



USAID
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GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

FOUNDATIONAL RIGHTS AND ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES FOR ALL LIBERIANS

Communities thrive when all members of society are included and empowered. Under its current five-year Country Development Cooperation Strategy, USAID contributes to a more resilient and self-reliant Liberia by designing and implementing activities that include and empower marginalized populations including women and girls; people with disabilities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and other gender and sexual minorities (LGBTQI+); and indigenous people. Activity design and implementation centered around empowerment and social inclusion ensures the greatest impact – from closing gender gaps in education and professional opportunities to ensuring non-discrimination and inclusion of marginalized communities in the private-sector.

Liberia is not without its challenges. Gender-based violence (GBV) is widespread and often seen as a private, family matter. According to the 2019-2020 Liberia Demographic and Health Survey, 60% of women age 15-49 have experienced physical violence and 9% have experienced sexual violence. Less than half (42%) of women who have experienced physical or sexual violence have ever sought help. Women are still limited in their participation in political processes, people with disabilities often experience extreme poverty, and LGBTQI+ people continue to face discrimination and hostility both under the law as well as within their individual communities. Despite these challenges USAID, along with community stakeholders, continues to promote and prioritize gender equality and social inclusion across its portfolio in Liberia.

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Recognizing that women often lack the means to obtain financial support and business skills, USAID conducts capacity-building training and sponsors small business loans to provide Liberian women and

youth with market-driven economic opportunities. For example, USAID is supporting women smallholder rice farmers in Lofa County by contracting plowing services which use power tillers for their rice fields, thereby easing the level of physical labor demanded for rice cultivation.

EQUAL LAND RIGHTS

Land rights and tenure security are critical to social and economic empowerment. However, longstanding cultural norms and practices have favored men in property and inheritance rights in Liberia. Women farmers face heavy restrictions, including facing barriers to planting cash crops that could help lift them out of poverty. USAID has been a key partner in helping the Liberian government implement the Land Rights Act to rectify historical inequities. USAID partners with communities to establish gender equitable local governance bodies and help them navigate the six-step process for formal recognition of their land.

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GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV)

From domestic violence to female genital mutilation (FGM) and pressure for students to exchange sex for grades, GBV is a wide-spread problem in Liberia. According to the 2019-2020 Liberia Demographic and Health Survey, female circumcision is widely practiced on women ages 15-49. The prevalence of female circumcision varies among counties from a low of 2% in River Gee and 3% each in Maryland and Grand Kru to a high of 78% in Gbarpolu and 71% in Grand Cape Mount. Recent studies on increased GBV during the COVID-19 pandemic highlight the vulnerability of Liberian women to external shocks. USAID engages parents and teachers in the prevention and response to GBV in schools and communities, promotes open dialogues and community forums to address issues of domestic violence, and supports conflict mitigation and reconciliation efforts. USAID gathers relevant GBV and FGM data for robust policy development through the Demographic and Health Survey and the Margibi County My Voice Platform, which is a web-based system that receives SMS messages or direct calls from GBV victims and provides referrals to support services.

WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP

Gender disparities in Liberia span political participation, personal autonomy, and access to and control over assets, resources, and finances. USAID's Democracy, Rights, and Governance activities seek to promote greater gender equality in the political process through increased female participation and leadership. USAID has strengthened the role of women within political parties by designing and delivering advanced campaign skills training and follow-on support for women political party members.

WOMEN AND GIRLS IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR

USAID education activities in Liberia place special emphasis on outreach to and retention of female learners, teachers, and administrators, since women and girls are significantly underrepresented across the education sector. USAID supported child and teenage mothers who left school due to pregnancy by providing them with teaching and learning materials, socio-emotional learning and school enrollment, and mentoring teachers in trauma-affected learning environments. USAID continues to identify and train women school administrators and educators. With USAID's support, the Government of Liberia's Ministry of Education revised teaching and learning materials to ensure the positive representation of gender roles in rural and urban contexts, people with disabilities, and religious minorities.

HUMAN RIGHTS OF GENDER AND SEXUAL MINORITIES

Liberia's laws criminalize same-sex sexual conduct and there is significant societal biases and discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, and other gender and sexual minorities (LGBTQI+) in Liberia. The stigma and discrimination experienced by the LGBTQI+ community, coupled with the prevailing negative public attitudes towards sexual and gender minorities, contributes to a hostile and often volatile social climate for LGBTQI+ people. USAID's Democracy, Rights, and Governance program advances LGBTQI+ rights, while USAID's health programming empowers the LGBTQI+ community to lead efforts that improve access to and the quality of HIV services for key populations in Liberia.

DISABILITY INCLUSION

USAID continues to support the Liberia School for the Blind to ensure that all children, regardless of ability, have access to education, assistive equipment, and learning materials. USAID support includes materials to read and write in Braille and teacher training materials which help ensure that the school is self-sufficient in its curriculum development and teaching methodology.

PROMOTING THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

USAID's Rule of Law activity in Liberia supported the drafting of and legislative outreach on the Land Rights Act, which was enacted in 2018 and hailed by land experts, Liberian civil society organizations, and other land stakeholders as one of Africa's most progressive land reform laws. The Land Rights Act was informed by consultations with indigenous communities from across the nation. For the first time in the country's nearly 200-year history, Liberia now recognizes customary land ownership by allowing indigenous people to own and manage their ancestral lands. Since the passage of the Act, USAID has supported several indigenous communities in completing the required process to obtain formal recognition of their land. Additionally, USAID's biodiversity activities consult forest communities in developing protections for Liberia's forests and wildlife while promoting livelihoods that preserve each community's indigenous culture.