



BASELINE STUDY REPORT ON WOMEN ACCESS TO INFORMATION THROUGH MOBILE AND MEDIA COMMUNICATION SERVICES

**A Research Initiative of the
LIBERIA WOMEN MEDIA ACTION COMMITTEE (LIWOMAC)**

**Funded by:
United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF)**

SEPTEMBER 2014

**BASELINE STUDY
REPORT**

**On Women Access to Information
through Mobile and Media Communication
Services**

UNDEF



**The United Nations
Democracy Fund**



LIWOMAC

**Liberia Women Media
Action Committee Inc.**

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September 2014

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I. Abbreviations and Acronyms

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CBO	Community Based Organization
E-Consult	Electronic Communications Consulting Services
HRBA	Human Rights Based Approach
HIV	Human Immune Virus
LMC	Liberia Media Center
LMA	Liberia Marketing Association
LIBTELCO	Liberia Telecommunication Company
LWDR	Liberia Women Democracy Radio
LIWOMAC	Liberia Women Media Action Committee
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SMS	Short Message Services
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Science
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNDEF	United Nations Development Fund
WONGOSOL	Women NGO Secretariat of Liberia

II. Acknowledgement

This baseline study would not have been possible without teamwork and dedication from several resource persons who contributed invaluable time, ideas, and wealth of experiences. The enumerators who conducted the survey and field interviews deserve special thanks as well.

LIWOMAC also extends its profound gratitude to survey respondents and key informants in the four targeted counties. We are thankful to the local authorities in Lofa, Nimba, Bong and Montserrado Counties for their cooperation, and remain grateful for the time, energy and insights provided to inform this valuable research work.

Sincere appreciation is also owed to the Electronic Communication Consulting Services (E-Consult) who conducted the study, analyzed the research findings and produced this final research report.

Finally, we owe huge gratitude to our donors, the United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF) for their support towards promoting work around women empowerment, peace, security, human rights, and media development.

This research report is the responsibility of the Liberia Women Media Action Committee and does not necessarily reflect the views of any donor or partner.

III. Foreword

The Liberian ICT Sector is still developing. Aside from inadequate infrastructures, telecommunication companies in the country generally face network problems. Also, government agencies responsible for ICT related services are way below the standard lines and cannot adequate support to enable the highest quality telecommunication service. Nevertheless, mobile technology has expanded across the country over the last ten years and is potentially a vehicle to improve information access, enhance governance processes and promote development.

The Liberia Women Media Action Committee (LIWOMAC) recognizes the role improved information access can play particularly in advancing women, and generally in promoting citizen's engagement in governance and national development processes. Thus, we commissioned this survey with funding from the United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF) to give better understanding and find useful information about women information preferences and daily use of mobile phones.

LIWOMAC will use the information contained in this report to develop contents for radio programming and enable us define a structural approach to engendering the interest and voices of women, and further widen the information floodgate between national leadership and local communities through a radio-mobile integrated system. While services to be provided would be accessible to every citizens, our major goal is to empower mostly rural level women to access critical information, and create opportunity for them to constantly influence news items on the Liberia Women Democracy Radio (LWDR FM 91.1), as well as, discourses around national development, peace and security.

As an organization, LIWOMAC works with a mission to empower women in poor grassroots communities through media and advocacy. We remain committed to the cause of women in Liberia and will work collaboratively with multiple partners on these fronts to help reverse the situation of Liberian women and girls.



T. Estella Nelson
President

IV. Executive Summary

This report documents the findings and outcome of a baseline survey on women access to mobile phones, news and information preference.

The study was commissioned by the Liberia Media Action Committee (LIWOMAC) and funded by UNDEF. The survey seeks to project deep insight into women use of mobile phones, their news and information preferences and the utility of mobile phones in other areas of their daily lives. The outcome of this baseline study would help in crafting program content for radios and determine strategies for engaging the beneficiaries with the aim to have an improved participation of women in mobile phone usage and access to news and information.

Methodology: The data collection method used in this study involved a perception survey, where a structured questionnaire with pre-coded responses was used to collect quantitative data samples. The data collection process also use of key informant interviews and an extensive desk review during which qualitative data were collected and ~~analysed~~analyzed from CBOs, CSOs, Women Organizations and other stakeholders.

Findings from the study show that:

- Out of a total 400 participants, 374 respondents, representing 93.5%, know how to use cell phones, while 26, representing 6.5%, have no knowledge whatsoever about cell phone usage. This finding is indicative of a relatively high knowledge of mobile phones utility.
- The result also indicates that Lonestar has the highest penetration level of 35%. Among the most frequently used GSM networks, Lonestar Cell registered the highest amount of users, 44.6% (146) while Cellcom is 17.1% (56). Novafone has the lowest level of usage 0.6% (2). As a result of advancement in technology with mobile phones now equipped with dual SIM carriages; about 37% (121) respondents are dual subscribers.
- On the usage of mobile phones to listen to radio, the result shows that of the 326 (83%) participants who own cell phones, 217 of these respondents, representing 58.5% use their phones to listen to radio, while 135 respondents, representing 36.4% do not use their phones to listen to radio. The regularity of using mobile phones to listen to radio varies.

- Illiteracy was found to be the major cause of inability to access SMS on phones by 53.9% of the respondents.
- Usage of mobile phones to send messages on women issues to women is very low. Only 53 respondents (15.6%) said they do send messages on women issues, while a whopping 247 (72.9%) responded in the negative.
- Receiving messages on women rights' issue is also low with only 75 (22.9%) admitting receiving such messages on their phones and 208 (63.6%) of respondents don't receive such messages.
- The finding also reveals that radio is the most frequent source of news and information with 77% (292) of respondents citing radio as the most frequent source of news and information. Radio is also the most trusted source of information with UNMIL radio being the most listened to radio station.
- Access to quality of information by women is less than encouraging. Of the participants in the survey, 48% of the respondents (190) believe women have access to quality information while 22.5% (89) don't believe so and 107 (27%) don't know.

In view of the findings, the following recommendations are propounded in order to improve women's usage of mobile phones and access to news and information.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Create awareness and educate women on the importance and usage of mobile phones
- Have prepaid lines for women to call to radio stations
- More women should be involved in media discussions
- Radio stations must have specially tailored programs that focus on women and critical women issues.
- Women must be made to have the confidence to demand information.
- Educative messages can be passed to women through the mobile phones

V. Project Background

Although there are preliminary data on mobile penetration across the target areas disaggregated by gender, age and occupation, there is however urgent need for a concentrated study on women use of mobile phones, their news and information preferences and the utility of the mobile phone in other areas of their daily lives. This baseline is critical to confirming or reaffirming some of the assumptions and data already available. The study is commissioned by LIWOMAC, under an UNDEF funded project.

The baseline study report and its recommendations will be useful in monitoring the project progress and impact. The M&E department ensured that the baseline was carried out consistent with the PD and RF and administered quality assurance standards like pre-deployment of questionnaire to ensure data integrity in the first quarter.

a) Historical /Political Context

The history of Liberia is laden with the numerous roles women have played in charting the course of the nation. Women constitute 54% of the labor force in both the formal and informal sectors. However, women remain among the most disadvantaged. Forty two percent (42%) of Liberian women have never attended school, as compared to 18% of Liberian men. The female illiteracy rate is staggeringly high with various studies putting the figure between 60 to 78%, with only 8% of women having completed secondary school or higher.

The Liberian Maternal Mortality Rate is one of the highest in the world, as is the teenage pregnancy rate, with 48% of Liberian girls having children before the age of 18. Women are also exposed to gender based violence, sexual exploitation and disproportionately to HIV/AIDS, especially among young girls.

The women of Liberia were very active in ensuring the return of peace to Liberia after a devastating 14 years of civil upheaval. The election of Africa's first democratically elected president, Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in 2005 was made possible by the massive participation of the Liberian women in the election process. The government of President Johnson-Sirleaf is committed to achieving gender equality and women's rights as a means to maintain peace, reduce poverty, enhance justice and promote sustainable development. The National Gender Policy and the National Action Plan on Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 are examples of this commitment.

b) Socio-economic and cultural context

The social consequences of the 14 years civil war, huge economic challenges compounded by the vast damage on infrastructure and access to basic services, have translated into higher rates of maternal and neonatal deaths, unwanted teenage pregnancies and unsafe abortions. Gender-based violence (including rape) substance abuse and increased violence have left most young people with psychosocial trauma. The health care system and health workforce are fragmented, uneven and heavily dependent on vertical programmes and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Basic social services like primary health, electricity, water, education, Economic activities in the Liberian economy is still gradually recovering as the Government has been struggling to put into place system and structures through several of its policies.

Empowering women is central to development initiatives that respond to their needs, rights, aspirations and talents of all Liberians. In line with equal rights and freedoms for all, women and men have been competing for the same opportunities and decision-making power regarding national issues, household economy and their own bodies. The war exacerbated gender inequality in Liberia; a vast majority of women and girls suffered various types of violence including sexual abuse and gender-based violence, forced sex in exchange for food and survival, forced and early marriage and unwanted pregnancies due to rape. Liberia has a multi-ethnic and cultural environment with 16 local dialects.

Many of the tribal groups are interlinked and shared commonalities in diets, dialects, language, culture, beliefs, values and norms. Mainstreaming gender issues into national policies and frameworks while promoting equality in terms of socio-economic opportunities, promises to enhance inclusiveness and solidarity among a war-affected population. The pursuit of a strong gender policy in Liberia will ensure more effective use of the human capacity of Liberia, accelerate economic and social development and sustain long term poverty reduction. Capacity development in gender planning, monitoring and evaluation is essential for the Ministry of Gender and Development, line ministries, local governments and civil society organizations.

Media, Communication and Information context

The media landscape in Liberia is male dominated. Women in the media are confronted with numerous challenges. Various studies show that women account for a mere 13 to 16% of the total number of journalists in the country, and hold less than 5% of clout positions. In fact, there are only four women

managers at the nearly 40 newspapers and more than 20 radio stations in Monrovia.

The lack of female leadership in the media has a direct correlation to power in decision making, especially editorial decision making. To quote a participant of a United Nations sponsored online global conversation on gender equality in the media, the dominance of men in leadership roles in the media is “automatically reflected in the editorial choices a newspaper or other medium makes”. In most institutions, the editorial decision on which stories make the news and how news is sourced rests with top management, which is male dominated.

The only functioning female owned radio station in Monrovia as of July 2014, is the Liberia Women Democracy Radio (LWDR), owned and operated by Liberia Women Media Action Committee (LIWOMAC).

Although there is also a newspaper (WOMEN VOICES) that tries to highlight women issues; most media houses favor political stories. Since women are very few in politics, they are often not in media headlines. Stories where women are more portrayed in the media are human interest stories, like rape and gender based violence.

Internet connectivity is largely restricted to Monrovia and other urban cities. Lack of internet connectivity in the rural areas also makes it difficult for women in these areas to receive news and information.

This and other reasons probably account for reasons why many women are not knowledgeable on developmental issues or conversant with news and information on women matter.

Study Rationale

Though there are preliminary data on mobile penetration across the target areas disaggregated by gender, age and occupation, there is, however, an urgent need for a concentrated study on women use of mobile phones, their news and information preferences and the utility of the mobile phone in other areas of their daily lives. This baseline is critical to confirming or reaffirming some of the assumptions and data already available. The study is commissioned by LIWOMAC under an UNDEF funded project. The baseline study report and its recommendations will be useful in monitoring the project progress and impact.

Study Objective

The primary objective of the study is to determine, analysis and report, through evidence-based quantitative and qualitative data, on audience use of mobile phones for news gathering purposes and media penetration across the country and the role of ICTs in promoting news gathering and information dissemination.

Scope and Methodology

The study covered four out of Liberia's 15 political sub-divisions (Montserrado, Bong, Lofa and Nimba Counties) The data collection in this study involves a perception survey where a structured questionnaire with pre-coded responses was used to collect quantitative data from ordinary women and men. In the second method, desk review and key informant interview were used to collect qualitative data from CBOs, CSOs, Women Organizations and other stakeholders.

Limitations

It is significantly important to indicate that due to the logistical and weather constraints the study did not capture data from all the 15 counties in Liberia but rather four (Montserrado, Nimba, Bong and Lofa Counties).

Demographic and Socio-Political Profile of Target Areas-

Located in West Africa, Liberia is bounded on the north by the Republic of Guinea, in the east by the Republic of Cote d' Ivoire, in the south and southeast by the Atlantic Ocean and the on the west by Sierra Leone. It has an area of 111,400 square kilometres and encompasses a territory of 43,000 square miles. It has a total landmass of 111,370 square miles¹. The country is made up of different ethnic groups, of which 95% are of indigenous stock namely: Kpelle, Bassa, Gio, Kru, Grebo, Mandingos, Mende, Krahn, Gola, Gbandi, Lorma, Kissi, Vai, Dei, Belle and Sarpo².

Liberia comprises 15 counties or political sub-divisions, namely: Montserrado, Margibi, Bong, Lofa, Bomi, Gbarpolu, Grand Cape Mount, Grand Gedeh, Grand Kru, Grand Bassa, River Cess, River Gee, Maryland, Sinoe and Nimba. Below is the demographic and socio-political profile of the four (4) targeted counties of the study:

Montserrado County

¹ Geography of Liberia , www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberia

² Pepper Coast before 1822-Liberia, www.liberiapastandpresent.org

Montserrado County lies on the north-western portion of the country. It has four districts: Careyburgs District, Greater Monrovia District, St. Paul River District, and Todee District. The capital of the county is Bensonville³. Montserrado is the smallest county by size in Liberia with an area of 1,909 square kilometers but has the largest population of 32.8% (1,144,806)⁴ of the total population of Liberia. About half of all Liberians live in Greater Monrovia. As of 2008 census it had a population of 1,144,806 inhabitants. It is home to all the tribes in the country. It is a multi-cultural county and has the Liberia's capital which is Monrovia. Christians comprise an estimated 68.2 percent of the population, with Muslims totaling 31.8 percent. Greater Monrovia⁵ is comprised of the townships and cities surrounding the nation's capital, excluding the municipalities of Monrovia.

Over one million people reside in Monrovia, and the area boasts a representation of all the 16 major tribal groups of Liberia. The majority is engaged in business, mostly medium, small, and micro in nature, and mostly informal. Others commute to white collar jobs with Government ministries and agencies, international and national organizations headquartered in Monrovia. Townships and cities in the rural parts of Montserrado have less accessibility to social services compared to those residing in the Capital. These townships particularly suffer from deplorable roads and insufficient water and sanitation facilities.

Lofa County

Lofa is situated in the northern most portion of the country, Voinjama serves as the capital with an area of the county measuring 9,982 square miles.⁶ As of the 2008 Housing and Population Census, it had a population of 270,114. It has six districts: The districts are divided along tribal lines. Lofa County seven political sub-divisions, namely: Salayea, Zorzor, Voinjama, Kolahun, Foya and Vahun; one Township, Zogolomai, and , Quadru Gboni. The capital of Lofa is Voinjama. At least six of Liberia's tribes (Lorma, Kissi, Gbondi, Mende, Mandingo and Kpelle)⁷ are resident in Lofa County. Traditional culture remains strong in Lofa with the Poro and Sande societies still playing a critical role in the education and initiation of boys and girls. The two largest tribes are the Lorma and Gbandi, which are largely Christian and Muslim respectively.

³ Liberia History up to 1847, Dr. Joseph Saye Guannu, 1983

⁴ 2008 National Housing and Population Census, unstats.un.org

⁵ Montserrado Count Development Agenda, www.emansion.gov.lr/doc

⁶ GeoHive-Liberia's Population Statistics , www.geohive.org/africa/liberia

⁷ Lofa County Development Agenda, www.emansion.gov.lr/doc

The two coexisted peacefully prior the conflict, but current issues of land ownership, traditional practices and power sharing have led relations to deteriorate. Before the war, Lofa was considered the “breadbasket” of Liberia as a result of its high level of food production, especially of rice, the national staple food.

Bong County

Bong County is situated roughly at the geographic center of Liberia. It is bordered by Lofa County on Northwest, Gbarpolu County on the West, Margibi County on the Southwest, Grand Bassa County on the South and South-East, and Nimba County on the East and the North-East. On the North, Bong County is bordered by the Republic of Guinea. It is Kpelle both in scope and pigmentation. However, there are other minority tribes found in the capital – Gbarnga and in the outskirts of the county particularly in bordering areas. The county is made up of eight districts, they are: Fuama, Jorquelleh, Kokoya, Panta-Kpa, Salala, Sanoyea, Suakoko and Zota. Islam and Christianity are both practiced in the county. Bong is the third most populous county in Liberia, 2008 National Population and Housing Census put the population of Bong at 328,919. The county is noted for agriculture⁸.

Nimba County

Like Bong County, Nimba is located in the north-central portion of the country. It is the second most populous county in the country. The 2008 NHPC report put it at 462,062.⁹ The county is home to the Gios, Manos, and Mandingos, but predominantly Gio and Mano. It has six districts, namely: Gbehlageh, Saclepea, Sanniquelleh Mahn, Tappita, Yarwein Mehnsohneh, Zoegeh; Its capital is Sanniquelleh, commonly known as San City. Christianity, Islam, Bahai Faith and African Traditional Religion are practiced in Nimba.

Targeted Counties and Graphical Representation of Key Findings

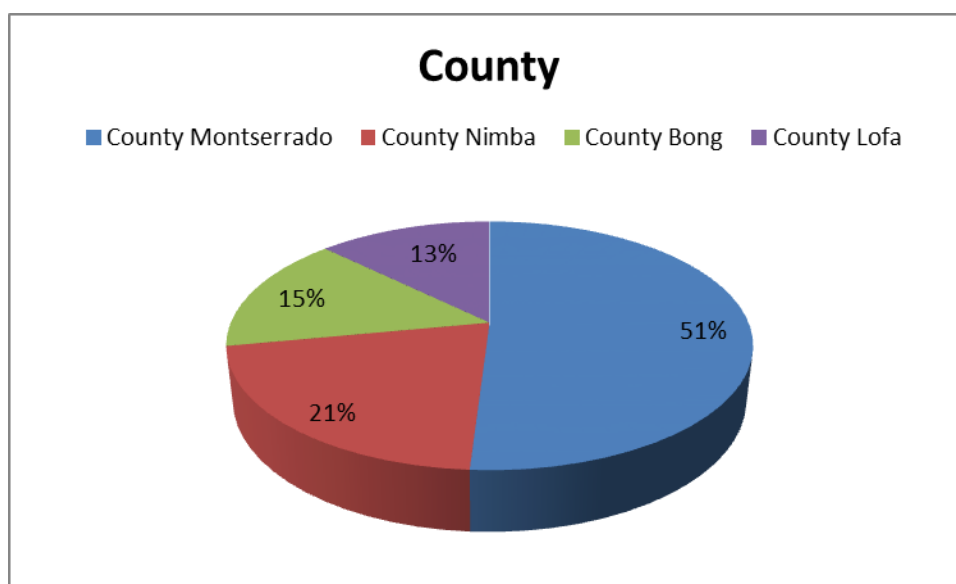
VI.

County	Questionnaires	%
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⁸ Bong County Development Agenda, www.emansion.gov.lr/doc

⁹ Liberia Population Demographics, www.indexmundi.com

Montserrado	204	51
Nimba	84	21
Bong	61	15.3
Lofa	51	12.8
Total	400	100

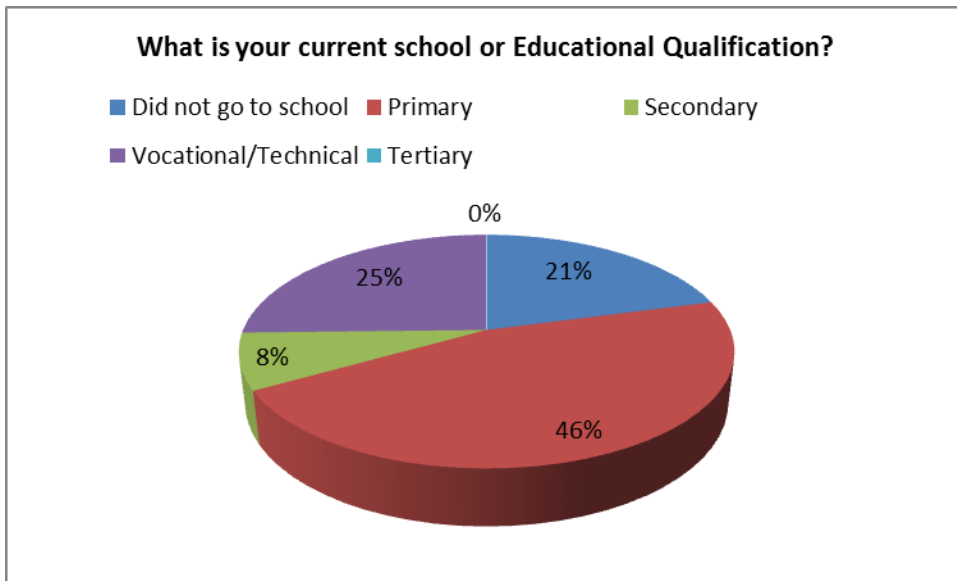


Socio-demographic

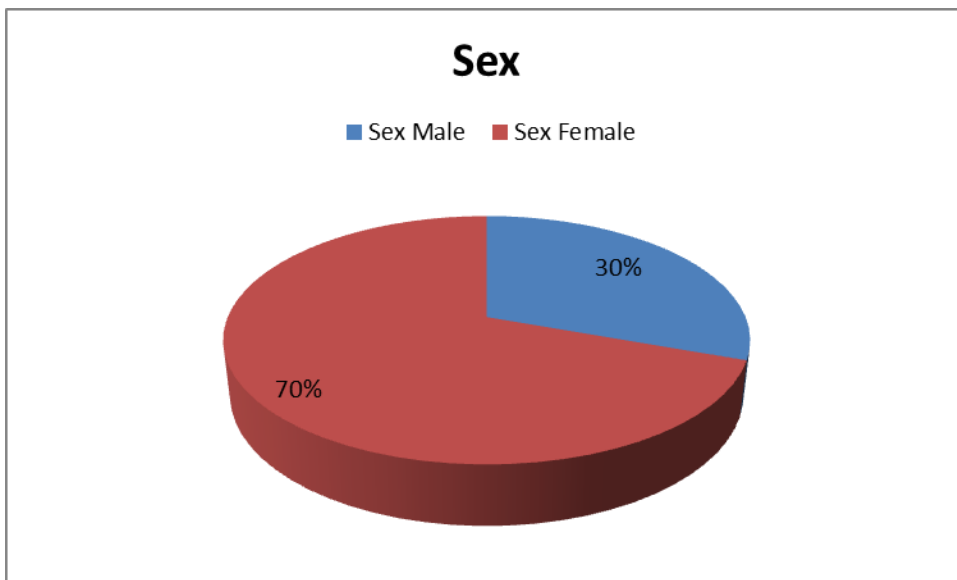
Education

The women access to mobile phones, news and information preference survey was commissioned by the Liberia Media Action Committee (LIWOMAC) and funded by UNDEF. The survey was conducted in four counties; Montserrado, Nimba, Bong and Lofa counties. 8 field officers were trained and dispatched to the targeted counties. A total of 400 questionnaires were administered in the four counties by the 8 field officers.

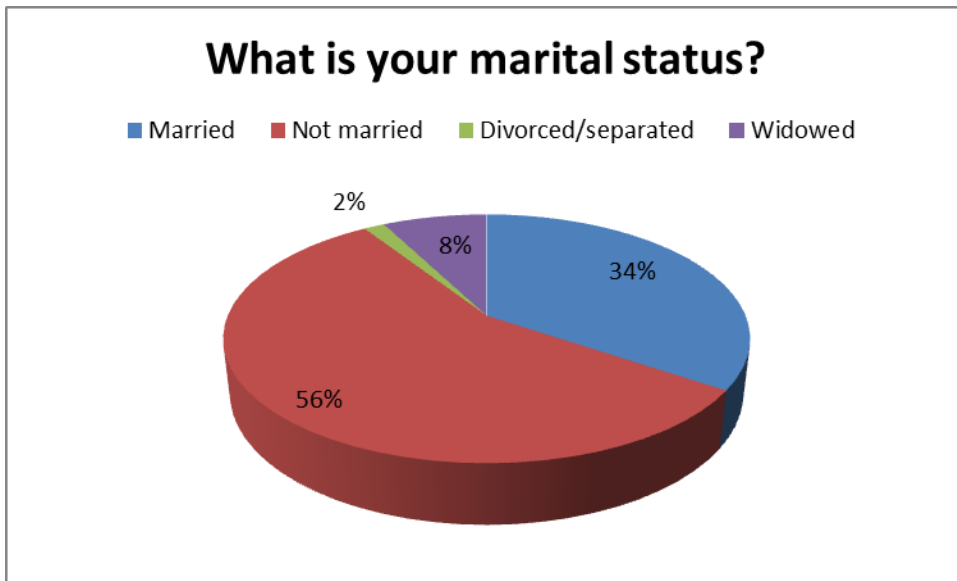
A team of data entry clerks collated questionnaires and entered the data. A data analyst later did the analysis using SPSS software. The outcome of the analysis revealed that of the 400 participants in the survey, 20.9% (83) are Uneducated; majority have primary education 46% (183) while secondary education is 7.8% (31) with 25.4% in vocational education (101).



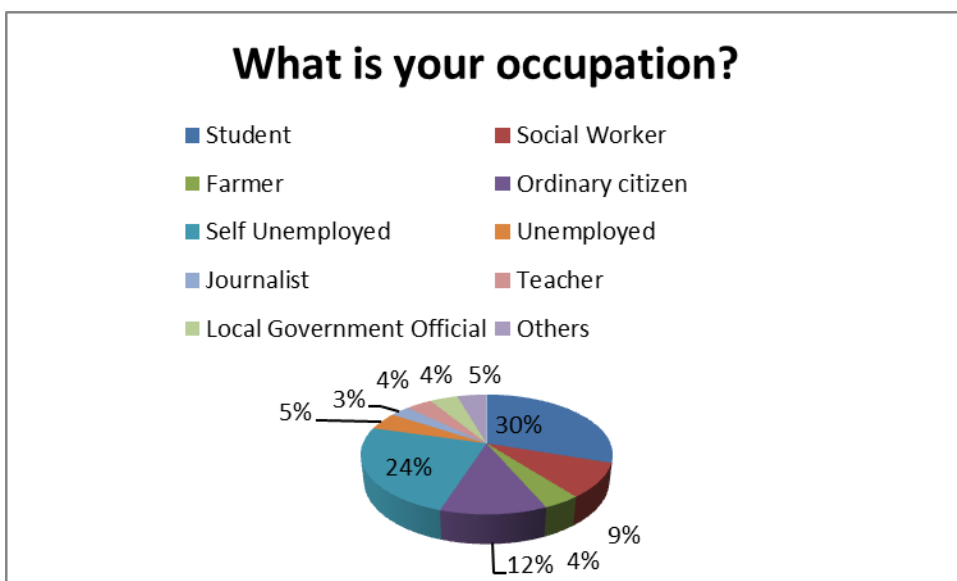
Sex: Participation in the survey was female dominated, 69% (276) while the male participants were 121 (30.5%).



Marital status: The number of unmarried participants dominated with 56.4% (221), Married 34.4% (135), while the widowed is 7.7% (30) and the divorced/separated was least with 1.5% (6).



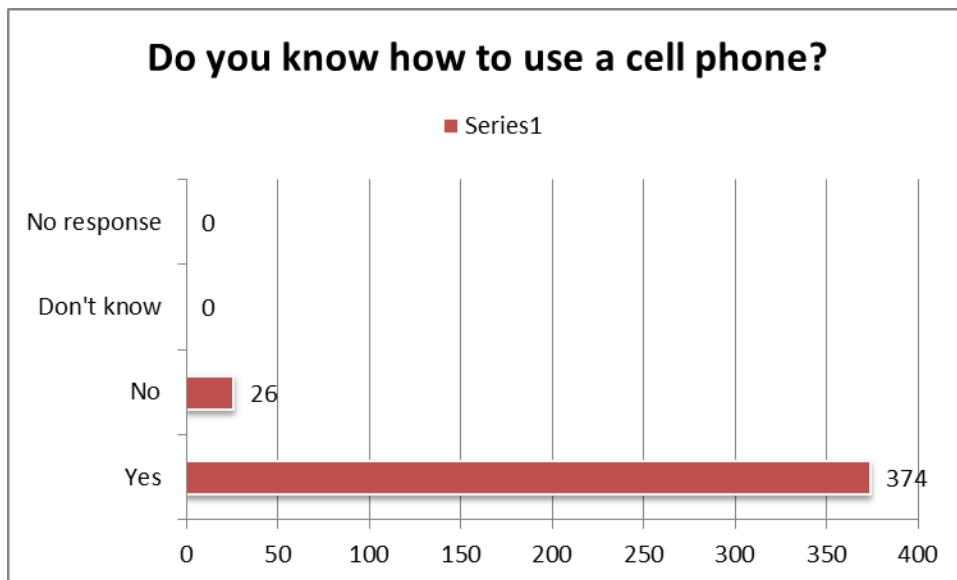
Occupation: Occupational breakdown shows the employed at 45% (179), Students 120 30.2% (120) with unemployed at 24.4% (19) and others 20.1% (80%).



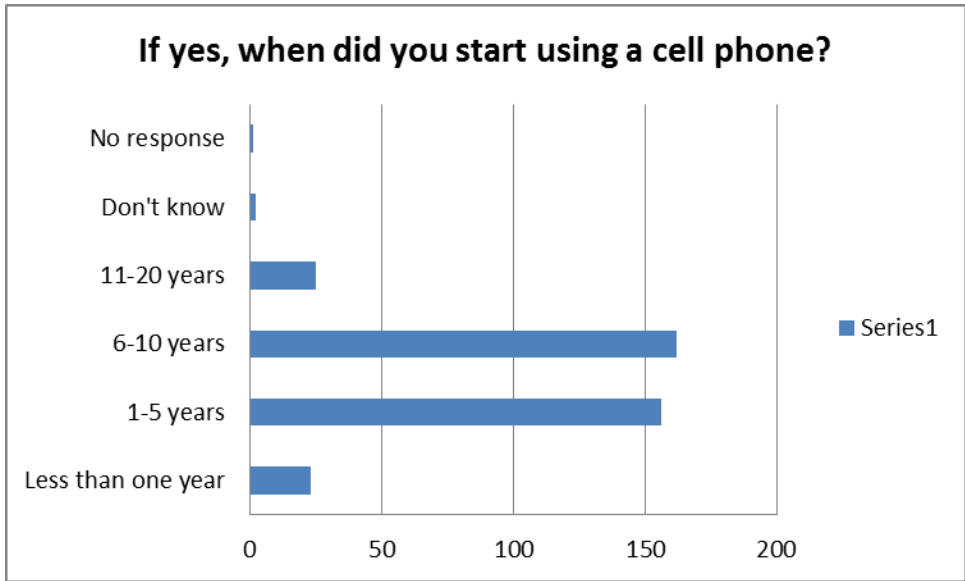
i. Women Awareness and Usage of Mobile phones and SMS

The penetration level of mobile phones in Liberia is an important factor in determining the awareness and usage by women. According to the Liberia Telecommunication Authority, Mobile penetration in Liberia is about 68% and Internet is about 21%.

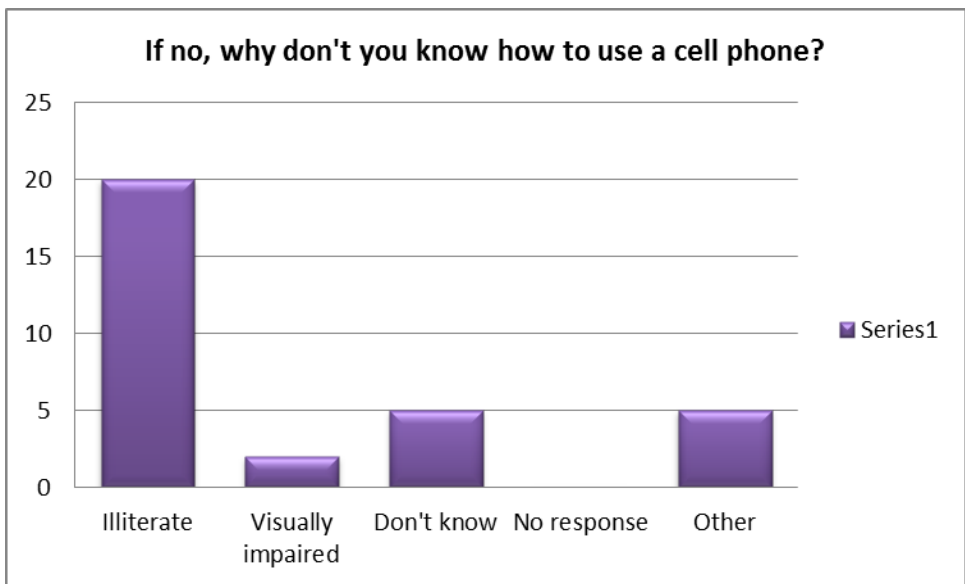
A perception survey to gauge the awareness level of the usage of mobile phones and SMS by women in Liberia indicates that out of 400 participants, 374 respondents (93.5%) know how to use cell phone, while 26 (6.5%) don't. This shows there is a high knowledge on the use of mobile phones.



The survey further indicates that 156 (42.3%) have been using cell phone for about 1- 5 years, while 162 (43.9%) have been using cell phones for about 6-10years. 23 respondents (6.2%) started less than a year ago. However some of the respondents, 20 (62.5%) don't know how to use a phone because they are illiterate while 2(6.3%) respondents say they don't know how to use a phone because they are visually impaired. Out of the total number 400 respondents that the questionnaires were administered, 326 (83%) claim to own cell phones while 65 (16.5%) respondents say they don't have any.

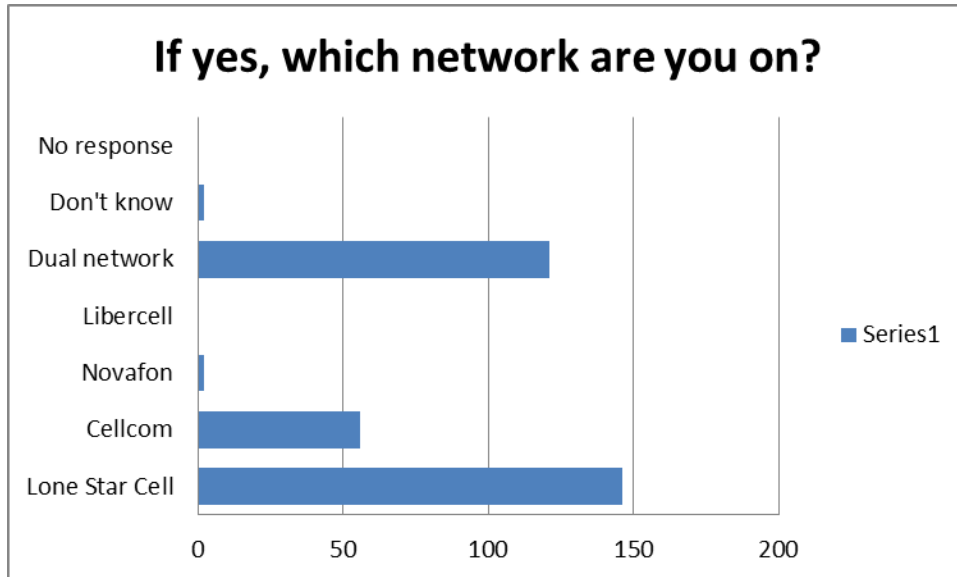


Liberia currently has four mobile communication service providers – Lonestar, Cellcom, Novafone and the government owned Libtelco. Of these service providers, Lonestar has the highest penetration level of 35%. It is thus not surprising that the survey result shows that Lonestar cell is the most frequently used network; 44.6% (146) while Cellcom is 17.1% (56). Novafone has the lowest level of usage, 0.6% (2).

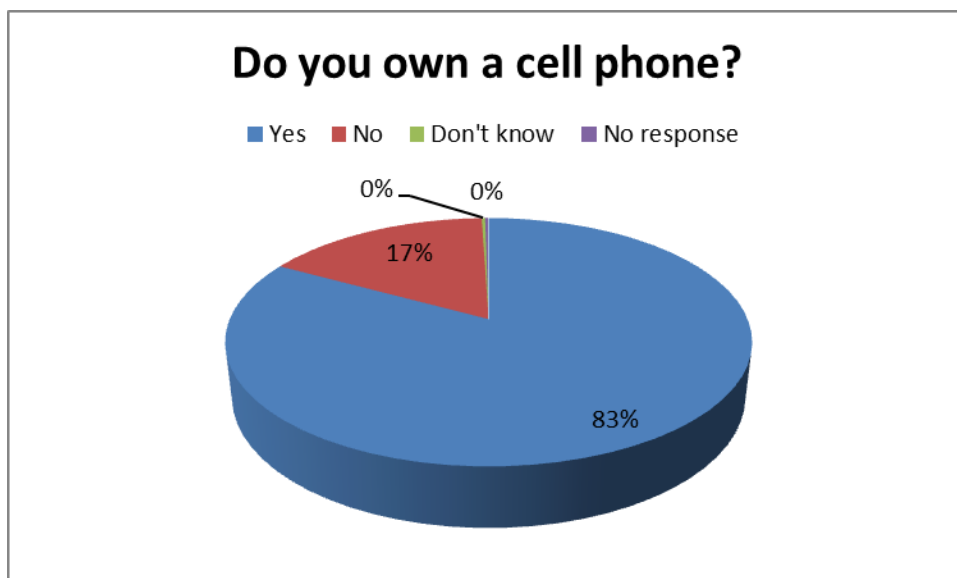


Securing disaggregated data on mobile usage by gender is somehow difficult. Communication service providers are reluctant to release such information. However, data from the business intelligent unit of the biggest telecommunication company in Liberia- Lonestar Cell indicate that of the 1,963,027 subscribers as shown by the SIM registration process, 1,272,384 are male, while women stand at 690,643.

As a result of advancement in technology with mobile phones now equipped with dual SIM carriages, about 37% (121) respondents are dual subscribers. However, 59 (74.7%) respondents don't own a phone but have access to it, while 10 (12.7%) don't own phone and have no access to any.



Of those respondents that have no phones of their own and have no access to phones, six respondents, representing 42.9%, say they don't have access to a phone because there is none in their household, while two, representing 14.3%, cited the lack of communication network in their areas as reason for not owning or having access to a phone.

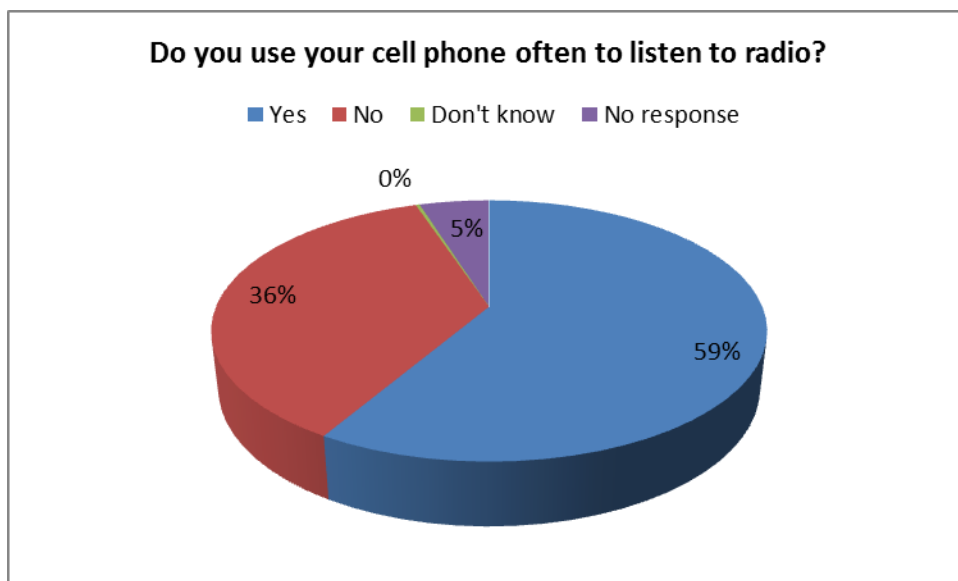


The usage of phones as a means of communication cannot be overemphasized. According to the Secretary General of the Liberia Marketing Association, F. Clayplah Nagbe, educative messages can be passed to women through the mobile phones. "At the LMA, our market

women mostly do business transactions nowadays through mobile phones. When market women in Monrovia want bags of beans in Lofa, they call the seller in Lofa to send the bags through a driver they both agree on. On delivery of the beans the market women send the cash through the same driver. So instead of paying transportation to Lofa for beans, they only make phone calls."

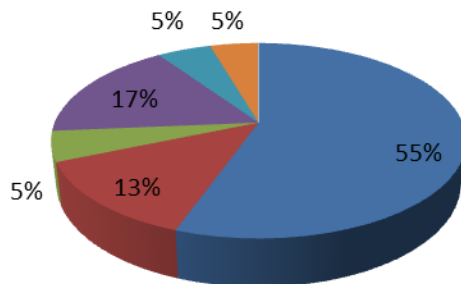
Usage of Phones to listen to radio

Usage of mobile phones to listen to radio is slowly gaining grounds. Of the 326 (83%) participants who own cell phone; 58.5% (217) of these use their phones to listen to radio while 36.4% (135) don't. The regularity of using mobile phones to listen to radio varies. About 55.5% (122) of the respondents who listen to radio on their phones do so daily, while 13.2% (29) only listen to radio on their phones 2-3 times weekly. 16.8% (37) sometimes do so and 5% (11) of respondents each either listen to radio on their phone once a week or seldom do so.



If Yes, how often do you use your cell phone to listen to radio?

■ Daily ■ 2-3 times weekly ■ Once weekly
 ■ Sometimes ■ Very seldom ■ No response

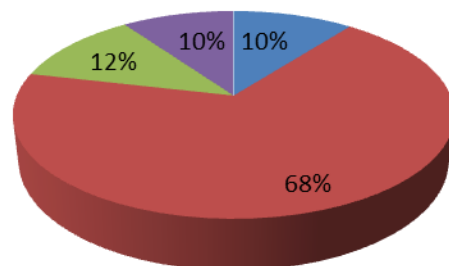


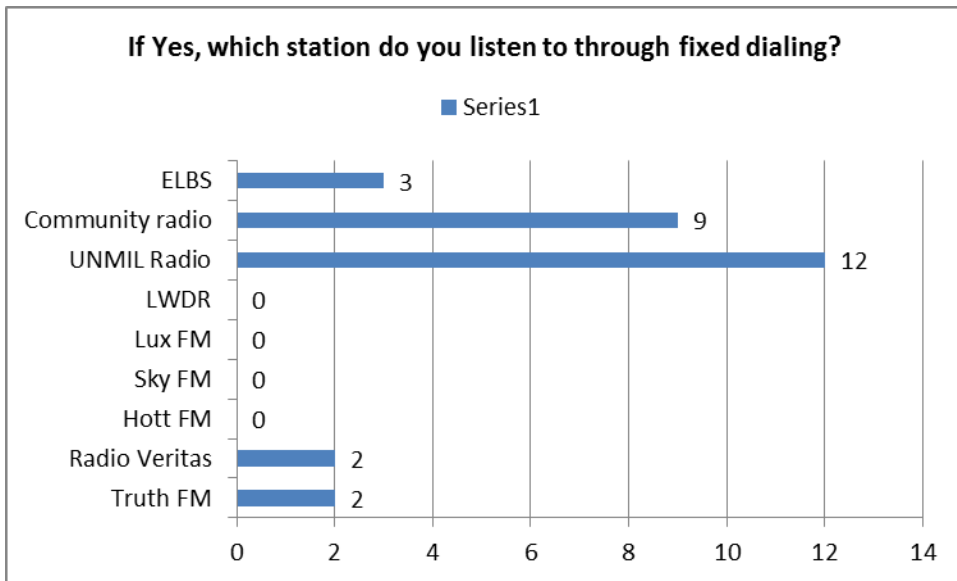
For those who use fixed dialing to access radio on their phone, the figure stands at only 10.5%, representing 30 respondents. On the other hand, 194 respondents, representing 68.1% don't use fixed dialing, while 33 of them, representing 11.6%, don't even know what fixed dialing is. Of those who use fixed dialing to listen to radio on their phone, 42.9% (12) listen to UNMIL radio; 32.1% (9) listen to community radio stations, while Truth FM and Radio VERITAS account for 7.1% (2) each. Three respondents representing 10.7% listen to the national radio station, ELBC.

According to the President of the Ganta Concern Women in Nimba County, Musu Kardimie, out of about 200 members of the organization 50% have phones but only 20% of that number knows how to access radio on their phones.

Do you use fixed dialing to access radio on your phone

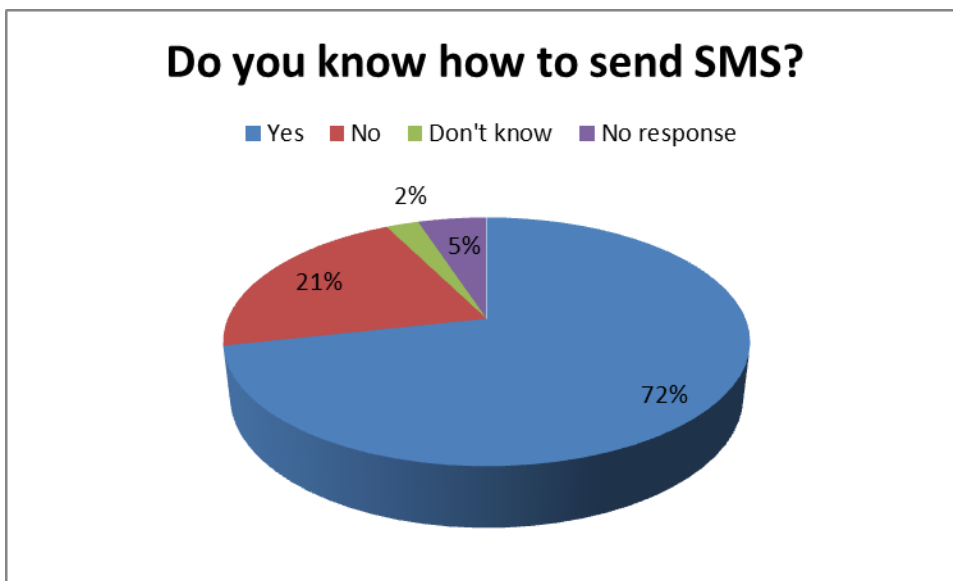
■ Yes ■ No ■ Don't know ■ No response





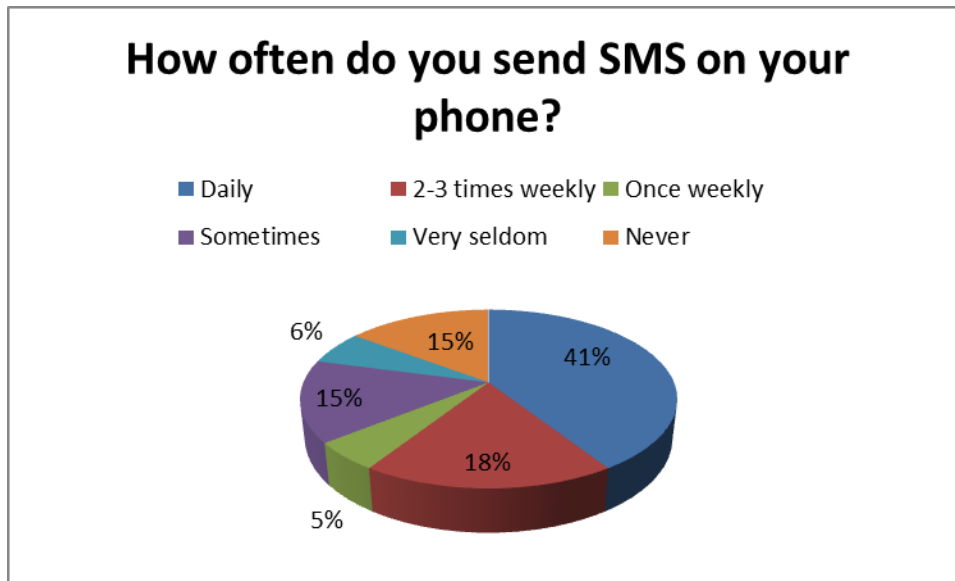
Sending and receiving SMS

On the knowledge on the use of SMS; 71.5% (269) of the respondents say they know how to send SMS from phones while 21% (79) don't, and 2.4% (9) don't know if they can send SMS or not. Of those who say they send SMS from phones 40.8% (127) do so daily and 18.3% (57) do that about 2-3 times weekly, while 14.8% (46) each sometimes send or don't send at all. 5.1% (16) send only once a week and 6.1% (19) seldom send SMS on phones.



The number of those who know how to access SMS on their cell phones is 266 (76.4%) while 56 respondents (16.1%) say they don't know how to access SMS

on their phones, and 10 (2.9%) can't say if they can access SMS on their phone or not.



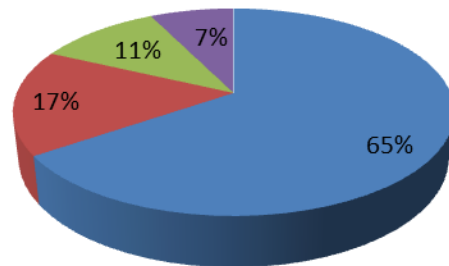
Illiteracy was found to be the major cause of respondents' inability to access SMS on phone, with 41 persons (53.9%) attributing this as a cause. On the other hand, six respondents, representing 7.9%, cited visual disability as being reason for not been able access SMS on phones. Five respondents (6.6%) indicated lack of interest in accessing SMS; while 11 respondents (14.5%) indicated don't know why they are unable to access SMS on phones. Despite illiteracy being a prime cause of majority respondents' inability to access SMS, it is worthy to note that women in the Liberia Marketing Association say they send bulk SMS messages using Lonestar or Cellcom. "Sometimes we use Novafone. Most of our officials use Novafone while the members are split between the various networks," the LMA secretary general disclosed.

Bulk SMS on women issues

The general usage of bulk SMS messages was also tested with 214 respondents (65.4%) saying they receive bulk SMS messages on their phones and 54 (16.5%) don't while 35 (10.7%) don't know if they receive bulk SMS messages or not. There was no response from 24 (7.3%) of the respondents.

Do you receive bulk messages on your phone?

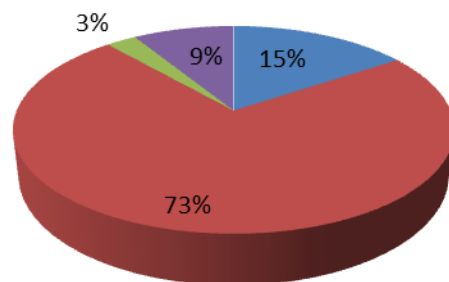
■ Yes ■ No ■ Don't know ■ No response



Usage of mobile phones to send messages on women issues to women is very low. Only 53 respondents (15.6%) said they do send messages on women issues, while a whopping 247 (72.9%) responded in the negative. 35 (2.7%) don't know if they do and 30 (8.8%) failed to respond to the question. Of those who say they send SMS messages on women issues; rape related matters account for the highest 12 (25.5%) rural women matters stand at 10 (21.3%), access to education 11 (23.4%), female genital mutilation and county development accounts for 3 each (6.4%) other reasons stand at 5 (10.6%)

Do you ever use your cell phone to send messages about women's rights

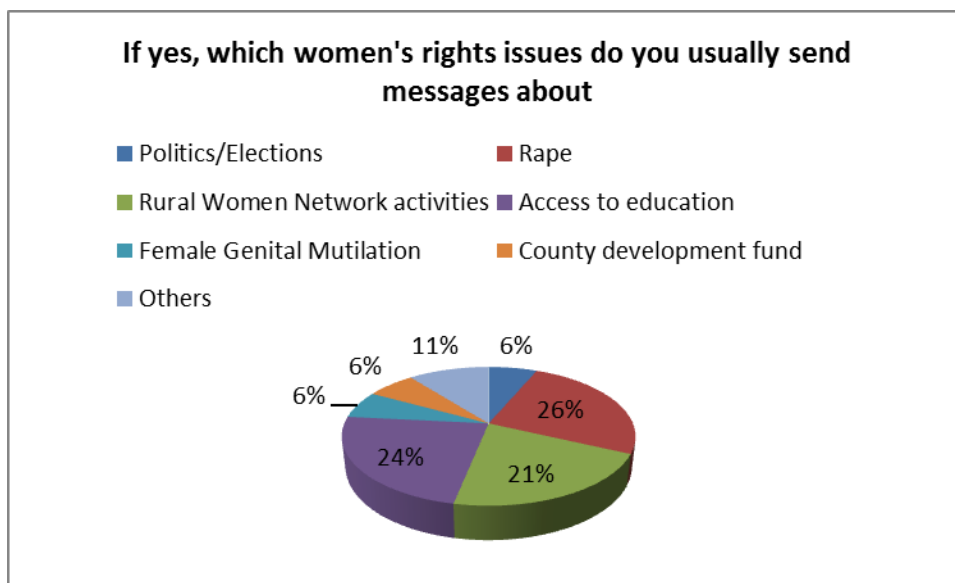
■ Yes ■ No ■ Don't know ■ No response



Of those respondents who do not use their cell phones to send messages, 56 persons, representing 20.9%, claimed to be totally disinterested, while 28 respondents, 10.4%, believe sending messages on women issues by phone will not change anything. On the other hand, 21 respondents, representing 7.8%,

cited no credit on phone as reason for not sending SMS, while 61 (22.8%) believe they wouldn't receive any feedback. Surprisingly, 102 (38.1%) gave other reasons for not sending SMS messages on women issues on phone.

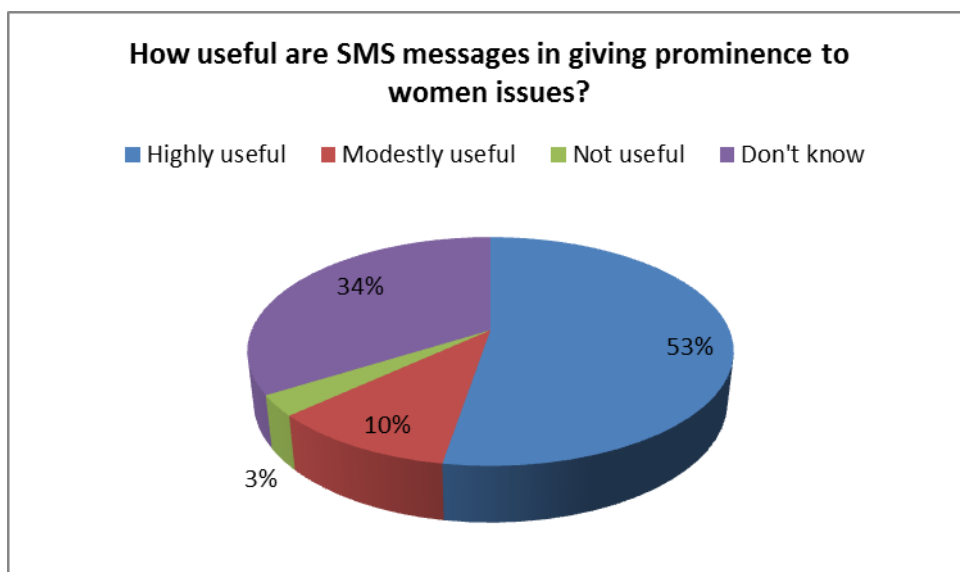
Message reception on women rights' issue proved dismally low as 208 respondents, representing 63.6% of the total respondents, don't receive such messages. For those who did, the figure stood at a lowly 75 persons, representing 22.9%, while 21 respondents, representing 6.4% said they don't know if they receive such messages or not. There was no response from 23 respondents (7%).



The utility of SMS messages in giving prominence to women issue was found highly useful by 180 respondents (52.6%), and 36 (10.5%) found it modestly useful. On the other hand, 10 (2.9%) said it is not useful, while 116 (33.9%) don't know.

Regarding respondents' message source trustworthiness, 99 (30.9%) cited the media as their source of such messages, while 22 (6.9%) said local government officials. On the other hand, 7 (2.2%) said political parties, while 11 (3.4%) cited CSOs and CBOs. In the same vein, 14 (4.4%) cited rural women as providers of trusted messages, while 167 (52.2%) cited other sources. The dismal showing of respondents' trust in SMS messages emanating from political parties is somehow indicative of voters' perception as it relates to how candidates engage electorates mostly during political campaigns.

The utilization of the bulk SMS messages on pertinent issues is encouraging. Of those who believe in the usefulness of such messages, 240 (82.5%) use information contained in the SMS messages while 51 (17.5%) don't.



For those who don't use information contained in SMS messages, 11 respondents, representing 15.1%, claimed not to understand the message, and 11 others as well said they found the information not relevant. On the other hand, five respondents, representing 6.8%, claimed the information would not help solve their problem or information too complex while 16 (21.9%) said they don't know why they don't use information contained in the SMS messages. In the same vein, 25 (34.2%) had no response.

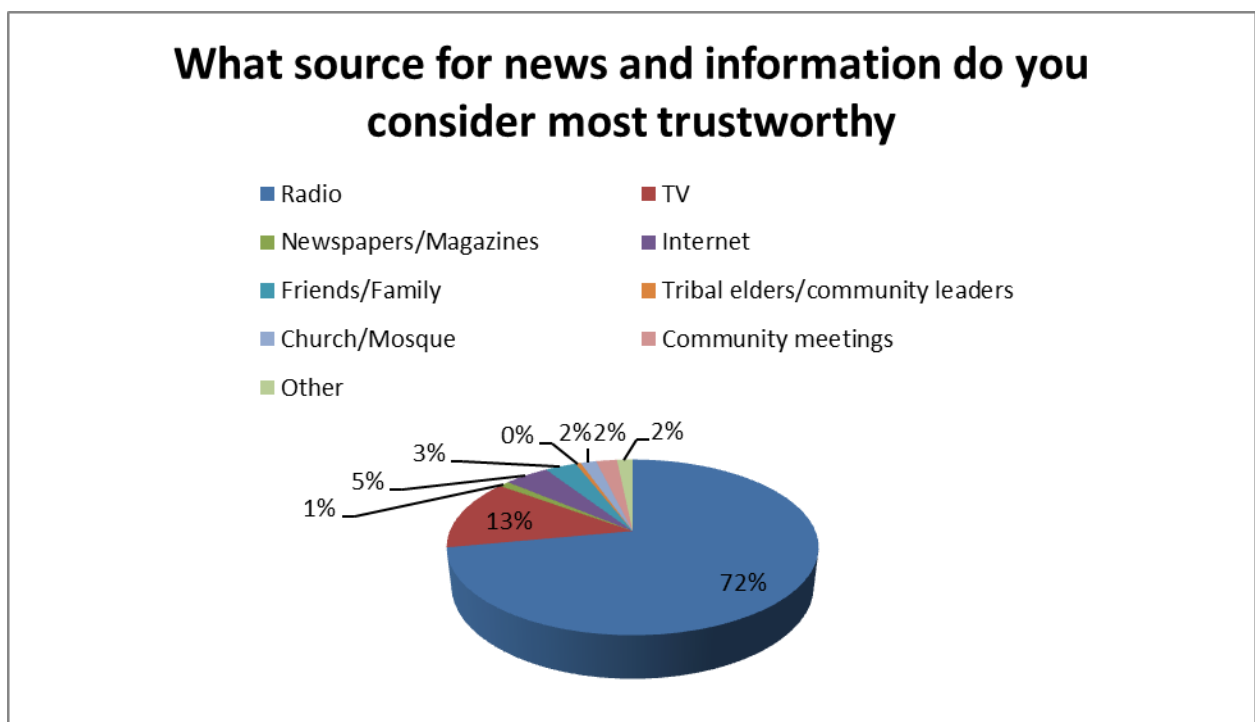
Notwithstanding, the national mother board for all women organizations in Liberia, WONGOSOL use bulk SMS to send and receive messages from their various women network and they respond positively to the SMS. "It is very effective in communicating with them," says Lena Cummings, project coordinator of WONGOSOL.

Frequent source of news and information

The frequency on source of news and information was also investigated. Interestingly, 77% (292) of respondents cited radio as the most frequent source of news and information. Television accounts for 5% (19), while newspapers/magazines stand at 3 (0.8%). On the same note of news and information source frequency, 15 respondents representing 4% cited Internet, while 30 (7.9%) said friends and family. Tribal elders/community leaders accounted for 3 (0.8%), while two respondents apiece (0.5%) listed church/mosque, and those who don't know standing. On the other hand, 7 (1.8%) respondents cited community members, while 5 (1.3%) provided other reasons and one person (0.3%) did not respond.

The trustworthiness of source for news and information

The trustworthiness of respondents' news and information source saw 265 respondents (72%) choosing radio as their trusted source, while 48 (13 %) chose television; with 4 (1.1%) saying newspapers and magazines 4, and 17 respondents (4.6%) listing the Internet as their trusted news and information source. On the other hand, 12 respondents, representing 3.3% chose family/friends, while a measly 2 persons (0.5%) said they trust tribal elders for news and information. In the same token, 8 respondents (2.2%) claimed community members as the most trustworthy news and information source, while 6 persons (1.6%) apiece said they trust the church/mosque, as well other sources.



Most listened to or watched radio or TV for news and entertainment

The Liberia Women Democracy Radio (LWDR) is the media arm of LIWOMAC and the only radio station in Liberia that deals mostly in women issues. Despite the station's devotion to women's cause, the coverage level is very low. "We are aware of the LWDR but their coverage level is very low. They are not receivable in most parts of the rural areas, so what they do is prerecord some programs and share with community radio stations," says a member of WONGOSOL. Even the members of the Liberia Marketing Association, LMA, are also aware of LWDR but mostly work with stations like ELBC and UNMIL radio.

The result from the survey conducted indicates that although community radio stations seem to be most listened to, as supported by 50% (178) of the respondents, UNMIL radio is the most singular radio station regularly listened to for news and entertainment, attested by 65 respondents, representing 18.3%. The least is LWDR with 2 respondents (0.5%). Others include Truth FM with 25 (7%) respondents agreeing; Radio VERITAS with 11 (3.1%) respondents supporting this claim, Hot FM with 19 (5.3%) respondents, SKY FM, 17 (4.8%) respondents, LUX with 4 (0.6%) respondents and ELBS 35 (9.8%) respondents.

The low listenership to LWDR as captured in this survey is not unconnected with the fact that the sampled communities are a distant from the locality of the Liberia Women Democracy radio. In a separate study to gauge the actual listenership of the station; three communities in the Paynesville belt where the station is located was sampled. In these communities 100 questionnaires were administered. 98 respondents 52 male and 46 female responded to the questionnaires. Of these numbers 90% (90 respondents) receive the Liberia Women Democracy radio signal in their various communities, while 5 don't and three failed to respond. Of those who receive the station, 83 listen to it while others don't.

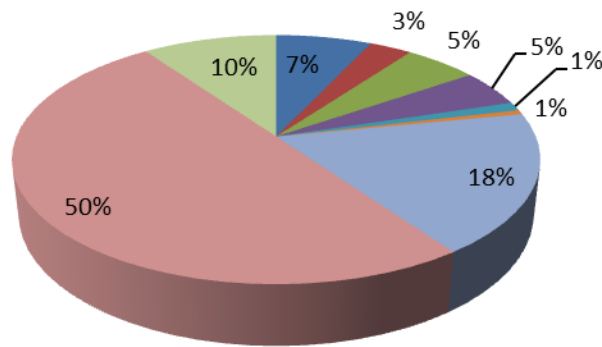
On the frequency of listening to the station, 19 listen to it daily, 9 do so 2-3 times weekly, 5 says once weekly and 39 sometimes. The survey also rated programs broadcasted regularly by the station. News Drill seemed the most listened to program with 19 of the respondents saying so, with morning talk coming second with 14 respondents and my voice my country 12 and Democracy spot 4.

The most convenient time of the radio audience to listen to their favorite programs was also gauged with most of the respondents (41) prefer morning hours with 18 preferring the afternoon hours, 13 evening and 7 at nights.

Amongst the many radio stations in the Paynesville community, the respondents were asked to list their preferred radio station in a scale of preference. The government owned national broadcasting station ELBC topped the scale with 29 respondents, closely followed by LWDR with 26 respondents. Truth FM ranks third with 18, community radio stations 11, Veritas 4, Hot FM 2 and UNMIL radio 1.

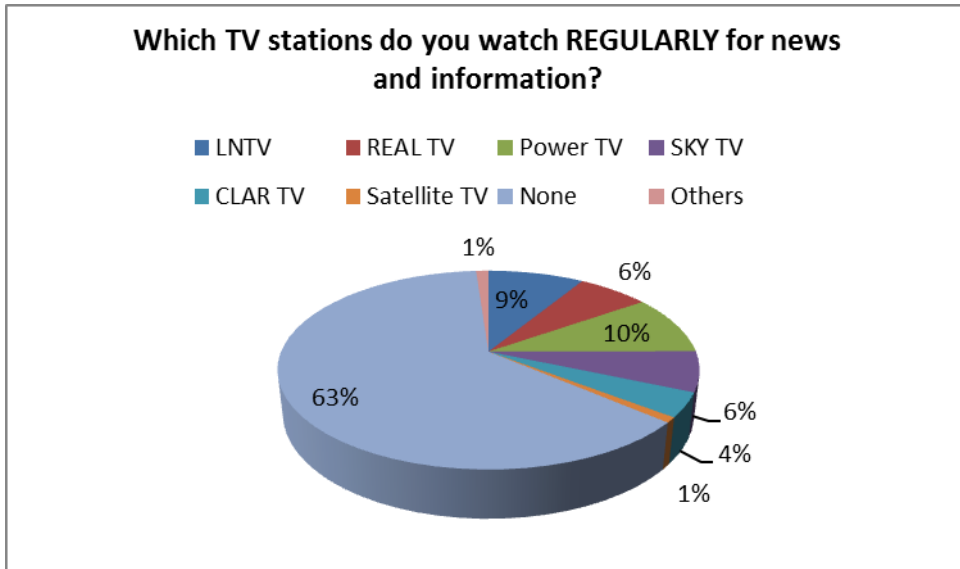
Which radio stations do you listen to REGULARLY for news, entertainment

■ Truth FM ■ Radio Veritas ■ Hott FM
■ Sky FM ■ Lux FM ■ LWDR
■ UNMIL Radio ■ Community radio ■ ELBS



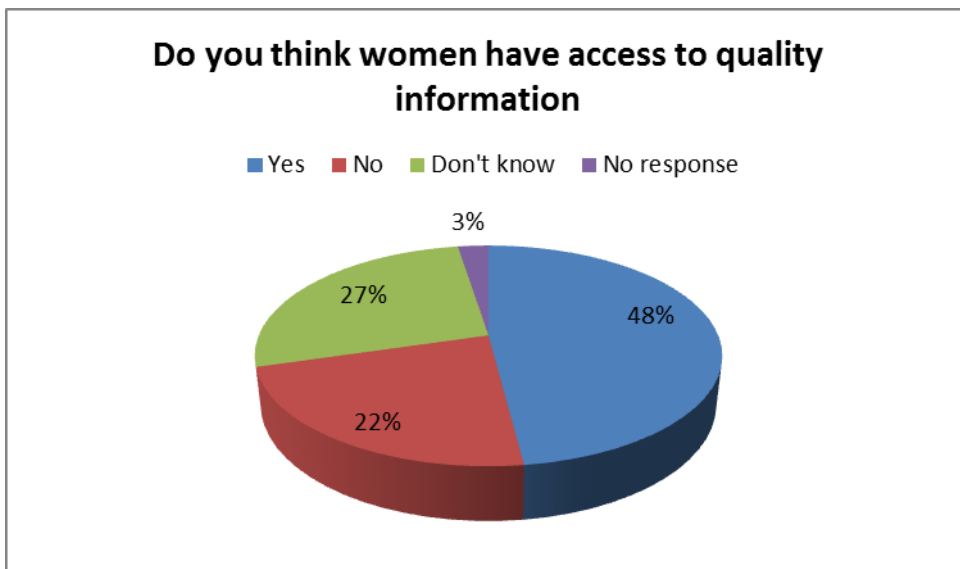
Varnetta Johnson Freeman of the LWDR is confident that the station has had some programs that have positively impacted on women. For instance, the simple English program entitled, "I Know My Rights" and the "Legal Clinic By Radio" provide excellent platforms for women to call in for legal advice. According to Ms. Freeman, "Women's Health" is another program that creates awareness on health issues related to women. However one of the major challenges of the station is the inability of women to own LWDR. "The station was built purposely for them but they are not making use of it," laments Ms. Freeman.

Among the television stations regularly watched for news and information, Power TV registered the highest percentage of viewers among the respondents, with 34 persons (9.6) indicating their preference for the station. Others included LNTV with 31 (8.8%) respondents, Real and SKY TV with 23 (6.5%) respondents each, CLAR TV with 14 (4%) respondents, while 4 persons chose others. Satellite TV received the least with 3 (0.8%) respondents. The inaccessibility of television among the populace is evident in the large number of respondents, 221 (62.6%), who chose none of the Liberian television stations.



Women access to quality information

There seems to be a struggling level of access to quality of information by women. Of the participants in the survey, 48% of the respondents (190) believe women have access to quality information. But 22.5% (89) don't believe so, while 107 (27%) don't know.

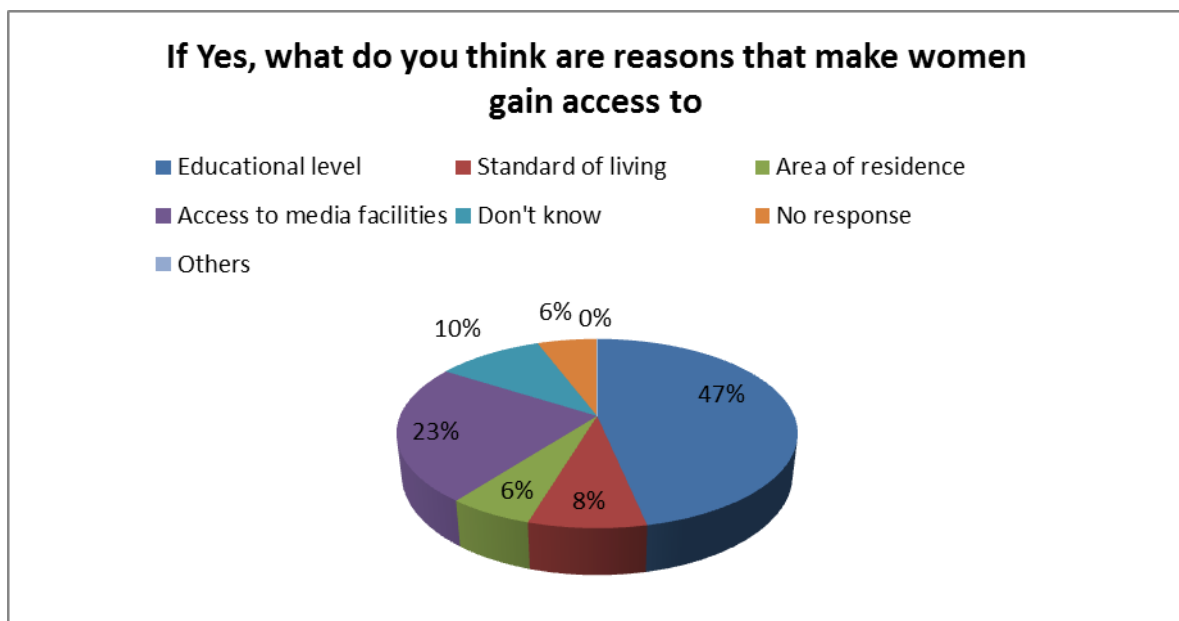


The reasons that make women gain access to quality information are cited as education, with 105 (46.7%) agreeing; standard of living, with 18 (8%) in agreement, area of residence 13 (5.8%), and access to medical attention 53 (23.6%); while 23 (10.2%) respondents claimed not to know any reason. On the other hand, 13 respondents provided no answer.

For those who think that women don't have access to quality information, 40 respondents (31%) cited illiteracy as the greatest barrier to access. Other given reasons are low level of education, with 35 (27.1%) in agreement, poverty, with 8 (6.2%) respondents agreeing, non- access to media facilities with 12 (9.3%) persons, while 7 respondents (5.4%) said women themselves are the barriers to quality information. On the other hand, 3 persons (2.3%) cited culture as barrier, while 15 respondents (11.6%) said they don't know, and 4 persons (3.1%) cited other reasons. In the same vein, 5 persons (3.9%) provided no response.

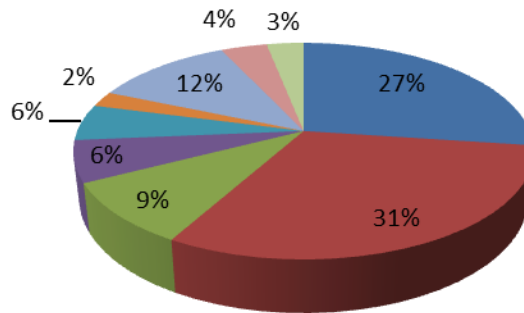
Media reporting on women's rights and gender equity is not enviable. The media seldom cover such issues. According to Ms. Jenneh Paye of the Women Care Initiative in Bomi, "they are quick to report issues of rape but when it comes to matters that concern development and participation of women they treat it with levity".

Excessive charges by community radio stations make it very difficult for the women to have access to the stations. As for the ability to listen to news and understand the information provided, illiteracy is a big stumbling block in this direction. According to the President of the Ganta Concern Women in Nimba County, Musu Kardimie, out of about 200 members of the organization only about 20 which is 10% can really understand the news except if it is in vernacular.



If No, what do you think are the barriers to women gaining access to

- Low level of education
- Poverty
- Don't know
- Illiteracy
- Women themselves
- No response
- Non-access to media facilities
- Cultural barriers
- Others



To enhance women participation, Ms. Freeman of the LWDR believes having prepaid lines for them to call to the stations would help. This she says will take the burden of cost away from women and encourage them to call freely. She said the prepaid lines system was used by the Liberia Media Center during the elections to have her field officers report the election results. "It will be most useful for LWDR during this critical period in our democratic transition," Ms. Freeman intimated, noting that there is also a need to craft special programs to address women issues.

Freeman believes it is important to take radio to the people by using the example of a program like "I Know My Rights", a community outreach radio program where the stations go to various communities to have them discuss issues of concern.

The Women NGO secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL) with its 104 member network is of the view that to ensure that women have access to information, there must be consolidated activities by the media groups to target women. Radio stations should develop programs to the level and attraction of women. They should stop concentrating on the negatives like rape or violence against women as these actually turn women off; if possible they should dramatize them as women love to listen to dramas. Women must be made to have the confidence to demand information. And when they are interviewed let them know when the news will be aired.

Percentage of trained women strengthened to research and document on issues related to women access to information.

Women trained to conduct research and documentation on women access to information or other women related issues are very few. Many of the women groups or NGOs have no research or documentation units. According to the Executive Director of The Forum for the Rights of Women, Luvenia Cole, they have not been involved in research and documentation, but are working on setting up a unit in their organization to handle such matter. As a matter of fact, one of their female staff recently attended a research and documentation training sponsored by LIWOMAC sponsored by UNDEF.

Women organizations that conduct research do so on a very limited basis and with capacity challenges. The Ganta Concern Women is one of those groups into research and documentation. Recently, the group conducted a research on voting and election process in Nimba. The organization has seven of its members trained to do research and documentation. Of that number, 5 (72%) are women while the remaining 2 (28%) are men. Another women organization, Women Care Initiative based in Bomi County, also conducts minor research. The group participated in a research on women access to information as it relates to the Freedom of Information Act in Bomi. The research was conducted by WONGOSOL in partnership with Carter Center. The 2 trained research persons in the organization are evenly shared between sexes, one male and one female (50%).

Use and quality of produced reports. / Number of trained media and CSOs personnel capable of covering issues around women and gender development.

Reports on women issues are received irregularly by some of the women groups from WONGOSOL. As for media literacy training and hands on skills, nearly all women CSOs lack personnel to handle media related responsibilities, However, there is abundance of staff available to take traditional advocacy assignments around women's rights issues.. For instance, the Women Care Initiative has 10 CSO persons that are trained and capable of covering women issues of which 6 (60%) are women and 4 (40%) are men.

Challenges

- Liberia is a multi-cultural society; the complex historical and cultural background spreads across the various counties including the targeted areas of study. One of the negative cultural beliefs is the traditional restriction on the free expression of women. As a result, administering the questionnaire to women who are the targeted group of the study proved difficult in some areas.
- The high illiteracy rate of women was another major challenge. This made the researchers to spend more time with the respondents explaining the contents of the questionnaire.
- As the time of the study falls in the rainy season of Liberia, long and unpredictable rains slowed down the process of data collection. Additionally, incessant rains made it impossible for the researchers to access remote parts of three of the four counties covered (Nimba, Bong and Lofa) due to the poor roads network.
- Poor media coverage of women issues and lack of accessibility to news and information by women in the rural areas made understanding of the issues covered in the study strange and difficult for the women.
- Internet connectivity is largely restricted to Monrovia and other urban cities. Lack of internet connectivity in the rural areas was one of the shortcomings of the study.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The LIWOMAC study is very instructive and insightful as it provides valuable information on how women access news and information, how they make use of mobile phones and messages to impact their daily lives. On a good note, the study reveals high knowledge level when it comes to utilizing cell phones. This revelation is supported by the high penetration of mobile technology in Liberia, especially in rural parts, where women have to rely on phones to interact with business partners and conduct other aspects of their livelihood.

Another plus side of the study is the finding that majority Liberians use their cell phones to listen to radio, with UNMIL radio singled out as the most preferred radio station for listeners' news and information preference. Sadly though, the Liberia Women Democracy Radio (LWDR), an offshoot of the LIWOMAC establishment, has far less listenership, even as it is the nation's only broadcast entity dedicated to propagating women issues.

The high knowledge level of cell phone usage notwithstanding, the study is instructive in revealing that most cell phones users, most especially the female project target population, are far behind when it come to using phones to send messages. The study also shows that majority Liberians do not receive or send messages that relate to women issues, mainly due to illiteracy problems.

Interestingly, the media which should be in the forefront of championing the cause of women, through their news and feature programs, are more concerned with political issues, especially male-dominated issues. The paradox of this situation is that the audience, as shown in this study, trusts the media more than even the politicians.

The above scenario means a lot needs to done if women issues must take center stage in the national discourse processes. The following recommendations may not be a cure-all for the myriad gender-related problems in post-conflict Liberia, but they should be seen as a starting point in the fight to make women issues relevant.

Recommendations

In view of the contending issues discovered in this study as they relate to women access to news and information, and the use of mobile phones and SMS in their daily lives, the following have been put forth for serious consideration as the way forward in ensuring amplification of women issues and women voices.

MEDIA must:

- Create awareness and educate women on importance and usage of mobile phones
- Have prepaid lines for women to call to radio stations
- Have more women be involved in media discussions
- Have more women in media leadership role
- Create specially tailored programs that focus on women.

LIWOMAC/CSOs must:

- Ensure women have the confidence to demand information through workshops, training programs and other capacity building initiatives.
- Ensure free flow of educative messages to women through the mobile phones
- Provide women greater access to news and information, especially women issues, through mobile technology
- Conduct periodic trainings on how to gather evidence-based data for effective advocacy.