

Mainstreaming Gender in Peace Support Operations

The United Nations Mission in Liberia

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INTRODUCTION

Liberia has been at war for approximately 14 years with adverse effects for the local population and national institutions, both government and traditional. Over 200,000 lives have been lost and more than one million Liberians have been forced to flee their homes, and even their country, as a result of the prolonged conflict. Most Liberians who fled are still internally displaced or were refugees in other West African countries until the start of the second peace process in 2003. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) were particularly vulnerable to human rights abuses by all parties to the conflict. These abuses included killings, rape and other forms of sexual violence, abduction, torture, mutilation and forced recruitment.

The maelstrom of the war impacted more severely on women. It engendered abject poverty for nearly 80% of the population, with an illiteracy rate of approximately 81%, and this turned Liberia into one of the world's highest maternal mortality rates of 780 per 100,000. Violence and tolerance for violence are much higher in post-conflict a situation, which has resulted in heightened rates of sexual and gender-based violence. Women continue to be plagued by entrenched cultural and societal norms, reinforced after the conflict, which prevent them from participating in decision-making.

Against this backdrop, the chapter provides a synopsis of gender issues, focusing on crucial issues of gender and children in the Liberian conflict and peace process. In particular, it provides a perspective of gender in Liberia, outlining the experiences of violence against women and girls and the legal framework for their protection. This provides a backdrop to the gender framework of UNMIL and its efforts to

mainstream gender in the peacekeeping operation. The synopsis also highlights the challenges, the lessons learned and the best practices that have derived from the role and functions of the Gender Unit in the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL).

FRAMING THE GENERIC ISSUES OF GENDER

Many of the experiences of women and girls in armed conflicts are similar to those of men and boys. Both groups suffer the same trauma, are forcibly displaced, injured and killed and have difficulties in making a living during and after the conflict. However, women and girls have become prime targets in armed conflict and have suffered its impact more severely as gender-based and sexual violence have become weapons of war and one of the defining characteristics of contemporary armed conflict. The Liberian conflict was no exception to this post-Cold War paradigm of horrific intra-state conflicts.

Armed conflicts exacerbate inequalities between women and men, and discrimination against women and girls. If women do not participate in decision-making, they are unlikely to become involved in decisions about the conflict or the peace process. Girls face particular difficulties because they may be forced into early marriage as a coping strategy in economically desperate households. Girls' enrolment and retention in schools often drop in times of war. When forced to become heads of households, girls are particularly marginalised, suffer social stigma, and are at increased risk of abuse and sexual violence.

Refugee, returnee and internally displaced women and girls suffer human rights abuses throughout their displacement, including their flight, encampment and resettlement settings. Weakened or lost social support structures result in less security, a higher risk of harassment or abuse, and problems in accessing the assistance that is necessary for survival. The difficulties faced by women and girls are not always identified and addressed in the planning and management of camps.

However, women and girls are not only victims in armed conflict, they are also active agents. As in many other conflict areas, women in Liberia were actively engaged in conflict and had a complex experience. Although they were captives and sometimes dependants of the men, they were involved in planning and executing the war. Some chose to participate in the conflict or to provide non-military support, such as recruitment and spying. Others provided support in the usual domestic roles, or were manipulated or driven into various other roles, including

forced sexual slavery and coercion to work as domestic servants for fighting groups.

Information obtained from very limited research in one of the cantonments, showed that in that study most had been abducted, while some were forced to join the fighting to save their lives, and the rest were pushed into fighting by the family to save the rest of the family. Others decided to join through recruitment by friends or of their own choice.

The specific impact of conflict on women and girls therefore calls for specific responses. Gender-based differences and inequalities need to be addressed within holistic policies, planning and implementation in all peace operations, humanitarian activities, and human rights and economic security frameworks, as well as leadership and reconstruction efforts.

On the whole, it appears that Liberian women have yet to regain one fourth of the professional and technical jobs they held in pre-conflict Monrovia, as well as their traditional livelihoods and roles in the production, allocation and hawking of food. While the conflict might have altered the gender perspectives of Liberian society, it might take a long while for that society, under traditional law, to entitle women to inherit from their husbands or retain custody of their children, in the event of the death of their spouses. Thus, there is reason to believe that the dynamics of the conflict have exacerbated gender-based violence against women and their marginalisation, in terms of discriminatory policies and practices – for instance exclusion from inheritance rights under customary law. While the Liberian constitution prohibits discrimination based on ethnic background, race, sex, creed, place of origin, or political opinion, laws prohibiting gender discrimination, ethnic discrimination, or female genital mutilation have yet to enter the statute books.

Despite this, it is hoped that the end of the prolonged war and the exposure gained from displacement to other countries in the region and beyond should have changed perceptions of post-conflict Liberia towards openness, tolerance and modernisation. In this sense, it is possible that the positive role of Liberian women and the struggles of Liberian women's associations over the last decade, should achieve for them a greater role and more active participation in post-conflict governance and reform. In the post-conflict period such groups as the Liberia Women's Initiative (LWI), the Mano River Women Network for Peace (MAWONEPT) and the Women in Peace-building Network (WIPNET) need increased support and assistance for continued visibility, engagement and involvement in efforts towards durable peace. Their primary goal

remains to stop the carnage and restore peace and their commitment towards peace is informed by the very factors of the conflict.²

INSTRUCTIVE EXPERIENCES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS IN THE LIBERIAN CONFLICT

The civil wars in Liberia have resulted not only in the devastation of the nation's infrastructure, but also in widespread human rights abuses. While accurate statistics on the incidence of gender-based violence are difficult to come by, there is reliable information to support the argument that close to 40% of the population have been affected by this type of violence.³

There is no gainsaying that during the 1989–1998 civil war, factions forced women into slavery, and raped them, a situation that was repeated during the resurgence of fighting in 2003.⁴ The raping of women and girls resulted in many unwanted pregnancies, while the rate of teenage pregnancy increased significantly with a high incidence of HIV/AIDS. As a result and in combination with other factors, post-disaster psychiatric disorder is particularly high among Liberian refugee women and female abductees who were coerced into becoming cooks, domestic workers and fighters, and 'forced wives' or sex slaves.

According to the latest report from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the issue of gender-based violence during the recent conflict has entailed

“... victims ... [being] gang-raped by soldiers after fleeing the fighting and being arrested at checkpoints. Others have been arrested at war zones on suspicion of being spies, being related to rebels or backing them. Victims have usually been held in unofficial detention centres, often threatened with death should they resist rape, or reprisals if they lodged any complaint. The widespread nature of this crime, the involvement of senior military officials and the impunity which perpetrators enjoy suggests that rape is used as a weapon of war to instil terror among the civilian population ... There have also been cases of abductions and rape of young girls and women at check points operated by rebels.”⁵

A LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE PROTECTION OF AND RESPECT FOR THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS

An appropriate legal framework for dealing with issues of gender in any conflict is crucial to the successful mitigation of the impact of conflict on

women and children. In the last decade, the international legal framework has been expanded to address some of the particular crimes experienced by women and girls in armed conflict, such as rape, forced prostitution, trafficking and enslavement. These crimes are addressed within the definitions of war crimes and crimes against humanity, and as components of the crime of genocide, as well as torture. The development of gender-sensitive reporting guidelines is now accepted, both for reporting on crimes against humanity committed during conflict and for gender-based violations perpetrated during post-conflict reconstruction.

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed in Accra, Ghana, on 18 August 2003 articulates the issue of the rehabilitation of vulnerable groups or war victims – women and children – who have been severely affected by the conflict in Liberia. Article XXXI (‘Vulnerable groups’) of the CPA states that the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) must carry out the following tasks:

- The NTGL shall accord particular attention to the issue of the rehabilitation of vulnerable groups or war victims (children, women, the elderly and the disabled) within Liberia who have been severely affected by the conflict in Liberia.
- With the support of the international community, the NTGL shall design and implement a programme for the rehabilitation of such war victims.
- The NTGL shall, in addition, accord special attention to the issue of child combatants.
- It shall, accordingly, mobilise resources with the assistance of the International Community, especially in cooperation with the Office of the UN Special Representative for Children in Armed Conflict, UNICEF, the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and other relevant agencies, to address their special demobilisation and re-integration needs.
- The NTGL, in formulating and implementing programmes for national rehabilitation, reconstruction and development, for the moral, social and physical reconstruction of Liberia in the post-conflict period, shall ensure that the needs and potentials of the war victims are taken into account and that gender balance is maintained in apportioning responsibilities for programme implementation.⁶

Building on this framework, and pursuant to UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), titled “Women, peace and security”,⁷ which underscored gender mainstreaming in peacekeeping operations, UN Security Council Resolution 1509 (2003), among others, mandated that UNMIL should provide support for humanitarian and human rights assistance. In his report on the situation in Liberia of 11 September 2003, which informed the passing of this resolution, the Secretary General directed that special measures and programmes should be established to address the gender-specific needs of female ex-combatants, as well as the wives and widows of former combatants. He called for briefing, counselling and training in programmes for the eventual reintegration of ex-combatants that would take into consideration the differences in experiences during conflict between women and girls and men and boys. He recognised that because of the high rate of sexual violence in conflict, reintegration programmes must include prevention of sexual violence.

The provisions of Resolution 1509 (2003) enjoined UNMIL to contribute to international efforts to protect and promote human rights in Liberia, with particular attention to vulnerable groups, including refugees, returning refugees and IDPs, women, children, and demobilised child soldiers, within UNMIL’s capabilities and under acceptable security conditions, in close cooperation with other UN agencies, related organisations, governmental organisations, and NGOs. Resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1509 (2003) therefore acknowledge the importance of promoting and protecting the rights of civilians, especially vulnerable groups – predominantly women and children – in the resolution of the Liberian conflict.

UNMIL is mandated to assist the transitional government in monitoring and restructuring the police force of Liberia, consistent with democratic policing, to develop a civilian police training programme, and to otherwise assist in the training of civilian police, in cooperation with ECOWAS, international organisations, and interested states; as well as providing assistance in the formation of a new restructured Liberian military in cooperation with these agencies. Thus, with a view to ensuring rule of law, it is envisaged that the NTGL will be able to deal adequately with impunity, including sexual exploitation and abuse and gender-based violence against women and children.

AN OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK

To implement the decisions stipulated in the two resolutions, a gender unit and the Office of a Gender Advisor were set up as key operational

components of mechanisms to ensure gender mainstreaming. In the main the office coordinates matters relating to gender in the mission and works in cooperation with the UN agencies on the ground, as well as related organisations, governmental bodies and non-governmental bodies to ensure the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in all aspects of the peace process, including the operations of the peacekeeping mission.

SECRETARY GENERAL'S BULLETIN SEA AND SGBV

One of the operational frameworks for gender relates to the Secretary General of the UN's bulletin on sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) and sexual gender-based violence (SGBV). In that bulletin, the Secretary General defines the term 'sexual exploitation' as follows:

“... any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another’ and, similarly, the term ‘sexual abuse’ to mean: ‘the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions.’”⁸

Further to this definition in Section 1, and its range of application in Section 2, the bulletin (Section 3.1) effectively prohibited SEA as follows:

“Sexual exploitation and sexual abuse violate universally recognised international legal norms and standards and have always been unacceptable behaviour and prohibited conduct for UN staff. Such conduct is prohibited by the United Nations Staff Regulations and Rules.”⁹

Section 3.2 reiterates and promulgates existing general obligations under the UN Staff Regulations and Rules, for proper conduct towards the protection of the most vulnerable populations, especially women and children:

Sexual exploitation and sexual abuse constitute acts of serious misconduct and are therefore grounds for disciplinary measures, including summary dismissal.

Sexual activity with children (persons under the age of 18) is prohibited regardless of the age of majority or age of consent locally. Mistaken belief in the age of a child is not a defence.

Exchange of money, employment, goods or services for sex, including sexual favours or other forms of humiliating, degrading or exploitative behaviour, is prohibited. This includes any exchange of assistance that is due to beneficiaries of assistance.

Sexual relationships between UN staff and beneficiaries of assistance, since they are based on inherently unequal power dynamics, undermine the credibility and integrity of the work of the UN and are strongly discouraged.

Where a UN staff member develops concerns or suspicions regarding sexual exploitation or sexual abuse by a fellow worker, whether in the same agency or not and whether or not within the United Nations system, he or she must report such concerns via established reporting mechanisms.

UN staff are obliged to create and maintain an environment that prevents sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. Managers at all levels have a particular responsibility to support and develop systems that maintain this environment.¹⁰

It does appear that not all have actively operationalised the bulletin. But pursuant to the duties – of heads of departments, offices and missions – stipulated in Section 4, UNMIL established focal points within the mission area of UNMIL and investigated at least three cases out of an unspecified number of complaints of sexual abuse. The Office of the Gender Advisor has undertaken a systematic training of military peacekeepers, as well as CIVPOL and civilian staff on sexual exploitation and SGBV, with the expectation that awareness constitutes a preventive tool. Not all mission staff and peacekeepers have been sensitised, but all new arrivals have gone through the SGBV awareness training regime since the Office of the Gender Advisor became fully functional in March 2004. The training covers the UNSG's bulletin, as well as the code of conduct. The sensitisation of the military component of UNMIL includes awareness that the Secretary General's bulletin applies to them. To this end, investigations of cases of sexual exploitation by the military are undertaken by civilian teams. In collaboration with the Ministry of Justice and local NGOs, the office is dealing with an increasing incidence of rapes of babies and toddlers within the host community. The perception that UNMIL has been slow has to be considered against the need to ensure due process and protect the human rights of persons accused of sexual exploitation, while vehemently preventing a growing tide of lynching and mob justice in Liberia. Overall, the office could have achieved a great deal more with adequate budget provisions. In functional

terms, the reach of the office could be improved if its ambit is extended to cover breaches of the code of conduct and the SG's bulletin.

GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN DD: INTERVENTIONS,
CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

UN Security Council Resolution 1509 (2003) requires the development, as soon as possible and preferably within 30 days of its adoption, in cooperation with the Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC), relevant international financial institutions, international development organisations, and donor nations, of an action plan for the overall implementation of a disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration, and repatriation (DDRR) programme for all armed parties; with particular attention to the special needs of child combatants and women; and addressing the inclusion of non-Liberian combatants.

Resolution 1325 (2000) encourages all those involved in the planning of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes to consider the different needs of female and male ex-combatants and to take into account the needs of their dependants. Article VI of the CPA encourages prompt disarmament of all members of armed groups, the aim being the achievement of sustainable peace in an arms-free society through the successful DDRR of ex-combatants.

The successful implementation of DDRR is crucial to ensuring sustainable peace and security not only in Liberia, but in the entire region of West Africa. The process is seen as a precondition to facilitating humanitarian assistance, the restoration of civil authority, and the promotion of economic growth and development. The programme provides former members of fighting forces with the opportunity to start a new life through the provision of adequate and useful knowledge, skills, tools and/or resources. These programmes also aid social reintegration as they meaningfully participate in the country's development and reconciliation.

Female ex-combatants, however, tended to play different roles ranging from combat, to combat support and dependants. While some were actively involved in the fighting, some provided non-military support. In the Liberian context, though, while non-combatants might not have been able to dismantle a gun, they were able to shoot. Women involved in the fighting therefore claim to have had weapons with them on occasions while doing their domestic chores. This enabled those in close proximity to the weapons to return fire when their positions came under fire. They thus

played different roles according to operational exigencies and this makes differentiation between female combatants and dependants a little vague.

Considering the unique roles of women in armed conflict and its impact on them, the Office of the Gender Advisor-UNMIL advocated for an expansion of the definition of women involved in conflict to “women associated with fighting forces” (WAFFs) to respond to the various roles, instead of ‘camp followers’ during disarmament and demobilisation. Based on the directions of the Secretary General, the definition of female combatants was broadened to include not only active fighters, but also women who supported the fighters in any other role, including sexual slaves. The designation therefore ensured that all women who were involved in the fighting benefited from the DDRR process. Thus, the use of the wider term ‘WAFFs’ and the accompanying sensitisation and awareness campaigns resulted in 21,086 women going through the disarmament and demobilisation programmes, as opposed to the initial estimate of 2,000 female combatants.

The Office of the Gender Advisor-UNMIL monitored the DD process and provided technical expertise and advice on the incorporation of gender perspectives. It conducted assessment missions to six DD sites, namely Gbarnga, Tubmanburg, Voinjama, Harper, Ganta and VOA, to assess the extent to which gender was being mainstreamed in the procedures and structures. These assessment reports and recommendations were circulated among the various actors and implementing partners, and this helped to improve on gender in the mission area and the DDRR process in particular. The Office of the Gender Advisor developed tracking sheets to collate and evaluate the daily quantitative disarmament and demobilisation of women, men, girls and boys. The office also advocated the use of sex-disaggregated data in all DDRR reporting.

The DDRR of female combatants owes its success, among other reasons, to the development of Liberia-specific gender information messages in the print media and on radio by the Office of the Gender Advisor, in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender and Development and women’s groups. The sensitisation campaign was important in dispelling and countering rumours that women who participated in the DD exercise would not get married and would not be able to travel outside the country. The office participated in DDRR open forums and senior management meetings, where the senior gender adviser regularly discussed issues arising from the DDRR process, including assessment reports and recommendations on how to improve gender mainstreaming efforts. The issues were then addressed by relevant UN agencies and NGOs, as well

as implementing partners. Issues that needed policy interventions were channelled to the policy-making committee of the process.

The Office of the Gender Advisor achieved some successes, notably the designation of female combatants as WAFFS, gender mainstreaming in the DD procedures and camp layouts, and tracking the status of DDRR women. Nevertheless, there were certain drawbacks, namely the lack of female military observers (MILOBS) to screen female ex-combatants, and the initial lack of knowledge of the Office of the DDRR implementation plan. As a result the following lessons were learned:

- the importance of integrating gender perspectives in DD policies and plans and the input of gender expertise in the planning of the DD process;
- the importance of having female MILOBS in DD processes and the need to involve women groups and community members in DD processes;
- the importance of disseminating information on DD with a gender perspective, among others, to inform gender training for all DD personnel, prior to commencement of the DD process;
- the importance of influencing the increasing participation of female combatants in the DDRR process through carefully considered policies; and
- That the sharing of information, including problems, challenges and successes is critical and requires commitment among all stakeholders in the DDRR process.

The success of the DD programme underscores the need for an equally successful RR programme. Consideration should be given to the following needs:

- sufficient funding for RR projects to ensure that all ex-combatants benefit from the programme and are returned to society;
- encouraging the enrolment of women and men in non-traditional courses, including special provision for the enrolment of women;
- activities to create awareness of the New Inheritance Act as well as legal issues relating to property rights should be conducted.

CRITICAL ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN POST-CONFLICT LIBERIA

Culture and tradition in most parts of the world, and particularly in Africa, discriminate against women. It is no different in Liberia where

women's rights are not seen as equal to men's rights. Men have the final decision in the home, a woman has no right to negotiate safe sex; and on divorce the man has automatic custody of the children. Until October 2003 a woman who married traditionally could not inherit from her husband. A law has since been passed which gives the woman the right to inherit a third of her husband's property.

Many cultural practices stopped during the war, as people were moving around to avoid the fighting. Women activists hoped that this might have spelled the end to some of the more harmful traditional practices, but female genital mutilation, a dreadful human rights abuse which virtually disappeared during the war, is now being revived, purportedly because it is a means of reclaiming the culture and identity of ethnic groups.

Women and girls are vulnerable to human rights violations and all other forms of violence, and particularly sexual violence and exploitation. Easy access to weapons increases interpersonal violence, including domestic violence, which often continues and may even increase in the post-conflict period. In Liberia particularly the rural areas, sexual and gender-based violence has increased. Women and girls are being molested by family and other members of the community but, because of the culture of silence and settling differences the cultural way, many of these crimes go unpunished. Women and girls are made to believe that their own actions warranted such treatment and accept whatever is meted out in silence. The few who may complain are often ostracised by the community, thereby strengthening that culture of silence.

What can be done to protect women survivors of violence and bring an end to the impunity? Special measures need to be taken to protect women from rape and other forms of gender-based violence and to develop a legal framework through consistent, gender-responsive practice. However, protection and support for women survivors of violence are woefully inadequate. They need safe houses to go for help, medical support, resources, protection and security. Their access to protection services and legal remedies is limited in many ways. Many of the victims/survivors are poor and cannot afford the legal fees. Even then, the upheaval of war makes it difficult to seek redress from government institutions. The courts lack the capacity to prosecute even a fraction of the cases brought before them.

In Liberia rape is a bail-able offence and the perpetrator is released within 48 hours if not convicted. In some rural areas courts and prisons are non-existent; more often than not the rapists get off with impunity. The Association of Female Lawyers in Liberia (AFELL) signed a

memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Justice to prosecute cases of gender-based violence, but owing to financial and logistical constraints AFELL can only prosecute a few cases at a time. The absence of a specialised court to deal with rape and other cases of sexual violence also hinders the prosecution of these crimes.

AFELL, like other local women's NGOs and groups, has neither access to funds to be able to advocate changes in the law nor enough funds to implement programmes if and when laws are amended or passed. Despite these constraints, AFELL and other women's groups are pushing for an amendment of the law that makes rape a bail-able offence and an amendment of the definition of rape.

The CPA in Article XII calls for the strengthening of government branches that promote the rule of law; human rights; increased public sector capacity; effective judicial, police and correction systems; and the establishment of permanent democratic institutions. In line with Security Council Resolution 1509 (2003), UNMIL has the responsibility of restructuring the Liberian National Police (LNP) and is using different strategies to attract more women to the service.

RESPONSE-RELATED INSTITUTIONAL PROGRAMMES

Research reveals that most organisations that implement programmes on sexual gender-based violence (SGBV) cater to response-related measures rather than the combative measures recommended by the Secretary General's report.

As part of its human rights and protection programme, the UNDP has been instrumental in addressing issues around SGBV. To this end, UNDP recently has undertaken to document the extent and consequences of sexual violence during the war. The research will be conducted by 22 human rights monitors, who will identify the health, psychological and sociological effects of violence. Merlin, a local NGO, has also continued to offer medical assistance to girls and women. As part of their collaboration Merlin and other health-related international non-government organisations (INGOs), such as MSF-Belgium, share information. The data is then analysed and response strategies developed.

COMBATIVE INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS

As part of its mandate, UNMIL has taken measures to address the issue of violence against women and girls by establishing the Gender Unit.

Training strategic actors such as the interim LNP and conducting gender orientation sessions with incoming CIVPOL officers has helped to raise awareness of the issue. The sessions focus on gender and gender-based violence with the emphasis on prevention. There are plans under way to educate UNMIL personnel about gender and gender-based violence so that personnel understand the impact of their activities on the lives and livelihoods of the women and girls they interact with during their tours of duty. The unit also intends to conduct awareness of gender and SGBV as part of the orientation for their civilian staff.

For its part, UNHCR has been implementing gender-based combative measures that have focused mainly on creating awareness of SGBV. This is done in collaboration with the SGBV working group, who are members of NGOs working on issues of SGBV. The programme contributes to capacity-building and provides a forum for information sharing on gender and gender-based violence. The SGBV group then identify activities which they can implement to raise awareness. UNHCR also convenes SGBV training courses in the IDP camps to ensure that IDPs are aware of their human rights and of some of the dangers associated with living in IDP camps.

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the American Refugee Committee (ARC) are leading in the implementation of programmes that combat violence against women and girls among INGOs. By working with Liberian NGOs, their training sessions help to raise awareness, and identify preventative measures for SGBV in IDP camps which straddle Monrovia, for instance. A subsidiary strategy is applied by members of the Gender Based Working Group, which aims to build the capacity of national NGOs in issues of SGBV, as well as the IRC's teenage empowerment programme. The training on SGBV and skills development is designed to equip teenagers with skills that can give them a better start in life. IRC's area of coverage includes northern and central Liberia. Working in the major IDP camps around Monrovia, ARC coordinates programmes in these camps to raise awareness and implements programmes aimed at combating gender-based violence. It also conducts preventive sessions, including those on HIV/AIDS, in the camps. This organisation is developing a programme that integrates SGBV prevention, awareness raising and income-generation and skills-development components.

At the local level, AFELL conducts legal awareness workshops, which are intended to minimise the incidence of SGBV, in conjunction with civic education and women's rights activities. Other small

under-resourced organisations have also implemented programmes and activities that encompass preventive and combative measures in addressing SGBV. These include the Concerned Christian Community, Mary Ann Outreach, the National Association on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children (NATPAH), the National Commission of Liberia, and the Women's Health and Development Programme (PCHS).

ACTIVITIES ON TRAFFICKING

The Gender Unit's involvement in issues concerning human trafficking is limited to training and raising awareness of the issue and of sexual exploitation among military peacekeepers, CIVPOL and mission civilian staff. This is undertaken by a designated adviser on human trafficking who is based in Civil Affairs and works closely with CIVPOL. To date, the unit has assessed several establishments in Monrovia two of which have been put off limits to all UNMIL personnel. The other organisations in Monrovia are more focused on addressing issues of sexual exploitation by humanitarian workers and UNMIL troops.

Existing substantive research reveals that the type of trafficking that is normally found in the region involves child-trafficking for labour. As a regional syndrome, these children work on the farms of neighbouring countries such as Côte d'Ivoire or serve as domestics. However, most girls are sexually abused in the domestic setting, while boys are often physically abused. There is also trafficking of young women to Europe from several countries in the region. More comprehensive research is needed that focuses on a Liberian situational analysis of human trafficking, in order to establish its linkage to the region, given the porosity of borders. Unfortunately, funds allocated for such research are so limited as to hamper further efforts in this direction.

The Gender Unit is involved in the establishment of mechanisms to ensure the protection and safety of women and children through institutionalisation within the Liberian National Police (LNP). To this end, it is involved in consultations for the training of the LNP on gender and sexual and gender-based violence, the training of police trainers at the LNP Police Academy on SGBV, and the establishment of a gender policy for the LNP, as well as a rape and sexual assault unit.

The Office of the Gender Advisor is involved in drafting a Truth and Reconciliation Draft Bill and Electoral Regulations that make provision

for parties to ensure that women compose 30% of candidates for the forthcoming elections in October 2005.

CONCLUSION

In the Fifth Report on UNMIL (UN S/2004/972) of 17 December 2004, the UN Secretary General stated that “UNMIL has continued to work extensively with national counterparts to counter sexual offences against young children and to promote the rights of prisoners, improve access to justice and fair trials, and ameliorate the human rights situation of IDPs, returnees and refugees”.

In more gender-specific terms, the report notes that the UNMIL Gender Unit has focused on ensuring that some 22,000 women associated with the fighting forces have access to reintegration opportunities. In addition to awareness training, which is crucial in ensuring the successful and effective mainstreaming of gender perspectives in the mission area, gender mainstreaming helped to broaden the base of WAFFs for participation in the DDRR. At national level, the existence of a Gender Unit creates the capacity for the collaborative development of a gender policy into transitional statutes and administrative institutions.

One may therefore wonder why UNMIL appears to have been comparatively more successful in the implementation of the bulletin on SGBV and SEA than other missions, especially in Africa. A closer look at UNMIL indicates that leadership is fundamental to the successful mainstreaming of gender in peace operations. In spite of the slowness in establishing appropriate offices for gender-related issues, UNMIL's leaders at all levels from mission headquarters down to contingents instituted an appropriate framework, set an example and exerted forceful command and control over the activities of all staff and the operational activities of the mission, aiming at preventing, minimising and/or dealing with relevant SGBV and SEA.

It is not correct to say that there are no SEA issues in UNMIL, but through effective implementation of the bulletin, the mission has been able to institute measures that forestalled rampant abuses. This is not true of other missions. UNMIL's experiences underscore the need for the establishment of a gender unit with appropriate terms of reference, including in-mission awareness education and training of all mission personnel; effective inter-office collaboration and

appropriate mechanisms for exchange of information, and reporting and investigation of complaints; and above all, exemplary and forceful mission leadership in the implementation of the minimum standards of behaviour and sanctions relating to SGBV and SEA.

NOTES

- 1 Fatoumata Aisha is a consultant on gender. Her previous work experience includes local social work in Lofa County in 1996–1998.
- 2 See the concept paper for National Liberian Women’s Symposium, 10 September 2003. The LWI played an active mediatory and advocacy role towards the negotiated settlement of the first conflict, which was wasted by Charles Taylor’s misrule. MAWONEPT has been involved in the current peace process since 2001, by consulting West African heads of state to intervene and achieve a timely end to the crisis.
- 3 UNDP press release, 2 March 2004.
- 4 Human Rights Watch, Backgrounder – West Africa human rights, August 2003.
- 5 Report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, The situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Liberia, E/CN4/2004/5, 8 August 2003.
- 6 See CPA (2003), *op cit*, p 24.
- 7 See UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), Women, peace and security (S/RES/1325), 31 October 2000. In sum, the Security Council recognised the urgent need to mainstream a gender perspective into peacekeeping operations. To that end, among other measures, it urged member states to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict; ... further urged the Secretary General to seek to expand the role and contribution of women in UN field-based operations, and especially among military observers, civilian police, human rights and humanitarian personnel; ... expressed its willingness to incorporate a gender perspective into peacekeeping operations, and urged the Secretary General to ensure that, where appropriate, field operations include a gender component.
- 8 See UN Secretary General’s Bulletin on Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse (ST/SGB/2003/13), October 2003. The bulletin entered into force on 15 October 2003.
- 9 See UN Secretary General’s Bulletin (2003).
- 10 See UN Secretary General’s Bulletin (2003). In Section 3.3, the Bulletin emphasises that these standards are not an exhaustive list and that other types of sexually exploitive or sexually abusive behaviour may be grounds for administrative action or disciplinary measures, including summary dismissal, pursuant to the UN Staff Regulations and Rules.