it is therefore recommended that **one of the youth seats be allocated for female youth from each county**. This approach has also been implemented in other countries such as Uganda under its Local Governments Act.

- **Within the Act, the responsibilities of county and district administration included under Chapters 5 and 6 need to include an obligation for gender-responsive governance and more clearly define the structures and processes to ensure that gender is addressed in all future activities and that gender awareness among local government politicians and civil servants is fostered to enable them address gender concerns. The duty to support and promote gender-responsive analysis, planning, budgeting and provide opportunities for the effective participation of women should therefore be included under the duties, powers and authorities of the County Superintendent, County Administrative Officer, County Development Officer and the Heads of County Administrative Departments. The duty to implement gender-responsive budgeting should also be included under the duties of the County Financial Officer. The duty of the Head of County Administrative Departments to**

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77 Uganda Local Governments Act, 1997, Article 10(3)
collect, organize and provide district or county-wide data and information should include data and statistics that is gender-disaggregated.

- Chapter 10 of the Act stipulates that Superintendents and District Commissioners must at minimum be a holder of a bachelor’s degree or its equivalent from an accredited college or university. Given the extremely low tertiary educational levels of rural women, the educational requirements should be reconsidered and revised so that women are not excluded from contesting these leadership positions. Chapter 10 also sets out that General Town Chiefs must have vested interest in the chiefdom where they intend to contest in the form of crop or animal farm(s), real estate or any other form of business interest. Given the economic marginalization of women and challenges they face in the ownership of land and property, this provision should also be revisited in order not to exclude women from vying for town chief positions.

- Under Chapter 11 which deals with the appointment of non-elected county officials, it is recommended to stipulate that at least one of the three non-elected positions should be held by a woman.

- In establishing an inter-governmental fiscal transfer system under the Article 14.11 of the draft Act, it is important that the criterion of socio-economic development under the General and Development Funds also take into consideration the needs and priorities of women when determining grant allocations and that the criterion of population size and density also include sex (see section “Fiscal Decentralization and Financial Management” for more detail).

- Because the County Development Planning Unit is a key entry point for ensuring gender-responsive local governance and development (see the section on Local Planning and Development for more information), it is critical that the functions listed in Chapter 1 under Article 16.1 include gender analysis and gender-responsive planning and budgeting. It is also suggested to specifically mention gender assessments under 16.2(a) so that there is a clear responsibility to ensure that needs and priorities of women and girls are identified and addressed in the county development planning process. It is also important that the County Development Agenda corresponds to the approach and priorities included in Liberia’s national development program “Agenda for Transformation” which includes gender equality (as well as child protection, disability and youth empowerment) as a cross-cutting priorities. Under the draft Act, the proposed approach of “special programs for youth, women and children and persons with disabilities and minority communities” is not fully in line with a mainstreaming approach. In this regard, the recommended approach is to include these areas as overarching priorities that should guide and inform development of the County Development Agenda. It is therefore recommended to add a separate point in the Act under Article 16.3 that requires the County Development Agenda to “promote gender equality and improve the socio-economic and political status and capacity of women in Liberia.”

- In line with the key findings of this Study about the importance of gender-responsive decentralization reform processes, it is suggested that the title of Chapter 17 be changed to “Gender-Responsive and Inclusive Local Governance”.

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• Under the first Chapter, definitions of “gender-responsive governance”, “gender mainstreaming” and “gender-responsive budgeting” should be added since they are either referenced in the Act or proposed to be added (see above). Definitions for these terms can be taken from this Study.

3. Gender Equality Policy/Legal Framework

While the National Gender Policy provides an important framework for gender-responsive decentralization, because it was developed in 2009, further efforts are needed to ensure greater coherence with the National Decentralization and Local Governance Policy. Updating the National Gender Policy could therefore be an important entry point for furthering gender equality at the local level and for clearly defining the role and priorities of national and local authorities in this regard. Another entry point could be to develop a national policy on gender equality in local government. This approach was taken by the South African Government through its development of a Gender Policy Framework for Local Government.79

As mentioned previously, the lack of a specific gender equality law in Liberia presents a significant gap in the legal framework for promoting gender equality. Developing such a law could provide an important opportunity to create clear legal obligations for national and local government. For example in South Africa, the Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill which was approved by Cabinet in August 2012, requires 50 percent gender parity both in the private and public sectors. In Albania, the Gender Law specifically stipulates legal obligations for local governments.

Best Practice: Albania’s Gender Law - Legal Obligations for Local Government

Albania’s gender-related legislation creates legal obligations for local governments. The “Law on Gender Equality in Society” of 2008, for example, requires Local Government Units to:
- Collaborate with central government institutions to implement gender legislation and national policies on gender equality;
- Collaborate with non-profit organizations that operate within their territory to achieve gender equality in different areas;
- Collect and analyze data disaggregated by sex;
- Appoint one or several local Gender Equality Employees to deal with gender equity issues;
- Undertake temporary special measures for increasing women’s representation in decision-making positions (30% quota).

It is also important that laws and policies developed at the county and district level are gender-responsive, promote gender equality and are in accordance with national and international gender equal standards and commitments. Development of specific county or district-level gender equality strategies or action plans could be an important measure to identify and address the needs and priorities of men, women, girls and boys at the local level and to identify specific budget allocations required to address these needs (see section on Local Planning and Development for more detail).

Institutional Structures and Human Resource Capacity Development

Under the LDID and De-concentration Implementation Strategy, the establishment of new structures and positions to guide, manage and monitor the decentralization process provides an important opportunity to integrate gender and institutionalize gender skills and expertise across all substantive areas of work. Significant investments are therefore needed to develop the requisite skills and knowledge to institutionalize gender-responsive decentralization and local governance. Because gender mainstreaming within the decentralization process is the responsibility of all levels of government - ranging from the Office of the President which leads decentralization, MIA which guides implementation, the sector ministries, and county-level authorities - gender-related functions must not be seen as an “add on”. All levels of government need increased knowledge and skills to integrate gender into their responsibilities under decentralization. For this reason, it will be necessary to review and integrate gender issues into all the planned capacity development plans and programs planned under the decentralization reform process.

Opportunities and Entry Points for Gender-Responsive Institutional Structures

1. Liberia Decentralization Support Program Board

Under the LDSP Project Document, it is envisaged that a National Decentralization Program Board (comprised of governmental representatives and donor partners) will be established to direct and guide the program and undertake the functions of approving its work plan, ensuring overall supervision of results and monitoring the program’s coherence with other activities of other partners. Because this Board will have an important role in providing strategic leadership and oversight during implementation of the decentralization reform process, it is important that it also plays an integral role in ensuring that the process is gender-responsive. For this reason, gender-related achievements and targets should be regularly reviewed by the Board and specific gender issues should be included and discussed during meetings. The composition of the Board should include, as full members, agencies and organizations with the necessary expertise (such as MOGD, UN Women and UNMIL’s OGA) to advise and provide guidance on gender matters. Currently, in the LDSP, MOGD and UN Women are not included within the proposed composition of the Program Board.

1. Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA)

MIA has overall responsibility for implementation of the LDIP (in co-ordination with the Governance Commission), and once it is transformed into the Ministry of Local Governance, it will lead and coordinate support to all levels of local governance. It is for this reason, that building the institutional capacity of MIA to lead and implement gender-responsive decentralization reform will be critical. A key entry point will be MIA’s capacity development strategy which should include building capacity for gender-responsive decentralization and local governance and allocating the necessary resources for this purpose.

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80 As part of the Public Sector Modernization Program, the highest authority for the approval, coordination and monitoring of the LDIP rests with the president of Liberia, who carries out these responsibilities with the assistance of the cabinet (source: LDIP, p. 31).
Within MIA, another key gender entry point is the **National Decentralization Implementation Secretariat (NDIS)** which is responsible for coordinating, facilitating and supporting capacity development, change management and monitoring and evaluation of the LDIP. Including a **senior gender advisor/expert** within the NDIS will be essential in order to support efforts to effectively mainstream gender into all aspects of the decentralization process and provide the necessary in-house expertise to lead efforts to integrate gender into all policies, regulations and training programs. In order to ensure that such support will be sustained during the decentralization reform process and the transition of MIA to the Ministry of Local Governance, it is important that the position of senior gender advisor/expert is included as a civil servant position at a senior level in order to ensure that the future incumbent has the necessary seniority to exert influence among senior decision-makers.

While a gender-focused position within MIA’s NDIS can bring important gender-expertise, it is also important that significant resources are allocated to build up the gender knowledge and capacity of staff within each of the three NDIS teams (see Figure 2 below) since gender issues will need to be effectively mainstreamed into all areas covered by the teams including monitoring and evaluation; documentation and communication; and capacity building.

**Figure 1: Structure of National Decentralization Implementation Framework**

![Diagram of National Decentralization Implementation Framework]

**2. MOGD**

Under the decentralization reform process, MOGD will play an important role in supporting the development of gender-responsive local governance structures and processes. While gender mainstreaming is the priority of all ministries, MOGD possesses important expertise and knowledge that will be critical in ensuring gender remains a priority throughout implementation of the LDIP. Through its own de-concentration process, MOGD is now in the process of defining the role and functions of the 15 civil servants who will be positioned in each county. Ensuring the preparedness

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82 LDIP, p. 34.
of these MOGD County Gender Coordinators will require significant resources and capacity development in order to prepare them to take on new service-delivery functions (related to social welfare and protection which will become part of MOGD’s mandate) while simultaneously working with the county administration to support efforts to integrate gender into the decentralization process. Because of this dual role, MOGD will need to be strategic in setting clear priority areas for the work of the Gender Coordinators which will enable them to have the greatest impact. In doing so, MOGD will need to develop a specific strategy or plan mapping out the role and influence it would like to have in the decentralization reform process and identifying resource needs to correspond to these priorities.

For the Gender Coordinators to effectively support gender-responsive decentralization, a clear MOGD directive will be needed outlining the role and function of the Gender Coordinators which will need to also be shared with MIA and the Superintendent so that they understand and support MOGD to fulfill this role. In supporting the county administration, in particular the Superintendent and County Development Officers in their efforts to lead and facilitate gender mainstreaming across all levels and gender-responsive planning and budgeting, it will be important for the Gender Coordinators to be physically located within the Office of the Superintendent. In order to provide quality support and guidance to county administration in engendering LDIP implementation, the Gender Coordinators will also require specific training and capacity development support, including participation in training-of-trainer courses (focused on gender-responsive planning and budgeting) in order to increase their ability to run training seminars and workshops at the county and district level.

3. County, City and District Administrations including Traditional Authorities

Building the capacity of county, city and district-level authorities for transparent, accountable and equitable local governance will be an immense challenge requiring significant resources and leadership. It will be essential that increasing the capacity for gender-responsive local governance is at the forefront of all capacity development efforts and not seen as an “add on”. Clear policy directives and instructions will need to be developed by MIA that require county, city and district administrations to integrate gender into their work and to undertake gender-responsive planning and budgeting.

Ensuring that the Superintendents understand the importance and necessity of gender-responsive budgeting and are both aware and supportive of the processes to integrate gender into all aspects of local governance (including gender-responsive planning and budgeting) will also be essential. It is for this reason, that providing training and exposing Superintendents and other senior-level country officials to examples of successful gender-responsive local governance in other countries (particularly within Africa) will be critical in order to secure their leadership and support for such an approach. The development of directives, policies, guidelines and incentives will also be necessary in order to generate both support and commitment among the senior leadership of counties and districts.

The recruitment of a significant number of county and district administrative officials will be an immense challenge for the local CSAs. In order to ensure equitable representation of women and men within the civil service at a local level, specific policies and measures will be needed to promote equal opportunity in recruitment, promotion and compensation at the county and district level.
In integrating gender into capacity development efforts, it will be important to conduct an initial gender capacity assessment in coordination with LIPA to measure gender-awareness and knowledge early on and to provide a baseline for measuring changes in gender-related knowledge and capacity levels throughout the decentralization reform process. Specific capacity development plans should be developed for each county which include actions and measures to build gender awareness and capacity through the development of resources and tools and the delivery of county and district-level training. In close collaboration with LIPA and the county CSA departments, gender issues should be mainstreamed into all training efforts, rather than organized as one-off “gender trainings” which are often misunderstood to be aimed at women and lack the participation of senior-level decision-makers. Building the capacity of the County Finance Officer, County Development Officers and staff of the Development Planning Units will be a crucial entry point for ensuring gender-responsive planning and budgeting processes; therefore, designing practical training and tools to support gender-responsive planning and budgeting processes will need to be included as a priority area for MIA and MOGD with the necessary resources allocated. In order to ensure that future training and capacity development programs for local civil servants integrate and mainstream gender, it will be important to also develop strategic partnerships with the CSA and LIPA in order to institutionalize topics such as gender-responsive planning and budgeting into civil servant training curricula and resources.

Finally, another key entry point will be in providing trainings, seminars and workshops for traditional chiefs (including paramount, clan and general town chiefs) and elders in order to sensitize them about the importance of gender equality and the impact of harmful traditions and practices on women’s participation in local governance. It will also be important to raise their awareness about gender-responsive approaches to local governance, using examples from other African countries where traditional chiefs and elders have acknowledged the need to address gender and undertaken important steps to support gender equality and tackle traditional barriers to women’s inclusion in local governance.

**Fiscal Decentralization and Financial Management**

Fiscal decentralization is a key component of the national decentralization policy and LDIP under which the central government is to establish an adequate and reliable revenue base for each county government and grant local governments the authority to set and collect taxes. Under the LDIP, a phased approach to fiscal decentralization is envisaged starting with an initial lump sum grant that will be distributed and shared in equal amounts to all county governments. This will then be followed by the development of a transparent formula that takes into account factors such as population size, governance practices, natural resources base and deprivation of area and people, which will be used to distribute all funds, grants and revenues allocated by the central government. Under the draft LGA it is stipulated that tax revenue collection responsibilities will be assigned to local governments and that local government will have the authority to expend local revenues for service delivery.

The implementation of fiscal decentralization provides important entry points and opportunities to integrate gender and to assess the different impact of proposed reforms on women and men.
Opportunities and Entry Points for Gender-Responsive Fiscal Decentralization

1. Including Gender within the Fiscal Transfer Formula

Under the Article 14.11 of the draft Local Government Act, an inter-governmental fiscal transfer system will be established which will include criteria to share revenue between national and county-level governments. The draft Act also includes the establishment of an autonomous Local Government Fiscal Board that would be responsible for recommending the amount of annual grant allocations to counties, cities and townships for the grant funds. For the General Fund, the recommendation is to be based on criteria and factors laid out in the Act which include: i) Area; ii) Level of socio-economic development, taking into considerations elements such as poverty index and infrastructure distribution; iii) Population size and density; iv) Fiscal potential and tax generation capacity; and v) Good governance practices reflected by practices such as budget hearings, citizen participation and consultation in development of county development plans.\(^{83}\) For the Development Fund, recommendations are to be based on i) population size and density, ii) infrastructure distribution and iii) size and geographic challenges of territory.

Because gender equality is essential for sustainable local development, it is important that the criterion of socio-economic development under the General and Development Funds also take into consideration the needs and priorities of women when determining grant allocations and that the criterion of population size and density also include sex. In this regard, local governments who have conducted gender analysis and used this to identify women’s priorities and needs within their Development Plans should be incentivized through specific grant allocations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Best Practice: Development Funds for Women in Kerala, India</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In the state of Kerala in India, the local government earmarks 10 percent of development funds received by local councils from the state to be used for ‘women’s development’. The funds are managed by representatives of female groups of the village assembly.(^ {84})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Establishing Gender-Responsive Financial Management Systems and Processes

A key feature of gender-responsive governance is ensuring that the identified needs and priorities of women and girls are matched with adequate resources. It is therefore important to invest in the capacity of key stakeholders to conduct participatory budgeting, including gender-responsive budgeting, so that resource allocations at the county and district level correspond with the development priorities of women and men.

Gender-responsive budgeting is a gender mainstreaming tool that is used to ensure that government policies, programs and budgets address the needs and interests of women, men, boys and girls. It

\(^{83}\) Draft Local Government Act of 2013, Governance Commission, Republic of Liberia, p.49.
thus looks at biases that arise from resource allocations, government revenue collection and expenditure, in recognition of the different roles, needs, responsibilities and relations of women and men in society and seeking to redress these inequalities.85

The general objectives of gender responsive budgeting are to:

- Raise awareness of the gendered impact of policies and corresponding budget allocations;
- Highlight the gap between policy and budget allocations;
- Make government and communities accountable to gender equality;
- Bring about changes to policies and budgets that promote gender equality.86

A gendered analysis of budgets can contribute to an increased transparency of government budgets and make visible what resources and services are allocated to what sectors, and who benefits.

**Best Practice: Gendered Budget Analysis through Women’s NGOs in South Africa**

In South Africa gendered local budget analysis is pursued through the NGO Women’s Budget Initiative. Some progress has been made towards raising awareness of the impact of local government spending on programs relating to women. This has involved informing women about local government revenues and expenditures, and highlighting the types of resource allocation that promote gender equality.87

In order to be gender-responsive, budgets developed at the local level need to include sex-disaggregated data on beneficiaries and be linked to specific priorities set out in the county and district development funds. Implementation of gender-responsive budgeting at the local level will therefore depend on increased capacity of county and district administration, in particular finance and planning officers, as well as the establishment of policies and regulations to guide and oblige it.

### 3. Establishing Local Revenue Sources

The draft Local Government Act sets out various sources of own-source revenues for counties, cities and townships including property taxes, as well as fees and charges for the issuance of business and professional licenses, the provision of public services provided by the counties, cities and townships and the use of public spaces. As fiscal decentralization is rolled out, it will be important to examine gender implications of revenue generation, such as the impact of user fees for public services. Because women tend to earn less than men, charges on the provision of public services such as health, education or water supply connections which could adversely affect them if they are the family members chiefly responsible for generating funds to pay for basic services. Charging fees for the operation of markets and imposition of licenses and taxes for informal entrepreneurial activity could also disadvantage low-income market women disproportionately.

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85 Zimbabwe Ministry of Women’s Affairs, Gender and Community Development, National Gender Budgeting Training Manual, 2011, p. 3.
86 Zimbabwe Ministry of Women’s Affairs, Gender and Community Development, National Gender Budgeting Training Manual, 2011, p. 66.
For this reason, it would be important for MIA, together with the Ministry of Finance and MOGD, to commission further research and analysis, based on direct consultations with the members of communities who are most likely to be affected by taxes and fees in order to understand gender implications and ensure that such measures do not further disadvantage groups that are already marginalized.

**Administrative Decentralization and Sector Devolution**

Under the National Policy on Decentralization and Local Governance, administrative decentralization is planned to unfold in three stages starting with de-concentration, followed by progressive delegation and then shared authority. The framework for the first phase, de-concentration, is set out under the De-concentration Implementation Strategy which covers the timeframe 2012-2015. Under the Strategy, a functional review has been conducted of the twelve ministries and two agencies that are part of the de-concentration process in order to determine which functions will be transferred from line ministries and agencies to the counties and districts. Implementation units of sector ministries and agencies have also been established along with inter-sector coordination mechanisms (see diagram below).

![Diagram of proposed interim coordination and reporting of MACs at county level through the Office of Superintendent, 2013-2015 (Source: LDID, p. 29)](image)

Each sector ministry and agency will be responsible for decentralization of its functions and for eventually devolving them to county administrations. To accomplish this, a Decentralization Support Unit (DSU) will be established in each sector ministry and agency. The DSU of the sector ministry/agency will be responsible for the implementation of the decentralization process in that particular government institution.

Although the de-concentration process is a critical entry point for gender-responsive decentralization, unfortunately the only reference to gender under the De-concentration
Implementation Strategy refers to the functions of MOGD. Important decisions are now being made to identify and classify the functions and corresponding functionaries of MACs assigned to the counties and to determine expenditure assignments to effectively integrate them with the new county government structure by 2015. Sector de-concentration matrices have been completed for all major line ministries and some line ministries such as Health, Education and Agriculture have already made significant progress in de-concentrating some of their functions to the counties. In order to inform such decisions it is essential that the impact that localized service delivery will have on women, men, girls and boys is assessed and that MACs are both capacitated and incentivized during the decentralization reform process to ensure gender-responsive and gender-sensitive and gender-equitable service delivery.

**Opportunities and Entry Points for Gender-Responsive De-concentration**

1. **De-concentration Support Units (DSU)**

The DSUs will be a critical entry point within each ministry and agency for ensuring that the de-concentration process ultimately leads to equal access to services and equal treatment in these services. Within DSUs, it will be important to set up planning and budgeting structures that enable gender needs and priorities to be identified at the local level and reflected and addressed in sectoral policies, plans and budgets at the central and local level. A first and important step is to ensure that the final de-concentration plans of each MAC incorporate gender. In doing so, specific guidelines and technical support may be required from MIA NDIS and MOGD. As de-concentration evolves, specific gender analyses should be conducted by each MAC (led and coordinated by the DSUs in cooperation with the ministry gender focal points) in order to assess the impact of localized service delivery for women, men, girls and boys and to propose specific policies and measures needed to ensure equitable and accessible service delivery at the local level. MAC functionaries at the local level also need to be aware of barriers and challenges that women, men, girls and boys face in accessing their services. In this regard, the county-by-county gender analysis being prepared by MOGD and the Governance Commission will provide critical information to inform the efforts of the DSUs to ensure gender-responsive service delivery.

“Integrating gender-responsive decentralization within sector programs has the potential to result in concrete impacts in women’s lives and contribute to positioning the local agenda in the overall national policy dialogue.”

UN Women/UNCDF Gender Equity in Local Development Program Key message

2. **Inter-Sectoral/Inter-Departmental Co-ordination**

Ensuring coherence between decentralization, sector strategies and the national gender policy will be necessary in order to advance gender equality at the local level. It is therefore important that the final MAC de-concentration implementation plans incorporate and reflect the National Gender Policy and relevant Action Plans in determining functions and human resources requirements at the county level. Because one of the responsibilities of the Inter-Ministerial Commission on Decentralization is ensuring that all national reform programs are integrated into the

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88 LDIP, p. 8.
implementation of decentralization, this body also provides an important entry point for coordinating efforts access the different ministries to implement gender-responsive budgeting.

At the county-level, it will be important for the County Decentralization Coordinating Committee (which will be comprised of all MACs represented in each county) to regularly discuss and monitor progress towards achieving gender-responsive decentralization and to ensure that there is effective coordination and resources for such efforts. The establishment of a specific inter-sectoral/inter-departmental gender mainstreaming mechanism, such as a gender task force or gender working group (chaired by Superintendent) could also provide an important entry point for ensuring that a gender-responsive governance approach is applied and that mechanisms are in place to coordinate and support gender-mainstreaming efforts by MACs at the county level. Inter-sectoral cooperation could also be harnessed for specific initiatives to support gender-responsive service delivery. For example the collection of statistics and the development of shared databases could be developed to assess and measure changes in women’s access to services.

3. Local Government Centers

As part of the government’s de-concentration implementation strategy, in order for sector services delivery to be managed in a coordinated way, County Government Centers in each county capacity and District Government Centers in each county administrative district will be established. These centers, if designed and planned in a gender-sensitive way, can provide an important entry point for improving women’s access to services. It will therefore be important that in determining the location and hours of the centers that women’s needs and priorities are taken into account. For example, the centers should be placed in a safe location that is easy to access either by foot or by public transportation. The hours should also be flexible and correspond with women’s schedules. The identified example below from Moldova provides an important example of how such centers can be successfully made gender-responsive.

### Best Practice: Increasing Women’s Access to Public Services in Moldova

In Moldova, UN Women supported the piloting of local one-stop public service bureaus that reduce time spent at different providers. Located in 16 district towns, they offer vital assistance with employment, social protection and other concerns. To increase accessibility of rural women, UN Women helped make sure that operating hours coincided with market days and other times women are most likely to come to towns. Mobile units have also been set up to reach women in remote areas, in particular those with restricted mobility including persons with disabilities or women who need to care for their children.

The bureaus have proven so effective that in 2012, the Prime Minister issued a decree and made a budgetary commitment to replicate the bureaus across the country.


### Local Planning and Development

An important outcome expected under the decentralization reform process is the establishment of a holistic bottom-up approach to local planning at the district, municipal and county level that
promotes gender-responsive, rights-based and inclusive development.\textsuperscript{89} Because gender equality is included as a cross-cutting priority under Liberia’s national development agenda,\textsuperscript{90} equal priority must also be given to ensuring that gender equality remains a key goal of local development. In determining development priorities at the local level, it is critical that the priorities and needs of women and girls are identified, analyzed and that programs, services and budgets are responsive to these needs.

\textit{Opportunities and Entry Points for Gender-Responsive Planning}

\textbf{1. County/District Planning Units}

The County and District Development Officers and Development Planning Units are key entry points for ensuring that county and district-level planning systems and processes are gender-responsive. As such, it will be essential that the specific responsibilities of these Officers and Units set out under the Local Government Act also include gender assessments and gender-responsive planning. In fulfilling these functions, significant efforts and resources will be required to build the capacity of these Officers and Units to lead and facilitate gender assessments and gender-responsive planning. It will be important that the Officers and staff of the Units possess a solid understanding of the different barriers that women face in participating in planning processes and in accessing services so that these challenges can be factored into the design and development of local planning processes. In this regard, the county-level research study on the status of women which MOGD and the Governance Commission are planning to conduct will provide critical information that will help to identify necessary priority and funds required for the county and district development plans.

Finally, because the county-level Officers and staff will be responsible for supporting planning processes at the district level, it will also be important that they are able to train and capacitate the District Development Officers and Support Units. The new Ministry of Local Development, together with MOGD and relevant international partners and donors, will need to ensure the necessary expertise and resources to design practical training and guidelines, manual and tools to support County Development Officers and Units to effectively lead gender-responsive planning.

\textbf{2. MOGD Gender County Coordinators}

The MOGD Gender County Coordinators are another important entry point for establishing systems and processes to support gender-responsive planning, especially given the knowledge about gender-responsive planning and budgeting that many of them have acquired through their past work. MOGD also has strong connections and links to women’s organizations and rural women leaders which position them well to support women’s access to community decision-making.

While MOGD should play a significant role in supporting gender-responsive planning, it is important that responsibility is also fully assumed by the County and District Development Officers and Units and that gender aspects of planning do not get delegated to County Gender Coordinators which would undermine a gender mainstreaming approach and also overstretch the Gender Coordinators.

\textsuperscript{89} LDSP, p. 30.
\textsuperscript{90} Republic of Liberia Agenda for Transformation: Steps towards Liberia Rising 2013, Chapter 12, Pillar V (cross-cutting issues), p. 125.
who have numerous other functions. For this reason, it will be important to clarify the role and functions of the MOGD County Gender Coordinators and establish a clear coordination mechanism with the County Development Coordinators.

3. **Women’s Organizations and Rural Women Leaders**

Supporting and empowering rural women to identify their needs and priorities is essential for achieving gender-responsive planning. Women leaders and organizations are critical links for local government in accessing and engaging rural women and can play an important role in training and empowering women to participate in local development planning. Women’s networks can also help to mobilize women and develop platforms and plans which articulate the development priorities of rural women. In order for women’s organizations and networks to be effective they first need first to be representative and to truly represent the interests and priorities of women and secondly, they need increased resources and capacity to perform this role.

MOGD County Gender Coordinators can have an important role in strengthening women’s organizations and networks at the county and district level and in ensuring that they are involved in the design of local development planning processes and cooperate closely with the County and District Development Officers and Units. The example below from Senegal demonstrates how gender-responsive planning can increase women’s access to resources and services at the local level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Best Practice: Improving Women’s Access to Services through Gender-Responsive Planning in Senegal</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In Senegal, women from the Louga municipality wanted to address the high rate of girls dropping out of secondary school through the Gender Equitable Local Development Program (GELD), which works to improve women’s access to resources and services at the local level through gender-responsive planning, programming and budgeting. As part of the response, they advocated to prioritize the construction of separate toilets for boys and girls in the municipal high school. Their call was included in the local development plan, creating strong incentives for parents to support their daughters’ continued education.</td>
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</table>

4. **County/District Development Planning Process**

According the LGA, the Minister responsible for Local Government will provide guidelines, including templates for the structure and content of county and district development agenda and annual implementation plans. These guidelines and templates will provide an important entry point to oblige and guide gender-responsive planning and local development. As part of the guidelines, the importance of defining gender equality as a cross-cutting development priority (in line with the national development plan “Agenda for Transformation”) should be underscored and the template should provide a clear framework for mainstreaming gender (including gender-sensitive targets and indicators). Since one of the identified areas for the County Development Agenda is physical and social infrastructure, which will be matched with significant resources, planning guidelines should

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establish standards and specification for gender friendly and physically challenged requirements for all local infrastructure development.

The Local Government Act stipulates that development planning processes shall be participatory, gender-sensitive and inclusive of all citizens, residents, minorities and marginalized communities. Given the multitude of structural barriers that local women face and which hinder their participation in public life (see Section III for more detail), specific measures and approaches will be needed to enable their inclusion and ensure that they are able to articulate their needs and priorities. Such measures could include establishing quotas or targets for women’s representation and participation in planning processes which has proven to be effective in India in increasing women’s participation in local development (see box below).

Best Practice: Quotas in India for Women’s Participation in Planning Meetings

In the Indian system of local government, the *gram sabha*, or village assembly, is the arena for participation in planning. Indian states differ in their regulations for membership and quorums in these assemblies, but some have tried to remedy deficits in women’s participation.

In **Madhya Pradesh**, a quorum at a *gram sabha* meeting is not reached until one-third of the people assembled are women. In **Rajasthan**, a similar provision requires that women must be present in the village assembly in the same proportions that they are found in the local community—that is, at least 50 per cent. Women may be present in councils and village assemblies yet may not feel free to voice their views. The Indian state of **Kerala** has instituted additional measures to elicit women’s views on local planning. About 10 percent of the local budget is ring-fenced for “Women’s development”, and decisions about the allocation of these funds must be taken by all-women subgroups in the special *gram sabha* annual planning meeting. A further measure is designed to make local planning fora less intimidating and more accessible to women. Legal recognition has been given to smaller assemblies, both at ward level and among even smaller neighborhood units of around 50 households. These are somewhat better suited to women’s participation than the much larger *gram sabhas*; they are less intimidating and address locality-specific problems, enabling women to take active decision-making roles.

Gender-responsive planning guidelines could also set out the conditions necessary to enable women to attend and participate in planning processes such as holding meetings in locations that are socially acceptable for women or during times of the day when women are available to attend and providing for necessary childcare services to enable women to be present and engaged.

5. Gender Assessments and Analysis

In line with the Local Government Act, county development planning processes are required to include an assessment of the current social, economic and environmental situation of districts and chieftdoms to determine developmental challenges. In ensuring that assessments also address development challenges facing women and girls, County and District Planning Units should also be required to undertake gender analysis and use information and data from such analysis to inform the development of gender-responsive plans, policies and budgets developed at the national level by sector ministries. In undertaking gender analysis, local governments may choose to partner with civil

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92 Local Government Act, Chapter 16, Article 16.2, p. 57.
society organizations or women’s organizations which, together with the County Planning Units, can provide the technical expertise necessary to lead such processes.

**Gender analysis** refers to an analysis of the relationships between women and men in society, as individuals, as groups and within institutions. It identifies and understands the different social, cultural and economic realities, needs and interests of women and men and the inequalities of their relationship. It is an important tool for identifying barriers and opportunities for the advancement of women and reduction of gender inequities. It is intended to identify the gendered components of the problem, which is under consideration, whether at the level of international or national policy, or of micro-level interventions. Such problem identification would then be used to inform the process of planning interventions, whether in policy or programs or systems of monitoring.


A critical aspect of gender analysis is having gender disaggregated statistics and data which can be used to inform the development of policies, development plans and budgets. A key entry point is the County Statistics Information Offices (CSIOs) who will have responsibility for generating statistics and data at the county level. In order to build the capacity of these offices to develop gender data and statistics, it will be important for MOGD to increase its cooperation with the Liberia Geographical Information and Statistics Office (LGIS) through further training and technical assistance at a national and local level.

In addition to relying on women’s participation in planning meetings and gender analysis, the development of specific county or district-level gender equality strategies or action plans could be an important measure to identify and address the needs and priorities of men, women, girls and boys at the local level and to identify specific budget allocations required to address these needs. In a number of African countries including Mauritius, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa and Zambia, local governments in each district have developed gender action plans and in some instances, some countries have gone a step further by producing specific actions plans on gender-based violence for their district municipalities. Overall, Gender Action Plans play an important role in informing development plans and in conducting gender analysis of budgets to determine whether or not funds have been allocated to support gender priorities and needs set out in the Plans.

**Monitoring Systems and Accountability Mechanisms**

The LDIP includes a specific component on quality assurance in order to monitor and evaluate progress and impact of the decentralization reform process. Three levels of monitoring and evaluation are set out including preparation of annual governance reports by the GC, concurrent monitoring and evaluation by MIA of the day-to-day implementation of the decentralization process and participatory performance monitoring by citizens’ groups and civil society organizations in carrying out watch-dog functions. In order to monitor and assess the gender-responsiveness of the decentralization reform process and the impact of decentralization on the lives of women and girls, it will be necessary to ensure that the different levels of monitoring and evaluation include measures, standards and indicators that relate specifically to gender.

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95 LDIP, p. 25.
1. Baseline Studies and Research

In order to provide a basis for monitoring the progress and results of the decentralization reform process, the GC and MIA recently conducted a baseline assessment. Due to time and capacity constraints, gender aspects were not fully considered and included in the design of the assessment. As previously mentioned, the need for further data and research about the status of women at the local level has been acknowledged by MOGD and the GC who are now planning to conduct a county-level research study on the status of women. This research will provide critical information that will help to inform the development of county and district development plans and the roll-out of decentralized services. While the study will also help to provide a baseline concerning the status of women, in addition to the Study, it will also be necessary to conduct a specific baseline assessment that can be used to measure gender-responsiveness of the overall decentralization reform process. Such an assessment should be led by MIA NDIS and developed in close cooperation with MOGD and LISGIS. The baseline assessment could be used to determine: a) awareness-levels of local women about the decentralization reform process; b) current levels of gender sensitivity among local level officials (which could be informed by separate capacity assessments); c) what has been the participation of women planning process and discussions related to the County and Social Development Funds; d) the number of women currently represented in local government (i.e. superintendents, town chiefs, paramount chiefs); and e) capacity levels of women’s organization and women leaders to influence decision-making at the local level. The baseline assessment could also include collect and consolidate information and data on gender-responsiveness of service delivery which could be used to measure changes and improvements during sector de-concentration.

Another way to collect important baseline information and data is through community perception surveys which can be used to collect important qualitative information about needs and perceptions of women such as their ability to access service or to reach their development potential.

Illustrative Example from Hong Kong: Survey on Community Perceptions about Gender Issues

In 2009, a community perception survey about gender issues was commissioned by the Hong Kong Women’s Commission. The survey, which was conducted by telephone over a two month period, aimed at gauging the community’s views and perceptions on gender-related issues, including the extent of gender stereotyping in society, factors hindering women’s full development of their potentials, and the need to incorporate women’s needs and perspectives in policy making (i.e. gender mainstreaming). The survey successfully interviewed 1,530 people aged 15 or above (of which 53.5% were female and 46.5% were male).


2. MIA Monitoring, Evaluation and Policy Development Team

Because MIA is responsible for monitoring the day-to-day implementation of the LDIP, the Monitoring, Evaluation and Policy Development Team will need to be equipped with training, resources and tools to build their institutional capacity to monitor and measure the gender-responsiveness of the decentralization process as it is implemented. The Team will need to build their capacity to further engender existing monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks and
systems established under the LDIP and LDSP including the development of gender-responsive indicators and targets for the decentralization reform process. Once the MIA NDIS gender advisors/officers are in place, it will be important for them to conduct a comprehensive review of existing M&E frameworks, together with MOGD, in order to assess gender-responsiveness and to make recommendations to further engender these frameworks.

Finally, the annual governance performance reports that will be prepared by the GC, which will include the decentralization reform process, also provide an important entry point for assessing the performance of national and local-level governments in integrating and addressing gender issues and promoting gender equality.

3. Accountability Mechanisms

Getting good local government for women depends on effective accountability mechanisms and systems. All levels of government must be accountable for equally serving women, men, girls and boys in all aspects of decentralized governance. While it is necessary to have strong monitoring systems and data to monitor performance, commitment and responsiveness of MACs to integrate gender throughout the decentralization process, it is equally important to provide incentives through rewards and sanctions systems. Performance evaluations of civil servants involved in decentralization should also include specific criteria for gender tasks undertaken and give recognition accordingly. The example below shows how the Ugandan government has used post-training assessments to measure gender-responsiveness of local governments.

Best Practice: Assessing Gender-Responsiveness of Local Governments in Uganda

As part of its decentralization reform process, the Ugandan government developed a Capacity Building Policy and Action Plan which committed it to conduct gender trainings for all local governments. The trainings have been followed up with an annual assessment exercise on the extent to which local governments have integrated gender issues into their planning, budgeting and service delivery processes.96

Civil society organizations (CSOs) also have a key role to play in monitoring the decentralization reform process and effectiveness of local governance, including its gender-responsiveness. The LDIP acknowledges the important role of the public, CSOs and citizens’ groups in assuming a watch-dog function and in conducting performance monitoring of the decentralization reform process. In order for these groups to effectively take on this role, their capacity needs to be strengthened and there must be transparent and ongoing processes to support their engagement. Local governments therefore need to be mandated to engage citizens in decision-making at the national and local level. Although the LDIP establishes a Civil Society Forum, it is only at the national level. Support will also be needed to capacitate women leaders, women’s organizations and other civil society organizations to monitor and assess gender-responsiveness of the decentralization process, governance structures and service delivery. Local governments will need to ensure that these groups have access to planning documents and budgets so that they can assess whether gender related priorities set out in development plans have been included in local budgets.

96 Uganda National Planning Authority/UN Joint Program on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment: Final Report on the Development of Gender Responsive Indicators for: Education & Sports Sector; Health Sector; Local Government Sector; Public Service Sector; Environment & Natural Resources Sector; Agricultural Sector; and The Justice Law & Order Sector, July-August 2012.
SECTION VI: Strategies, Best Practices and Tools to Support Women’s Representation and Participation in Local Governance

Decentralization will enable local government to respond to the needs and priorities of women only if women have opportunities to participate in local governance institutions and processes. Successful implementation of gender-responsive decentralization will therefore depend on the capacity of women to participate in local governance. Women’s voices and perspectives need to be sought and respected in order to ensure that policy, planning, budgeting and decision-making fully reflect their needs and priorities. Without specific measures to increase women’s involvement in decision-making, women will continue to be excluded from leadership positions in the community, from local government institutions and from community developing planning processes.

This section discusses strategies and measures needed to overcome structural and institutional barriers to women’s participation in local governance processes and structures including actions and highlighted best practices from other countries.

Overcoming Barriers to Women’s Participation

While measures such as reserved seats for women on the County Councils are necessary to achieve gender-responsive local governance, simultaneous and continuous efforts must be made to address the structural and institutional barriers that impede women’s representation and participation. In this regard, it will be necessary to ramp up efforts to address illiteracy and low levels of education enrolment and completion among women and girls. Such measures will critical in order to build their knowledge, skills and qualifications to compete for seats on the county councils, to apply for positions in the county administration and to effectively participate in local develop planning processes.

Although the Government has implemented a policy of free and compulsory basic education, intensified efforts are needed to ensure that these educational programs reach distant rural areas and that achievement level among boys and girls are equalized. In order to address the issue of high dropout rates of girls, further programs to motivate and keep girls in school should be introduced from primary to university levels in order to build a pool of qualified local women to serve in leadership positions. Tackling the high illiteracy rate among adult women will also be critical to increase their access to information about planned decentralization reforms, local development plans and budgets. Women’s increased literacy will also ensure that they are able them to participate in elections as voters.

“In our communities, only men can be in front and so when this decentralization business takes place, it will be better for us.”

Ma Annie Kruah, President of Liberia Rural Women, Nimba County
Addressing traditional barriers, including harmful practices and stereotypes that impede women from participating in local governance will also be crucial. In addition to community-based public awareness efforts that set out to challenge traditional values and notions of gender roles and stereotypes, it will be equally important to engage with men in order to garner their support for women’s participation in local politics and to increase their awareness about the impact that women’s involvement in politics can bring to their family and community. The experience of Uganda has underscored has shown that in order to be effective equity measures such as reserve seats must be complemented by efforts to tackle deep-rooted traditional attitudes and values (see box below).

**Uganda Decentralization: Lessons Learnt**

Uganda’s Local Government Act which provides that 30% of the seats on local councils are reserved for women has resulted in increased women’s representation in local councils; however, the experience of Uganda has shown that while policy and legislative changes to secure increased participation of women in local government structures are important, on their own, they are not enough. Such measures must be complemented by efforts to build capacity, confront traditional attitudes and combat the patriarchal culture of discrimination.

Finally, efforts to support women’s economic empowerment will also be essential in ensuring that women have the financial means to compete as candidates in elections. Through women’s increased economic empowerment, they will have increased means for child care and transport which will provide them with greater opportunities to participate in local governance processes and structures.

**Building Capacity of Women to Compete as Candidates in County Council Elections**

The reserved seats for women on County Councils proposed under the draft Local Government Act provide an important and necessary measure to enable women to participate in local governance. In order to equip and empower women to compete for these positions as well as the general seats on county councils in 2015, significant support, training, resources and awareness-raising will be needed. Such efforts should include the development and delivery of specific training courses for local women interested in politics, which aim at providing them with necessary skills and knowledge for campaigning, presentation, negotiation and effective use of media effectively. A notable good practice of such efforts was the development of a specific campaign manual for women candidates in Sierra Leone (see box below).

**Best practice: A Campaign Manual for Women Candidates in Sierra Leone**

In Sierra Leone, a campaign manual was developed for women candidates for the local government elections. The manual provides women with an overview about the role of government as well as practical information and guidance about campaign planning, public speaking and fundraising. The manual relies extensively on visual images in order to extend its reach to women with lower levels of literacy.

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Civil society can also play a key role in facilitating women’s participation and in articulating and representing gender interests. For example, women’s organizations can mobilise women voters to vote for women candidates and also be used as a recruitment pool and springboard for political posts as they lower the entry barriers into politics by providing a training ground for women. Local women’s organizations can also be critical in defining priorities issues for women during elections, such as women’s political platforms or ‘manifestos’ which can be used as an important measure after elections in holding elected women and men accountable to their election commitments (see best practice example from Botswana below).

**Best Practice: Political Education for Women Candidates in Botswana**

In Botswana, one year prior to parliamentary and local elections, the NGO Emang Basadi (meaning Stand Up Women) launched a Political Education Project with the double aim of increasing the number of women in parliament and local government, and ensuring that political party platforms would include commitments to women’s issues. In addition, a Manifesto was developed, in which they demanded that the government and all political parties ensure equal participation and representation in all national and local legislative and decision-making bodies. They held ‘Voter Education Seminars’ in the political constituencies and organised campaigning and training workshops to assist women candidates. As a result of these efforts, the representation of women in parliament and local government increased after the 1994 elections.  

Establishing and strengthening existing networks at the local level can also help to provide women with the social networks and financial resources necessary to take office. Such networks can also provide an opportunity for the exchange of experience, advice and mutual moral support (see box below for a best practice example from Morocco).

**Best Practice: Creating Networks of Locally Elected Women in Morocco**

In Morocco, UN Women worked with the Ministry of Interior to create the first network of elected women in the region of Guelmim Es Smara in April 2012. The Forum, as it is known, works to strengthen the capacities of women to advocate for access to decision-making bodies in municipal and regional councils.

Partnerships with organizations in other regions or countries are important to exchange and gain experience, and to encourage and train women candidates, including partnerships between local politicians and women in decision-making bodies of different countries (for example the five countries where the Gender Equity in Local Development program has been successfully implemented).

**Increasing the Effectiveness of Women’s Representation and Voice**

Once elected, one of the problems that many women politicians face is that they are not allocated time in discussions and debates or given the opportunity to sit on key committees and occupy key

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100 Speech of UN Women Deputy Executive Director Lakshmi Puri at the Fourth Congress and World Summit of Local and Regional Leaders organized by the United Cities and Local Government in Rabat, Morocco, on 1 October, 2013. http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2013/10/ded-speech-on-women-in-democracy-in-morocco#sthash.t9RgOgdM.dpuf
positions. For example, prior to the launch of the Gender Equitable Local Development program in Mozambique, many of the elected women on the Consultative Councils did not speak up or attend meetings because they were often not invited or were not given enough notice to make arrangements to attend. Another challenge is in ensuring that through the measure of reserved seats, husbands or male family members do not use women as their spokesperson as has been the case in some countries such as India and Uganda. For these reasons, support and capacity-building for elected female County Councillors will be necessary to ensure that they are able to make their voices heard and that they have the necessary confidence and skills to effectively participate in governance structures and processes.

Capacity building support for women County Councillors will help to ensure they are aware of their roles and that they have knowledge of key technical issues such as council procedures and rules. This knowledge, combined with efforts to build the self-confidence and leadership skills of both elected women and civil servants will be critical factors in ensuring women’s effective representation and participation in governance structures. In addition to formal training workshops, the establishment of mentoring programs for women councillors and women civil servants could also provide important ongoing support. Supporting women councillors to establish links with women leaders and representatives is also important in ensuring that have a direct channel to hear about women’s needs and priorities. Within County Councils, specific committees with a gender-focus could be established in order to provide a forum for discussing gender-related priorities and issues. Separate to this, support could also be provided to establish a women’s caucus comprised of the women county councillors.

Supporting local women to articulate their needs and priorities and to lobby local governments for the necessary programs, services and resources to address these needs is also critical for gender-responsive local governance. In order to build their capacity, local women will require assistance and resources to establish networks and develop strategies and platforms to effectively identify and lobby for their priorities. An identified good practice of such efforts is Kenya where women have been able to influence resources, planning and policy decisions at the local level (see box below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Best practice: Organizing Rural Women in Kenya to Influence Local Government</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In <strong>Kenya</strong>, <strong>GROOTS</strong> (Grassroots Organizations Operating Together in Sisterhood) has organized grassroots women to unite through a bottom-up participatory approach and empowered them towards engaging with local development. Women have been able to successfully influence governance processes through coming together in self-help groups to pursue improved services and reduced poverty and as a result, they have been able to effectively influence resources, planning and policy decisions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“We have been to workshops and this has given us more ‘braveness’ to speak out - this is the kind of training that our women need.”

*Ma Annie Kruah, President of Liberia Rural Women, Nimba County*

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Efforts will also be needed to facilitate women’s participation in community decision-making bodies and community developing planning processes through the use of women’s quorum quotas (see Section VI for more detail) and specific measures to make consultation opportunities gender-friendly (see checklist below).

### Checklist for Supporting Women’s Involvement in Community Meetings

- ✓ When planning events/meetings, ensure that women’s situations and time constraints are taken into consideration;
- ✓ Rectifying exclusion barriers such as meeting times, lack of childcare, inaccessible venues or lack of transportation (adapting time and place); gender-friendly environments
- ✓ Support women’s organisations and local NGOs in the form of resources, capacity development and advocacy skills;
- ✓ Use of predominant local languages/dialects;
- ✓ Ongoing collaboration with NGOs active at the local level.

In strengthening the confidence and capacity of women to participate in community decision-making structures and planning processes, women’s organizations can play an integral role in training local women at the community-level and in building their knowledge about gender-sensitive planning and increasing budget literacy. In India important results have been achieved through investing time and resources to capacitate elected women representatives (see box below).

### Best practice: Building Confidence of Locally Elected Women in India

In India, UN Women has helped more than 65,000 elected women representatives in village councils in five states acquire skills and confidence to advocate their priorities. Where women once felt intimidated as the men talked, they now speak up. They ask for new services, such as systems to ease the burdens of water collection and improve sanitation, and mobilize efforts to prevent child marriage and stop.

Ensuring Men’s Support for Women’s Participation in Local Governance

Engaging men and securing their support for women’s participation in local government is critical for ensuring that barriers at home and in the community do not prevent women from pursuing opportunities to serve on County Councils or attend community development planning meetings. Intensive efforts are therefore needed to sensitize and educate local men about the importance of women’s participation, including the benefits this brings to their family and community, so that they can also play an active role in supporting it. A good practice in this regard has been Mozambique where intensive efforts to educate, inform and build the support of men for women’s increased political participation have shown important results (see box below).

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103 UN Women Annual Report 2012-2013, p. 7.
Best practice: Engaging Men in Mozambique to Support Women’s Participation

In Mozambique, women identified their husbands’ jealousy as a major constraint to their participation. In response and with support from the Gender Equity in Local Development program, a ‘husbands’ workshop was held in 2010 in order to talk with husbands about their wife’s role on the Consultative Council and to try to get support for their participation. Men who participated in the workshop stated that attending the workshop helped them to understand that when women go to meetings they are working to benefit their families and community.\textsuperscript{104}

As mentioned in Section IV, the intensive communication efforts planned under the LDIP also provide an important avenue for raising awareness among women and men about the value and necessity of women’s participation in terms of ensuring good governance and sustainable community development. Public awareness-raising efforts can play a key role in challenging social norms and stereotypes about gender roles and overcoming resistance and in overcoming resistance to women’s increased representation and inclusion in local governance structures and processes. Because men comprise the majority of decision-makers at the local level, increased efforts are needed to build their support and capacity to engage women through ensuring that they are informed about opportunities to influence decisions and that the necessary conditions are in place to facilitate their effective participation.

\textsuperscript{104} MacLean, Melissa and Gifford, Katherine, Facilitating Gender-Equitable Local Development, GELD Mozambique, Universitas Forum, Vol. 3, No. 1, February 2012, pp. 7-8.

\textit{“Men should encourage the women – if there is a piece of news, share it with women and encourage them to participate. If you help her to get there, it will become better for all of us.”}

Hon. Minister Julia Duncan Cassell, Minister of Gender and Development at the Dialogue with Women Political Leaders, December 3, 2013
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This Study has provided an overview of the legal and policy framework for gender-responsive decentralization, identified key barriers to women’s representation and participation in local governance and presented evidence and international best practice examples to illustrate why decentralization must be gender-responsive in order to be successful. This Study has also reviewed current implementation frameworks for the decentralization process (including the LDIP and LDSP) and identified specific entry points for integrating gender into the reform process. Strategies and measures to support women’s participation in local governance have been identified along with best practice examples from other countries.

Liberia’s decentralization reform process provides an unprecedented opportunity for the inclusion and participation of women in local governance and for addressing gender equality issues and closing gender gaps. The decentralization process aims to expand local participation in the affairs of the government and to provide equal opportunity for all citizens to participate in the development of their communities. Since women constitute half of the population of Liberia, it is critical that efforts and measures are taken to enable their effective participation in local government structures and processes. In doing so, conscience efforts are needed to identify and understand the root causes of inequality experienced by women in Liberia and the effect that this has on their involvement and participation in local governance. While reserved seats to support women’s political representation are important, unless the sources of women’s exclusion and discrimination are addressed, such measures are unlikely to have their intended effect.

In order for the decentralization to be successful, it must be gender-responsive with the integration of gender into all areas by all relevant actors at all stages including political, administrative and fiscal decentralization. Drivers of the decentralization process need to build a strong case for gender-responsive government and to put in place the necessary legal, regulatory and policy frameworks and resources to oblige and it in practical terms. Communication strategies for the decentralization reform process provide an important opportunity to highlight how women’s participation in local decision-making, development planning and budget processes contributes to more efficient and effective local governance. Significant institutional reforms are now underway and comprehensive capacity development interventions are now being developed to address the immense human resources development needs of government actors responsible for supporting and implementing local governance. These reforms and interventions provide a critical opportunity to further integrate gender into new structures that are being developed and training programs for local civil servants that will be rolled out over the next five years. Equipping local decision-makers and planners with knowledge and practical tools to support gender analysis and gender-responsive planning and budgeting will be necessary in order to ensure that local development plans reflect the needs and priorities of women, men, girls and boys equally.

Finally, enabling and empowering women to participate in decision-making structures and processes is also essential to achieving inclusive, equitable and effective local governance. Preparing women to compete for seats in the County Councils and providing them with increased information, knowledge and tools while simultaneously engaging with men to also ensure their support for
women’s participation will be necessary in order to ensure women’s effective representation and inclusion in decision-making structures and processes at the local level.

Liberia has an opportunity to benefit from the recent experience and lessons learned from many other African countries in their efforts to achieve democratic, inclusive, transparent and equitable local governance; Liberia also an opportunity to emerge as a best practice itself. While the National Policy on Decentralization and Local Governance provides an important foundation for advancing gender equality, it will therefore be essential to ensure that the implementation and roll out of the decentralization reform process places women at the forefront as critical drivers in this change process.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this Study, a number of strategic and actionable recommendations targeting key stakeholders responsible for the decentralizations process are highlighted below. These recommendations are aligned with the LDIP and LDSP and fall within the 2017 timeframe of these implementation frameworks. Some of the recommendations, in particular those related to proposed amendments to the Local Government Act require immediate attention and need to be fast-tracked before the Act is finalized.

Addressing Structural Barriers to Women’s Participation in Local Governance

1. Increased research and studies are needed to further identify and understand the root causes of inequality experienced by women in Liberia and the effect that this has on their involvement and participation in local governance. The county-level gender assessments that are currently planned by MOGD and the GC will provide important data and analysis about the different structural and institutional barriers to women’s participation in governance. It will be critical that such information is used by MOGD, MIA and the GC to guide the development of a gender-responsive decentralization reform process.

2. In order to ensure that women have the requisite qualifications and skills to participate in local governance structures, including civil servant positions in the counties and districts, further measures and programs are needed to increase educational levels among women and girls. This includes continued efforts to reduce drop-out rates among girls through construction of an increased number of ‘girls friendly’ schools, community-run child care centres, outreach programs and public awareness campaigns to combat traditional stereotypes that affect girls school enrolment and completion rates.

3. Programs to support increased literacy, particularly among adult women, have had a significant effect in increasing women’s participation in social, economic and political life. In order to prepare women to participate in county elections (as candidates and voters) and in planning and budgeting processes at the local level, intensified efforts are needed to support increased literacy among women.

4. New strategies and measures are needed to challenge societal attitudes and cultural norms that serve as barriers to women’s representation and participation in local governance and
to create a political and social climate supportive of gender-responsive local governance. As part of its decentralization communication strategy, MIA and the GC, in cooperation with MOGD, should devote attention and resources for public-awareness campaigns (including radio messages, educational materials and creative initiatives such as community theatre performances) which set out to break gender stereotypes and highlight the value and importance of women’s participation for communities.

Communication, Awareness-Raising and Securing Political Support

5. In developing the decentralization communication strategy under the LDIP, MIA and GC should identify specific actions and resources to target women and raise their awareness about the proposed local governance reforms and the opportunities and benefits that decentralization will bring for women. Because of the high rates of illiteracy among adult rural women, promotional efforts and materials should rely heavily on the use of radio, public consultations and town criers.

6. The regional workshops on strengthening women’s participation in local governance, which are planned to take place in five counties in each region in early 2014, provide an important opportunity to raise local women’s awareness about the decentralization process. MIA, GC and MOGD should ensure that the information from these workshops is used to identify the types of support women will need to participate in local governance.

7. Increased efforts are needed to build the necessary political support for gender-responsive decentralization and local governance. MIA, GC and MOGD should develop specific information resources (using key messages such as the ones provided in this Study) for legislators and political party leaders in the lead up to discussions on the Local Government Act.

8. In order to bring gender issues to the forefront of decentralization discussions and efforts, MIA, GC and MOGD should consider organizing a national conference which could be used to generate support for, and knowledge about gender-responsive local governance. Officials from other countries who have successfully implemented gender-responsive decentralization process could be brought in to share their experience and lessons learned.

9. Planned study tours under the LDIP should include a visit to a country where successful gender-responsive decentralization has taken place. Such a visit should include high level and senior officials and local leaders who are well-placed to lead and champion gender-responsive approaches to local governance.

Ensuring Gender-Responsive Legal and Regulatory Frameworks

10. MIA and GC should incorporate further changes to the Local Government Act (based on the proposed amendments identified within this Study) in order ensure that it provides a solid legal foundation for gender-responsive local governance.
11. **MOGD** should consider either updating the 2009 National Gender Policy or developing a separate policy specific to gender equality and local governance in order to ensure coherence in government policy frameworks and to provide specific policy framework for gender-responsive governance.

12. **MIA** and **MOGD** should undertake efforts to support the development of county or district-level gender equality strategies or action plans that could be used to address the needs and priorities of women and girls and identify required resources.

**Institutional Structures and Human Resource Development**

13. In order to ensure that decentralization oversight and management bodies are able to monitor and advise on the gender-responsiveness of the decentralization reform process, gender-related targets and progress should be regularly reviewed by the LDSP Board and the composition of the Board should include as full members agencies and organizations with the necessary expertise to advise and provide guidance on gender matters (such as MOGD, UN Women and UNMIL OGA).

14. As the driver of the decentralization reform process, **MIA** should ensure that its capacity development strategy includes priority activities and resources to build capacity for gender-responsive governance within the National Decentralization Implementation Secretariat (NDIS) and among MACs and local authorities.

15. **MIA** should recruit a senior advisor/official within its NDIS in order to support efforts to effectively mainstream gender into all aspects of the decentralization process and provide the necessary in-house expertise to integrate gender into all policies, regulations and training programs.

16. **MOGD** should invest significant effort and resources to capacitate the County Gender Coordinators to provide quality support and guidance to county administration in engendering LDIP implementation.

17. **MIA** and **MOGD**, in coordination with LIPA should conduct an initial gender capacity assessment to measure gender-awareness and knowledge early on and to provide a baseline for measuring changes in gender-related knowledge and capacity levels throughout the decentralization reform process.

18. **MIA**, in close collaboration with LIPA, MOGD and the county CSA departments, should ensure that gender issues are effectively mainstreamed across all planned capacity development interventions for local civil servants.

19. **MIA** and **MOGD** should support and earmark resources for the development of practical training and tools for gender-responsive planning and budgeting processes (targeting Finance Officers, Development Officers and staff of the Development Planning Units at the county and district level).
20. In order to ensure that future training and capacity development programs for local civil servants integrate and mainstream gender, **MIA and MOGD should develop strategic partnerships with the CSA and LIPA in order to institutionalize topics such as gender-responsive planning and budgeting into civil servant training curricula and resources.**

21. **MIA, in co-operation with MOGD, should develop specific policy directive and instructions that require county, city and district administrations to integrate gender into their work and which oblige them to apply gender-responsive planning and budgeting in the development of county and district development plans.**

22. **MIA, in cooperation with MOGD, should develop and provide trainings, seminars and workshops for traditional chiefs (including paramount, clan and general town chiefs) and elders in order to sensitize them about the importance of gender equality and the impact of harmful traditions and practices on women’s participation in local governance.**

23. **In order to ensure gender equity in the composition of county and district administration, MIA, together with the Civil Service Agency, should consider establishing gender quotas or target systems for positions in civil service at local level and ensure that organizational policies and regulations are in place to promote equal opportunity in recruitment and promotion practices.**

**Fiscal Decentralization**

24. **Because gender equality is essential for sustainable local development, the Local Development Fiscal Board should ensure that the criterion of socio-economic development under the General and Development Funds also take into consideration the needs and priorities of women when determining grant allocations.**

25. **MIA, together with the Ministry of Finance and MOGD, should develop regulations, policies, budget templates and planning processes which support the development of gender-responsive budgets.**

26. **MIA, in co-ordination with the Ministry of Finance and MOGD, should commission further research and analysis to examine gender implications of revenue generation schemes proposed under the draft Local Government Act, including consultations with members of communities who are most likely to be affected by proposed taxes and fees.**

**Administrative Decentralization/De-concentration**

27. **MIA and MOGD should provide guidelines and support to MACs (in particular the De-concentration Support Units) in order to further engender the de-concentration implementation process and ensure that the final de-concentration plans developed for each MAC are gender-responsive.**

28. **MIA and MOGD should develop specific policies, guidelines and tools to support MACs to conduct gender analyses within their specific sector areas in order to assess the impact of**
decentralized service delivery for women, men, girls and boys and to propose specific policies and measures needed to ensure equitable and accessible service delivery at the local level.

29. In order to support coordination and prioritization of gender mainstreaming across sectors at the county-level, MIA should support the County Decentralization Coordinating Committees to establish a specific inter-sectoral/inter-departmental gender mainstreaming mechanism such as a gender task force or gender working group (chaired by the Superintendent).

**Local Planning and Development**

30. MIA, in cooperation with MOGD, should ensure that the guidelines and templates for the county and district development agenda and annual implementation plans provide a clear framework for mainstreaming gender.

31. In order to ensure that local development planning processes are participatory and gender-sensitive, MIA in coordination with MOGD should support the development of planning guidelines including quotas or targets for women’s participation.

**Monitoring/Ensuring Accountability**

32. MIA, together with the GC, LIGIS and MOGD, should undertake a baseline assessment in order to assess current levels of gender-responsiveness of local governments and capacity levels.

33. MIA, in co-operation with MOGD, should conduct a comprehensive review of existing M&E frameworks for the decentralization reform process in order to assess gender-responsiveness and recommend areas where further integration of gender is needed.

34. MIA, together with LISGIS, should undertake measures to ensure that gender-disaggregated monitoring and evaluation data needs is collected, analyzed and incorporated into gender-responsive reporting systems.

**Ensuring Women’s Participation in Local Governance**

35. In order to equip and empower women to stand as candidates in the 2015 local elections, MOGD, together with CSO and international partners, should support the development and delivery of specific training courses to build capacity for effective representation.

36. MOGD, together with CSO and international partners should support local women to establish networks, strategies and platforms in order to identify and lobby for their priorities and to hold governments accountable for gender equality commitments. In doing so, best practices from other African countries under the Gender Equitable Local Governance program should be drawn upon.
37. MOGD, together with CSO and international partners should provide specific support for initiatives to sensitize and educate local men about the importance of women’s participation, so that they are able to play an active role in supporting it.
ANNEX A: Proposed Features of Local Governance in Liberia

**Elected officials**
- County Superintendents
- County Council (CC):
  - two representative per district, one of which must be a woman
  - two youth representatives county wide
  - two representatives from the cities
  - two representatives from the townships
  - two elders from the National Traditional Council of Chiefs and Elders
- District Commissioners
- City Mayors
- Township Commissioners
- City and township councils
- Paramount Chiefs
- Clan Chiefs
- General Town Chiefs

**Administrative structures**
- County chief executive officer (Superintendent);
- County administrative officer and heads of county administrative departments;
- County district commissioners;
- County departments to cover the following functions:
  - Finance - revenue, expenditure, budget;
  - Administration and personnel;
  - Public works and utilities;
  - Health and social welfare;
  - Agriculture, natural resources and commerce;
  - Education, information and sports.
- District administrative office to include:
  - Planning and development officer;
  - Health officer;
  - Educational officer;
  - Agriculture officer.

**Powers**
- Superintendent supervises administration, prepares annual county development plan and budget, appoints all head of county administrative agencies;
- CC approves the budget and county development plan, levies local taxes, rates, duties, fees, licensing and operating permits to local business, approves some appointments of administrative staff by the superintendent, and enacts local ordinances;
- District commissioner is responsible for the implementation of county policies, assisted by a voluntary advisory board at the district level.

**Reporting**
Superintendents report to the CC and annually to the President, through the MIA.

**Functions**
The policy also lists those areas that are to remain at the National Level, which include:
- Justice; Auditing; Elections; Foreign Affairs; Immigration; Industrial licensing and intellectual property;
- Money, Bank and insurance; National defense; Natural Calamities; National health, education and water policies.

**Resources**
- Property tax levied on all real estate property; Licenses and fees on local business;
- Grants/tax shares as established in a revenue sharing agreement.

ANNEX B: Bibliography

Government of Liberia Documents

General

1. Constitution of the Republic of Liberia

Gender-Related Documents


19. Ministry of Gender and Development, Liberia National Plan of Action on Gender-Based Violence


**UN Documents**


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# ANNEX C: List of Interviewees

## CONSULTATION PHASE II: 18 October - 12 November 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee(s)</th>
<th>Number of Persons Interviewed</th>
<th>Gender Breakdown</th>
<th>Interview Date</th>
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<td>- Hon. Yarsuo Weh-Dorliae, Commissioner/Decentralization</td>
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<td>- Dr. Alfred Kulah, Program Manager, Political and Legal Reforms/Decentralization</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Ms. Youngor Johnson-Nah, Research Assistant/Gender Focal Point</td>
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<td>- Betty Koffah (River Gee)</td>
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<td>- Sarah Nolleh</td>
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<td>- Hawa Tolah</td>
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<td>- Besie Quaye</td>
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<td>- Mamie Massaquoi</td>
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<td>Moiyar Dubuyay</td>
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<td>Aljaz Qureshi, Operations Manager</td>
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**CONSULTATION PHASE I: May 2013**

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**Women’s Legislative Caucus**

<p>| Hon. Josephine George-Francis | 11 | 8 | 3 | May 6 |
| Hon. Munah E. Pelham-Youngblood |   |   |   |        |
| Hon. Corpu G. Barclay |   |   |   |        |
| Sen. Geraldine Doe-Sherif |   |   |   |        |
| Sen. Jewel Howard-Taylor |   |   |   |        |
| Hon. Malai G. Gbogor |   |   |   |        |
| Alton D. Whitmis |   |   |   |        |</p>
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<td>Sabrina Cajoly, Team Leader, UNMIL HRPS</td>
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<td>Joseph T. Zennoh, Acting Labour Commissioner, Ministry of Labour</td>
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<td>A. Jadee Karmoc Seyen, C.S. A., Regional Officer</td>
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<td>T. Clarence Carter, Data Clerk, MOGD</td>
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<td>Martha C. Treh, Women in Development Movement in Agriculture</td>
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<td>Joseph T. Zennoh, Acting Labour Commissioner, Ministry of Labour</td>
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<td>Isaac Juah, County Co-ordinator (LIGIS)</td>
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<td>M. Kaison Kiadu, District Commissioner Garwala</td>
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<td>Cecelia Pagoseh, Rural Women Chair</td>
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<td>J. Varney Kiazola, Clerk/Township Commissioner (MRU)</td>
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<td>Mamaline Massaqiu, District Chair, Commonwealth</td>
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<td>Zinnah Batu, District Chairwoman, Garwala</td>
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<td>Jartu Sheriff, Member</td>
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<td>Jebbeh Sougai Swaray, Agriculture Chairwoman, Grand Cape Mount County</td>
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<td>Jebbeh Sannoh, Town Chief</td>
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<td>Massa D. Sheriff, Cross Border President, Grand Cape Mount County</td>
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<td>John Bayee, County Protection Coordinator, Danish Refugee Council</td>
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<td>Deputy Police Commander, Liberian National Police</td>
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