

***THE RELEVANCE OF GENDER STATISTICS IN POLICY
MAKING IN LIBERIA****

Prepared by

Jerolinmick Piah
Assistant Minister for Planning and Administration,
Ministry for Gender and Development
LIBERIA

Gender and Statistics: The Case of Liberia

“THE RELEVANCE OF GENDER STATISTICS IN POLICY MAKING IN LIBERIA”

Context:

Emerging from fourteen (14) years of civil conflict, in 2005, Liberia voted for a new future with the election of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, Liberia and Africa’s First Female President. The country was consumed by extraordinary challenges and needs: Government institutions were destroyed, capacity significantly constrained, public trust lacking, resources very limited or absent, most social services out of operations, a majority of the population uneducated and deeply affected by the war, and physical infrastructure demolished.

The Sirleaf Administration, with the support of the International Community and National Civil Society Partners, had the task and mandate to set Liberia on a new course of economic and human development --- one that secured peace, reduced poverty and fostered equality.

Within this setting, the environment of Liberia was ripe with opportunities for policy and program development to benefit women and girls. The first female President had a strong mandate to empower Liberian women and that women’s groups had gained notoriety and attention for their significant role in bringing peace to Liberia. However, translating the political will into tangible results for Liberians would require the appropriate policies and prioritization to effectively target the greatest gender gaps and needs.

Regarding the topic “The relevance of gender statistics in Liberia’s policy making Process”, it is important to understand that the Liberian Government has focused its policy development and decisions within the framework of National Poverty Reduction Strategies. In 2006, Liberia wrote its Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy (IPRS), outlining the government’s activities for the next year and a half. This was an intermediate stage of planned activities, while the government prepared and undertook the development of a comprehensive and participatory Full Poverty Reduction Strategy. The PRS was completed in March, 2008, with a three-year implementation window.

The examples of the IPRS and PRS are important to the topic of gender and statistics because they show the critical importance of statistics to developing and advocating for policies that account for gender needs and concerns. In formulating the iPRS, the Government was looking at a black hole, as far as statistics were concerned. No one knew the exact population, the poverty rate, the exact literacy rates, labor force participation, or detailed health statistics. Many of these crucial statistics became available only after surveys were conducted for the Poverty Diagnostics in the preparation of the PRS. Thus, these new statistics enabled a more enlightened and educated approach to policy development and activities prioritization within the framework of the PRS.

Why gender statistics are important for policy making: (Liberia's case)

Regarding policy-making in Liberia, gender statistics are crucial for many reasons to include 1. Prioritizing areas, 2. Designing the appropriate policies and programs and monitoring their implementation, and 3. Advocating for gender concerns and mobilizing support.

In a setting where every sector has significant needs and limitations, it is difficult to know how to prioritize with out having an exact picture of the situation. Following the war, we knew that the situation of women was grim. During the war, many were victims of sexual assault, many died during child birth many women were uneducated, compared to men. Women were prevalent in the agricultural fields and were the face of marketing and trading for the country. Everyone knew that women were active economic agents and that they were disadvantaged in their access to many inputs and services, but no one knew by how much. In this setting, it was nearly impossible to prioritize specific areas under which to focus attention on policy-making for women. Were there largest gaps and needs in health? Education? Access to finance? Economic opportunities? Women in agriculture? The Security sector? No real and tangible answers could be gotten for these questions.

Additionally, as the country looked at its overall agenda, all sectors demanded serious attention. Without statistics to show the reality, it was difficult to advocate for programs targeting women. For example, without knowing the composition of women in the agricultural sector and their access to extension services, it was difficult to make the case for large-scale programs directly targeting women farmers. Another example was that maternal health was clearly an important issue, but just how high should it be on the list of the main goals for the Ministry of Health? Hard data is important for prioritization.

Secondly, relating to policy and program design, statistics provide the necessary guidance for direction and specificity and allow the government to monitor and track progress. By providing more information on the situation, statistics allow for a better diagnosis and more targeted treatment. For example, illiteracy statistics painted a clear picture that literacy programs needed to be focused on rural women. National statistics provide us with a clear measuring stick of the success of these programs in the medium term.

Finally, by emphasizing the reality of the situation, statistics are strong tools for advocacy and for mobilizing support. For example, it is difficult to convince donors and other policy makers of the importance of supporting women in the informal economy, unless you can provide the appropriate information on the percentage of women working informally, how that compares to men, and how this sector fits in the overall picture.

Use of gender statistics in Liberia's PRS

The availability of new and reliable statistics during the PRS preparation period allowed for more effective advocacy and decision making in the PRS drafting process. The Ministry of Gender and Development's top concern was mainstreaming

gender into the deliverables in each of the four pillars: peace and security, economic revitalization, governance and rule of law, and infrastructure and basic services. Not only did statistics backed up the Ministry's emphasis on women's important role in the economy and vulnerable security situation, but even more importantly, they provide baseline indicators for the tracking of progress and successful implementation of many interventions in the PRS which take into account the differing needs of women and men, boys and girls.

For example, statistics on women's involvement in agriculture (women conduct 80% of the marketing and 60% of agricultural production activities) justified the extra emphasis on vulnerable female farmers. Intervention in PRS: "Provide inputs (seeds, tools, fertilizers, agro-chemicals) and agricultural processing equipment to vulnerable groups such as women and smallholders".

New data on the maternal mortality rate set Liberia at one of the worst rates in the world, placing a high emphasis on midwifery training and support programs in the PRS's health interventions.

Additionally, with regards to the education sector, Liberia had already introduced a Girl Child Education Policy; however, the availability of enrolment statistics and educational attainment data allows for indicators to track the success and progress of the policy at closing the gender gap in education.

Overall, as shown in the annex, the statistics gave a clear picture of just how extreme many of the gender gaps are and they justified the focus on gender mainstreaming within the policies of all line ministries.

Liberia's existing gaps

As Liberia begins to fill its vacuum of national statistics and data, the needs relating to gender are still quite large. As a government, our line ministries need capacity building in gender analysis, not only to understand the importance of sex-disaggregated statistics, but to know how to interpret them and use them effectively in policy design.

Additionally, there is a glaring gap in statistics on gender-based violence. One example of the importance of GBV statistics comes from a random survey which was conducted for women in Lofa county, one of the counties that was most effected by the war. According to the survey, 59% of women were sexually violated during the conflict. The harsh reality of this statistic emphasizes the dramatic need for national health and psychosocial programs to address their needs. Yet, national data is still lacking. While the Demographic and Health Survey of 2007 provided the first national estimates on some GBV indicators, we are still far from knowing exactly how many women are affected by GBV and who are the perpetrators. We need estimates of the percentage of women who were sexually assaulted during the war in order to appropriately target psychosocial and recovery programs. We still do not know whether rape is on the rise or decline in the country, though there is no arguing the fact that it is a serious issue. We need estimates of the occurrence and rates of

rape in order to monitor and evaluate the large-scale effort to prevent and respond to the crime.

Finally, from all of the analysis made herein, I wish to state clearly that gender statistics is extremely important for policy making in Liberia; hence the need to support the gathering of such statistics.

National Gender Based Violence Statistics
from the Liberia Demographic Health Survey (2007)

Physical Violence

- 44% of women have experienced physical violence since they were 15 years old.
- 29% of women experienced physical violence in the 12 months before the survey was taken

Sexual Violence

- 10% of Liberian women aged 15-49 who have ever had sexual intercourse say that their first sexual experience was forced against their will.
- 17.6% of women age 15-49 have experienced sexual violence. For those aged 25-39, this rate increased to 22%.
- Of those experiencing sexual violence, 32% report it coming from their current husband/partner, 10.2% from their current/former boyfriend and 8.1% from a police/soldier (Note that there is no distinction in the survey between those soldiers during the war years and police/soldiers now).

Spousal Violence

- 38.6% of ever-married women age 15-49 have experienced physical and/or sexual violence with 36.3% having experienced it in the past 12 months.
- 10.8% of ever-married women age 15-49 have experienced sexual violence from their spouse; 35.8% have experienced emotional violence and 35.0% physical violence.

FGM

- 89% of Liberian women aged 15-49 have heard of the Sande Society
- 58.2% of Liberian women aged 15-49 (39.5% of urban women and 72.0% of rural women) are members of the Sande Society (have undergone FGC).
- Of these women who have been cut, 45.2% think that the tradition should stop.

Education Statistics

From the Liberia Demographic Health Survey (2007)

Educational attainment amongst children and adults

Age		No Education	Some Primary	Completed Primary (grade 6)	Some secondary	Completed Secondary or higher
6-9	Girls	86.9	13.1	-	-	-
	Boys	87.2	12.8	-	-	-
10-14	Girls	43.8	50.3	3.3	2.3	-
	Boys	42.2	52.2	2.7	2.6	-
15-49	Women	42.4	27.0	5.2	17.6	7.7
	Men	17.6	26.6	4.9	31.9	18.9

- Literacy rates for women in rural areas is staggeringly low at 26%, compared to 61% for urban women and 60% and 86% for rural and urban men, respectively.
- The gender gap in secondary school attendance is particularly high in the rural areas with a low 6% net attendance ratio for females and 13% for males. In urban areas this gap is much smaller (29% and 32%, respectively).

Mortality Rates

LDHS 2007 and LDHS 1999/2000 (as cited in PRS, 31)

Indicator	1999/00	2007
Infant (per thousand)	117	72
Under 5 (per thousand)	194	111
Maternal (per 100,000 live births)	578	994

Labor Force Statistics

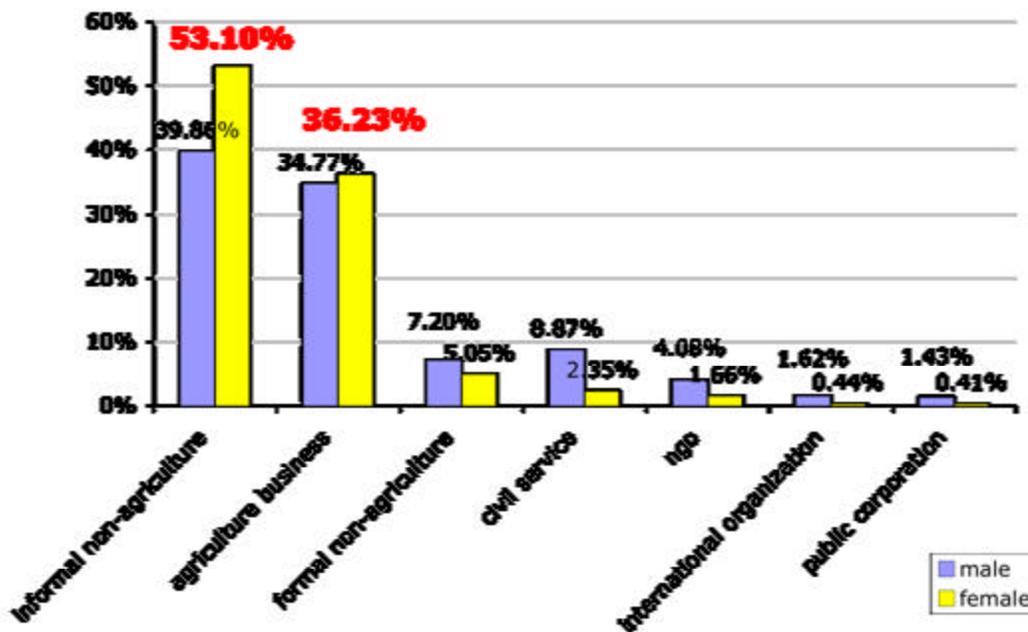
From the Common Welfare Indicator Questionnaire (CWIQ)

- Including formal and informal workers in Liberia, women make up 54% of the labor force (CWIQ 2007).
- Liberian women are disproportionately clustered in the least productive sectors with 90% employed in the informal sector or in agriculture, compared to 75% of working men. Men are more than three times as likely to be employed by the civil service, an NGO, international organization or public corporation (CWIQ 2007).
- Across Liberia's economy, working men that are paid on wages outnumber women by over three to one (25.5% of all male workers verses 8.0% of all female workers). Just under half of all Liberia's workers are engaged in unpaid family work, presumably supporting household agriculture and informal economic activities. 56% of female laborers and 38% of male laborers are engaged as unpaid family workers.

Breakdown of employers by gender

Source: CWIQ 2007

Represents proportion of all (fe)male workers employed by category



- Given women's predominance in agriculture and the informal economy, men greatly outnumber women in all other sectors of Liberia's economy. The manufacturing sector hires men at a rate of 2 men for every 1 woman. In mining and panning, more than 9 men are hired to every 1 woman. In forestry it is nearly 4:1 and in the services sector 3:2. Only in agriculture and fisheries are men and women employed at an equal 1:1 ratio.

