Sexual and Reproductive Health Situation in Liberia

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INTRODUCTION OF PRESENTING ORGANIZATION

West Point Women for Health and Development Organization (WPWHDO) is a women led non-governmental organization that has been working over the past 14 years against SGBV; advocating for women’s, adolescent girls and children’s rights in the community of West Point and surrounding communities, providing education, health, empowerment and child’s protection through the provision of safe space for survivors, collaborating with other women rights organizations. Advocated for the passage of the Domestic Violence Act, conducts monitoring and the documenting of SGBV and FGM related cases.
THE SITUATION:

SGBV is prevalent in Liberia but the reporting of it is a concern due to the stigma associated because of social and cultural norms, victims and family unwillingness to go through the due process of the law. Some sees this process as a waste of time and energy, some victims and families are impoverished and cannot afford the cost for a lawyer, cost of transportation to court. So they tend to either compromise or abandon the case.

- Sexual violence and abuse perpetrated against young women, adult single women, married and women who are intimidated or lacking economic independence are afraid of the threats and stigmatization associated to coming forward or pursuing their cases.

- Criminalization and discrimination against persons of different sexual orientation and gender identity prevents many men and boys, especially as survivors, from reporting their cases and accessing much needed social services.
The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSP), statistics shows

2016, a total 1,413 GBV Cases were documented,
2017 a total of 1,685 GBV Cases documented,
2018 over 1,500 GBV Cases were documented
2019 a total of over 2,450 Cases documented,
60% were rape cases victims between the ages of 0-17
25% domestic violence cases
30% were FGM and teenage pregnancy
0.05% accounting for access to justice.

In West Point alone
2017, 96 cases of Gender Based Violence reported and documented
2018, 104 cases reported and documented
2019, 100 cases reported and documented.
Out of the cases of Domestic Violence, Abandonment, Non-persistent Support, Family separation, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) 27 were rape including gang rape.
RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY COUNTRIES DURING PREVIOUS UPR FROM:

1. Sweden
Ensure the full enjoyment of human rights by women and girls, including through public awareness-raising and measures to improve investigation and prosecution of sexual and gender-based violence.

Source of position: A/HRC/30/4/Add.1 - Para. 142

2. France
Continue to combat violence against women, particularly female genital mutilation and sexual violence, ensure that this violence is always prosecuted, and continue to organize awareness-raising campaigns on this issue.

Source of position: A/HRC/30/4/Add.1 - Para. 131

3. Ireland
Intensify efforts to eliminate sexual and gender-based violence and to specifically criminalize female genital mutilation as well as to take all necessary measures to ensure its eradication.

Source of position: A/HRC/30/4/Add.1 - Para. 132

4. Germany
Strengthen its efforts to end discrimination against women by incorporating the principle of equality into the Constitution in the context of its constitutional review.

Source of position: A/HRC/30/4/Add.1 - Para. 45
Our Recommendation:

- That the government of Liberia passes a new comprehensive law that prohibits and criminalizes FGM with heavy penalties imposed on perpetrators.

  - The enactment of the law should be accompanied by a change of social norms and behaviors through education outreach targeting local chiefs, traditional women leaders, and communities that practice the act.
Achievements:

The rise in reporting of cases can be attributed to the contribution of women’s led organizations commitment to increased awareness raising on SGBV and the utilization of the national referral pathway program. Even though data reported by the government through the Ministry of Gender is somehow underreported due to the knowledge of cases intended to be reported from Montserrado alone even West Point and within the other 14 counties of Liberia. If case load from these counties were adequately reported, it is likely government would take some measures to help stop the rise in SGBV cases.

- The newly passed Domestic Violence Act, . The law further places domestic violence into three categories (Section 16.5: a-d)
  a. Physical Abuse
  b. Emotional Abuse
  c. Economic Abuse
Our Recommendation:

Ensure Social Protection for vulnerable people and SGBV survivors through the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, should include other stakeholders (Women led organization and other relevant CSO’s working on SGBV issues or engage in outreach to educate citizens and foreigners on the newly passed Domestic Violence Act also work closely with other relevant government agencies in the enforcement of the law.
THE SITUATION:

Abortion in Liberia

Abortion is a sensitive and contentious issue with religious, moral, cultural, and political dimensions in Liberia. It is illegal and makes termination restrictive based on the following conditions:

- To save the life of the woman
- To preserve physical or mental health of the mother, or that the child would be born with a grave physical or mental defect; and
- In the event of rape or incest and fetal impairment that's when abortion is legally allowed.

Unwanted pregnancies among teenage girls are inextricably linked to inadequate access to family planning information and services. According to the GoL, 55% of neonatal mortality occurs among girls under 15 years compared to 6% for those over 19 years
THE SITUATION:

Teenage pregnancy is often associated with unwanted pregnancy. Restrictive laws coupled with economic hardship drive teenage girls into undergoing abortion procedures that are unsafe.

- By the age of 15 years, approximately 11% of Liberian girls become pregnant
- By the age of 19 years, 62% are pregnant
- Liberia Demographic Health Survey (LDHS). A total of 26% of adolescent pregnancies are unintended, while 30% pregnancies among adolescent end in abortions, 90% of which are risky and unsafe contributing to high mortality rate. Republic of Liberia: Investment case for Reproductive, Maternal, New Born, Child, and Adolescent Health, 2016-2020, page 26.

These conditions have enormous consequences on retention in school and sexual reproductive capacity.
OUR RECOMMENDATION:

Women and girls in Liberia should be given the option to choose motherhood as it relates to abortion, they should be allow to access safe, affordable and free Planned Parenthood services.