

## CONCEPT NOTE

### ***LIBERIA'S SIDE-EVENT***

***During the Margins of the***

**67<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN (CSW)**

**Co-Hosted with**

**The Republic of Sierra Leone and the Republic of The Gambia**

**Co-Sponsors:**

**United Nations & The Government of Sweden**

**Moderated by:**

Amb. H.E. Jaha Marie "Ma Musu" Dukureh,

***UN Women Global Goodwill Ambassador against FGM & Child Marriage***

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**Title of Side Event** : ***"Pathway to Eradicating FGM in Liberia – An Intentional Participatory Process"***

**Event Location** : CR-1, GA Building

**Date / Time** : Wednesday, 8<sup>th</sup> March 2023 / 4:45pm – 6:00pm

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### **Background**

In September 1995, Liberia, as a Member State, participated along with 189 countries during the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, China. The conference adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, considered the most progressive blueprint ever for advancing women's rights with a focus on gender equality and the empowerment of all women, everywhere. As a defining framework for change, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) made comprehensive commitments under 12 critical areas of concern. During the 23<sup>rd</sup> special session of the United Nation's General Assembly in 2000, Member States reaffirmed their commitment to the 12 critical areas of concern as the progress towards the Platform for Action was reviewed, five years after its adoption.

Since then, regular five-year reviews of progress on fulfilling Beijing commitments have sustained the momentum, and the Government of Liberia and its partners, including civil society and the public is gradually translating the Platform for Action's promises into concrete changes. These have ushered in enormous improvements in women's lives since Liberia's country report of June 2019.

While the Platform for Action envisioned gender equality in all dimensions of life and no country has yet finished this agenda; the Government of Liberia, working along with its partners and stakeholders, continues to strive in initiating and supporting gender mainstreaming policies and programs to accelerate Liberia's development as compared to the past. Although there has been significant gains since Liberia's report on the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 2019, Liberian women still remain vulnerable and experience some form of violence. As reported by Liberia's Data & Health Survey of 2019-2020, 35% of women aged 15–49 are members of the Sande society or other women's bush societies and have gone through partial or total removal of the female external genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for cultural reasons. Membership in these societies shows a sharp decline over time, from 66% in 2007 and 50% in 2013 to 35% in 2019-20. Among women who are circumcised, 25% were circumcised before age 5, 17% at age 5-9, 33% at age 10-14, and 22% at age 15 or above<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Liberia's Data & Health Survey (LDHS) of 2019-2020, Section 15.10

## **Rationale**

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) remains the ultimate leeway through which annual follow-ups are made on the progress women are making globally. While there are still inequalities affecting women to include female genital mutilation (FGM), there have been significant progresses and commitments from the Government of Liberia, through direct respectful engagements by the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection with the National Council of Chiefs and Elders of Liberia supported by the One UN System, European Union, as well as International and National Organizations, including civil society organizations.

In 2018, a one-year ban against FGM through an Executive Order was passed by former President Sirleaf, and the impact was not extensive – the ban was not largely publicized; the Executive Order was not extensively enforced with limited monitoring; the ban was considered ineffective as there were no penalties for violators. Based on studies conducted in Liberia, the practice of FGM has some economic gains benefitting female practitioners or Zoes. In this case, the ban did not address the economic benefits of female practitioners, as there was no form of economic alternative programs; thereby, creating a loop-hole in the full implementation of the ban, as well as its monitoring. The challenge of prioritizing economic gains led to continuous forceful initiation as there was unwillingness from Zoes, which also led to the increase in underage girls' initiation and their exposure to health risks (genital cutting). It was also established that there was less engagement (buy-in) with traditional chiefs and elders, which led to the ineffective implementation of the ban. Based on lessons learned, the ban helped to increase support and advocacy towards the eradication of FGM.

Subsequently, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection supported by the United Nations and the European Union as well as Sweden through the Spotlight Initiative, embarked on several activities that have led to the progress made today in terms of ending FGM. The approach to ending FGM in Liberia has been an “intentional participatory process” – the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection has maintained respect with the traditional leaders and has extensively consulted “hand in hand” with the National Council of Chiefs and Elders of Liberia as well as the donor community to be able to design and implement projects, plans and/or activities towards ending FGM in Liberia – as well as addressing the socio-economic problems associated with the traditional leaders in regards to the closure of bush schools. In 2019, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed by the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, the Ministry of Internal affairs and the National Council of Chiefs and Elders of Liberia to suspend all bush schools as an agreeable action in ending harmful traditional practices for the period of one year, to conduct inventory of traditional groves and map out traditional practitioners in FGM practicing counties.

Eventually, a three-year ban was effected in February 2022 through Consistent engagement with the authorities National Council of Chiefs and Elders of Liberia clothed with all matters relating to the FGM practice and tradition to get buy-in in all policies, projects and programs relating to traditional matters, such as FGM. This has set the pace for the significant progresses made regarding Liberia's fight towards ending FGM, within the context of the 2018 Agreed Conclusion of the 62<sup>nd</sup> Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (*Strengthen normative, legal and policy frameworks - h*) relative to the Review Theme and the Emerging Issue of the 67<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW67). Some of the progresses include but not limited to the following:

1. Full involvement and consultation with chiefs, elders and Zoes in the conduct of projects, programs, and other related activities showing ownership. As in the case of the Spotlight Initiative aimed at addressing gender-based violence and harmful practices as well as addressing adolescent girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights, the full involvement included the active participation of chiefs, elders and zoes ranging from planning to implementation of the projects, and also as beneficiaries – wherein some traditional groves are being transformed to economic livelihood and vocational centers;

2. As in the case of the temporary suspension of all Sande activities through the adoption of the Ganta Policy by traditional leaders and practitioners on June 25, 2019. This suspension was essential as it provided an opportunity to conduct an inventory of traditional practitioners and their grooves, and as well provide alternative economic livelihood for traditional practitioners. Based on the inventory done, the Traditional Council will now be able to fully monitor the identified 1,335 traditional practitioners and the 721 traditional groves within the eleven (11) FGM-practicing counties in 77 statutory and administrative districts across Liberia. To date, 300 practitioners have received alternative livelihood support as an alternative to the abandonment of the practice of FGM, and four (4) counties now have vocational and heritage centers;
3. As in the case of the Government of Liberia and Partners' Anti-SGBV Roadmap, the National Council of Chiefs and Elders extensively created awareness among traditional leaders, including Zoes regarding the need to end FGM. The awareness took the form of focal group discussion, banners, flyers, billboards, and press conference from the National Chairman, Chief Zanzan Karwor of the National Council of Chiefs and Elders of Liberia; and
4. Following the Presidential Nationwide 2021 Tour and based on reports from the tour, the President provided 30 pickups and 150 motorbikes for the National Council of Chiefs and Elders of Liberia to be used in the fifteen counties across the country to enhance their work; among others.

### **Objectives**

This year's side event intends to highlight Liberia's progress made towards ending FGM to showcase the significant achievements made while rallying the needed technical and financial support to sustain the gains made and to ensure the passage of the legislation against FGM (Anti-FGM Law), particularly portraying the pathway to eradicating FGM in Liberia, which has been possible through an intentional participatory process – traditional council taking the lead and

### **Methodology**

#### ***Filming of a Documentary***

As part of Liberia's Side Event, there will be a filming of a documentary titled - "***Pathway to Eradicating FGM in Liberia – An Intentional Participatory Process***". The Side event will be moderated by Ms. Jaha Dukureh, UN Women Global Goodwill Ambassador against FGM.

#### ***Panel Discussion***

There will be a panel discussion, including story telling of several direct stakeholders, to include female practitioners as they share their experiences and perspectives on how FGM can be addressed holistically as well as the way forward to ending FGM in Liberia.

#### ***Participatory Method***

At the close of the panel discussion, participants will be allowed to ask questions, make comments or further contribute their ideas as well as recommend ways on how we can jointly mobilize and leverage on existing resources to address FGM in Liberia.

#### ***Participants***

Participants to the event will be drawn from Liberia's Delegation and other countries' participants attending the 67<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 67).

### **Goals**

The goal of this year's side event will be to create a platform to mobilize the needed support in sustaining the gains made in ending FGM in Liberia. Members of Liberia's delegation will leverage on the networking opportunities to strengthen Liberian women's global network and increase their social capital in a manner that attracts support for the implementation of earmarked programs and projects intended to end FGM, thereby advancing Gender Equality,

vis-à-vis women economic empowerment, sexual and reproductive health and rights and women's access to infrastructure.

### **Expected Outcomes**

Financial commitments of Member States, partners, and potential donors will be solicited and most likely secured for additional funding to support the country's work around ending FGM. Additionally, the side event is expected to spike opportunities to boost pragmatic/best practices from participating countries.

A report, containing a summary of the discussion and recommendations from Member States and other stakeholders will be developed. The report will be widely disseminated, made available for the Commission on the Status of Women and on the website of UN-Women and Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (Liberia).

### **Budget**

The total cost of the budget stands at **Seventy One Thousand Nine Hundred Sixty Six United States Dollars Forty Eight Cents (US\$71,966.48)**, as breakdown below:

<b>No.</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Qty</b>	<b>Unit Cost (US\$)</b>	<b>Total Cost (\$US)</b>
1	Documentary Production	1 video	3,000.00	3,000.00
2	Cost of Hall Rental	1 hall	506.48	506.48
3	DSA & Hotel Accommodation for 16 Days	10 persons	300.00	48,000.00
4	Air Ticket (round trip)	10 persons	2,016.00	20,160.00
5	Pull-up Banners	2 pcs	150.00	300.00
<b>Grand Total (US\$)</b>				<b>71,966.48</b>

## **PROPOSED AGENDA**

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***Moderator***

Amb. H.E. Jaha Marie “Ma Musu” Dukureh,  
***UN Women Global Goodwill Ambassador against FGM & Child Marriage***  
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1. Welcome & Opening Remarks ----- Mrs. Williametta E. Saydee-Tarr  
***Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection,  
Republic of Liberia***
  
2. Filming of the Documentary on the  
***"Pathway to Eradicating FGM in Liberia – An Intentional Participatory Process"***
  
3. ***Panel Discussion: Telling the FGM Story in Liberia***
  - a. Chief Zanzan Karwor, *National Chairperson, National Council of Chiefs & Elders of Liberia*
  - b. Queen Juli Endee, *Cultural Ambassador – Republic of Liberia*
  - c. Massa M. Kandakai, *Head Zoe, Montserrado County, Republic of Liberia*
  - d. Majula B. Daramy, *Muslim Head Zoe, Republic of Liberia*
  
4. Reflection Remarks ----- Hon. Manty Tarawali  
***Minister of Gender & Children's Affairs,  
Republic of Sierra Leone***  
  
Hon. Fatou Sanyang Kinteh  
***Minister of Gender, Children & Social Welfare,  
Republic of The Gambia***

### **Q&A & Floor Engagements**

5. Special Remarks ----- Ambassador Anna Karin Eneström  
***Permanent Representative of Sweden to the United Nations &  
Chair of the PBC Liberia Country Configuration***
  
6. Closing remarks ----- Representative, Liberia's Permanent Mission to the UN