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## **“Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in Liberia”**

### **Introduction**

The United Nation Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security was passed 10 years ago. This instrument is intended to serve as a unifying tool in support of the fight against violence against women and abuses they faced. It draws attention and places focus on the negative experiences of women, girls and vulnerable groups during war and its aftermath. The resolution 1325 interestingly is the only resolution that solely emphasizes the positive roles women and girls can play in conflict prevention, peace negotiation, peacebuilding and post-conflict construction processes.

Recognizing the fact that women can be agents of change and not just mere victims, this document or decree has called for the equal and full participation of women in all peace and security programs.

However, the full and equal participation of women is difficult to realize. While there is some commitment and recognition, it is not an obligatory mandate of any particular persons or organizations to implement the resolution except out of mere demonstrated commitment to the promotion of rights and well-being of women. Thus it is incumbent upon the UN, governments, and the international community to ensure that this resolution is effectively implemented.

All is not lost; there is also immense public support in favor of this resolution from the UN, women groups, human rights groups and the international community. It is in light of this that this conference was called by Heinrich Böll Foundation in Berlin to critically take stock of the implementation of the resolution 1325, and asks about the relevance of this universal tool for specific country cases on the ground. The conference is also intended to enhance the analysis of gender dynamics in conflict.

Liberia has just emerged from 14 years of civil conflict and finds itself in the process of post-conflict reconstruction. Understanding by experience the importance and relevance of the resolution 1325, she has developed a National Action Plan for its implementation in response to the UN Secretary General's call for the implementation of this supportive tool and in support of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Process.

I will therefore attempt to center my input on concrete ways in which the implementation of 1325 has affected Liberia, from the perspective of rural society and NGO working rural women. My input will cover government efforts globally and the Ministry of Gender and Development initiatives toward the implementation of the Liberian National Action Plan (LNAP), specific emphasis on medica mondiale activities in relations to the 1325, and other organizations' efforts. This document will also look at the challenges/obstacles and

resistances to the successful implementation of the UN Resolution 1325, and lastly some factors that are working successfully with it, in some areas.

### **Government's Efforts**

The Liberian government established some commissions and taskforces that consider different aspects of the implementation of resolution 1325 like the land reform commission to settle land dispute and ownership, the governance reform commission, law reform, the National Human Rights Commission, the Constitutional Reform Taskforce, Anti-Corruption Commission and others. Further, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Document treats gender as a cross cutting issue and the free and compulsory primary education program with emphasis on the girl child has been put in place.

### ***Gender Mainstreaming in the Security Sector***

In the security sector the government of Liberia has begun some programs in support of the implementation of the UN Resolution 1325 as reflected to some extent in gender mainstreaming activities and there are national policies or laws on gender issues that affect the sector.

In March 2009 the Liberian National Action Plan LNAP (2009-2013) was published. It is constructed on the four pillars: protection of women and children from s/gbv and prevention of s/gbv, promotion of women's human rights and their participation in peace processes, as stipulated by the resolution. The same year 2009 saw the development of a new National Gender Policy by the Ministry of Gender for use in the Liberian National Police (LNP) as well as a Police Handbook against sexual assault and abuse for use by the Women and Children Protection Section of the LNP. This section was established in 2005 and its Gender Policy was approved the same year. In March 2008 it was equipped with a Gender Affairs Section.

There are National Standard Operating Procedures for gender based violence (gbv) and the response to sexualized gender based violence (sgbv) in Liberia to ensure a coordinated and multi-sectoral approach to s/gbv and an Action Plan against gbv for the prevention and case management of gbv including SEA.

A civil service code of conduct proposes to all public institutions to establish an environment conducive for meaningful participation and advancement of women by adopting policies and procedures to address gender inequalities including a code of conduct, sexual harassment policies etc that have been drafted and are currently under review.

### ***Some important statistics on how these national policies and laws have impacted the security Sector***

In January 2010 the strength of the Liberian police force was 3,931, among them 3,351 males and 580 females, that is 17.3%. Of the senior level positions of 534 persons only 34 are females. To increase the recruitment of female police officers a special program was put in place, the first all female class graduated 150 females and the second graduated 143 persons with 80% percent females including an accelerated high school diploma training. 46 Women and Children Support Units were established at various police stations across the country.

But still there is no institutional gender policy in the armed forces of Liberia and no internal gender structure. The armed forces have no special gender training or specific gender section. However, they have a policy against sexual harassment and against sexual assault and rape. Currently they have a strength of 2,075 including 80 females, which corresponds to a percentage of 3.9%.

A special court has been established to try rape cases - the Criminal Court E – and 5 female judges were appointed to Circuit Courts.

The Correction Service has a gender policy, the staff strength stands at 218 with 37 of them being females and among the senior staff 6 are female and 24 male, but still there is no prison facility to cater to pregnant women and women with babies.

There is also a Sexual and Gender Based Violence Task Force, comprising the Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia (AFELL), civil society organizations, INGOs and relevant government agencies.

### ***Some progress with support or lead from the Ministry of Gender***

On the national policy level a Secretariat has been set up to coordinate with stakeholders the implementation of the LNAP on 1325. A Technical Committee provides technical support and a County Steering Committee has been established in five pilot counties to monitor the implementation of the LNAP at the county level and secure national ownership and commitment.

A National Gender Policy was launched and a Gender Equity Act to increase women's participation in governance, political parties and other institutions has been introduced to parliament and is currently awaiting approval for passage into law. In the line ministries and agencies gender focal points have been appointed and as mentioned earlier the education program puts a special emphasis on the girl child.

The launching of the National Action Plan on 1325 has already had effects on policy formulation. The latest amendments to the penal code on sexual offenses extend the legal definition of rape making it a non-bailable offense and increasing its penalty for life imprisonment. Regarding women's rights to property and widows inheritance rights, AFELL with support of the Ministry of Gender achieved the adoption of legislation protecting those rights.

In the field of dealing with the effects of gbv a psycho-social counseling center for gbv victims was set up and a sexual and reproductive health policy was developed and is being implemented. The same applies to the National Gender Based Violence Plan of Action that is meant to prevent the high incidence of gbv and provide support to survivors and fortunately the Joint Program to prevent and respond to sexual and gender based violence takes a holistic approach to addressing gbv issues.

In the various counties safe homes were constructed and an active network of actors from law enforcement, health services, social services and justice are working together to standardize referral pathways for victims and strengthen support provided to survivors.

For promoting active participation of women, especially rural women leaders, educational programs have been armed. In several communities and markets adult literacy schools were established that especially target women and, for example, the Angie Brooks International Center or the Chief Suakoko Center offer trainings in peacebuilding, conflict resolution, mediation or women's leadership. In order to ensure

rural women's participation in development and reconstruction processes the Ministry of Gender created a National Rural Women Structure. In the villages peace huts with rural women were established through the partnership with civil society, local communities, Government and the UN, recognizing the important role of communities and community structures in the prevention of violence against women and the building of peace.

Economic empowerment plays an important role in making female participation possible. A new outlet for women smallholder farmers was created to produce rice, peanuts, beans and cassava for sale to the World Food Program Purchase 4 Progress by the National Rural Women's Structure. 1250 vulnerable girls and young women were intensively trained by the Economic Empowerment of Adolescent Girls Program in new skills for wage employment and business development, with an emphasis on life skills for their own protection and self-promotion. The new Women in Cross Border Trade Association organises already 500 members.

The James A.A. Pierre Institute has been established at the University of Liberia to provide training for professionals in the Judiciary and Paralegal training and decentralized courts have been constructed in counties where there didn't exist any access to judicial services up to date. Border security officials are being trained on recognizing and preventing sexual exploitation and abuse and a gender training module was developed and is being mainstreamed into the security training manual. The National Gender Strategy in the security sector is meant to ensure 20% participation of women in the security sector by 2011 with 30% of immigration officials being women and 15% of the police force. Community Policing Forums were established nation-wide to improve the relationship between citizens and the police.

## **Activities of non-governmental organizations**

### ***medica mundiales efforts to support the UNSCR 1325***

medica mondiale Liberia (mmL) like several other organizations in Liberia works to promote the well-being of women and girls affected by war and its aftermath. Specifically, we have been implementing projects aimed at increasing the well-being of survivors of s/gbv.

The following activities are done in support of the implementation of the UNSCR 1325: The project "Political Participation of women in peace and security policy in Afghanistan, the DR Congo and Liberia", financed to a great extent by the European Commission, in Liberia aims at increasing the political participation especially of rural women from the South East and bring them into play as agents of change in their communities through peacebuilding and community mediation in Sinoe. The project has established a peacebuilding network of women groups across Sinoe and uses three strategies in order to reach its objective: networking among women's organisations, advocacy activities targeting decision makers and capacity building for the members of the network. In 2010, the members have already received several trainings on women's human rights, peacebuilding and methods of conflict resolution. The network has begun to engage county officials in issues related to the well-being of women and the county at large by drawing up a manifesto and it collaborates with other actors in the field of women's rights to carry out activities for advocacy and the promotion of justice.

In general, medica mondiale carries out massive awareness creation campaigns on women's rights in Grand Gedeh, Sinoe and Rivergee, as it is evident by an evaluation done after the first phase of its program in those counties. The program encompasses the establishment of community palava/peace huts for women groups in several rural communities in the three counties, sgbv support groups in all operating communities in Grand Gedeh, Sinoe and River Gee Counties, a safe home and a Women and Girls Center constructed by mmL for women in Rivergee County. Further, a skill training program was conducted for more than 120 women in Rivergee, a training for traditional birth attendants to promote safe delivery and reduce maternal mortality and a training of legal practitioners on human rights issues in the three counties.

### ***Activities of various other NGOs and INGOs***

The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) supports the implementation of UNSCR 1325 through the project called **COHESION** (Civic Ownership for Human Rights, Empowerment, Stability, Improvement, Organization and Networking) working in three districts and seven rural communities. Women peace committees were set up as change agents in the seven communities and the DRC implements border monitors for detecting and documenting violations against trade women along the borders. Simplified information was produced in local languages for awareness raising.

International Alert produced a simplified version of the resolution 1325 and started radio programs using rural radio stations for creating awareness on the resolution and what it means to the daily life of rural women.

Before the LNAP on the implementation of the 1325 and also nowadays, there have been and are still several activities being implemented by a number of organizations that support it. Yet, there has not been a coordinated approach to the implementation as it is done by the Ministry of Gender. Additional organizations involved with the promotion of women's rights do not call their activities UNSCR 1325 activities.

This means that a lot more is being done in support of the implementation but it is not being recognized as such. There could be many more organizations added to this listing.

## **Opportunities, obstacles and challenges for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 in Liberia**

### ***Main Obstacles and Resistances***

- Funding gap for the full implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the LNAP and Gender Policy;
- Cultural and traditional practices;
- Inadequate information to the public on the UNSCR 1325 that will allow people to understand and appreciate the relevance of the instrument;
- High illiteracy rate especially amongst women and girls;
- Inadequate harmonization of international and regional instruments with the national laws;
- Bad road condition/lack of accessibility to rural communities

## **Challenges**

- Low capacity building and training for women and girls;
- High rate of teenage pregnancy;
- Challenges remain in recruiting and retaining women in the security sector, particularly the Armed Forces of Liberia; some policies are not women friendly;
- The passage into law of the Gender Equity Act;
- High maternal mortality rate due to inadequate trained health practitioners and limited health care facilities;
- Women's participation in governance still remain a challenge due to high illiteracy rate and poverty;
- Limited access to micro-credit and control over resources;
- Shadow project implementation

## ***Favorable factors for working successfully with UNSCR 1325***

- Collaboration and coordination involving all stakeholders;
- Strong governmental will to promote the well-being of women;
- Strong women's groups;
- Civil society support;
- The national primacy created by the production of the Poverty Reduction Strategy document;
- The LNAP as reference for monitoring and advocacy work