


The Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund

Support to Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Liberia



April 2022

PBF GEWE investments in 

TOTAL INVESTED  **\$16 M**
since 2013

DIRECT PARTNERS



MAIN GEWE AREAS

-  **Greater Governance accountability for GEWE and improved gender mainstreaming in Security and Justice Sectors**
-  **Increased women's participation in conflict prevention and resolution**
-  **Strengthened women's engagement in public spheres and political processes**

The PBF support to Liberia has included dedicated support to women from the start of its engagement in 2007. Yet, since 2013 gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) have been highlighted as specific PBF priorities in support of Liberia's Strategic Roadmap for National Healing, Peacebuilding and Reconciliation and the two National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security. As such, since 2013, the PBF has invested over USD14 million in Liberia towards strengthening GEWE in peacebuilding, implemented through a range of initiatives in various sectors and across the country, through broad partnerships with the Government ministries, the UN Country Team and civil society organizations.

THE MAIN AREAS AND RESULTS OF PBF SUPPORT IN GEWE:

Greater Governance accountability for GEWE and improved gender mainstreaming in Security and Justice Sectors

In line with the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and subsequent resolutions on Women, Peace and Security, the PBF has strengthened the Government's capacity to advance on GEWE in its policies and budget allocation, with a specific focus on security and justice sectors. Duty bearers have been increasing their responsiveness to women's needs and accountability for women's empowerment at both national and community levels. Examples of institutional changes include the establishment of gender desks in all security-related institutions, increase in the number of female officers and their promotions in institutions like the National Fire Service and the Ministry of National Defense, establishment of the Gender and Security Sector National Task Force in the Ministry of Justice with 40 gender focal points in 10 security institutions, and establishment of a specialized Women and Children's Protection Unit at the Liberia National Police.

In addition, with PBF support, the Government of Liberia has made some progress in protecting vulnerable women and girls from sexual harassment and other forms of Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV), which impede their participation in sustaining peace initiatives. Reporting and investigation of SGBV cases has increased thanks to capacity building of CSO and justice sector actors, provision of legal aid to vulnerable women, and greater technical capacity to investigate and charge offenders, including through a dedicated SGBV Unit of the Ministry of Justice, a Women and Children's Protection Unit and the Community Services Section in the National Police. PBF funding also supported the establishment of two dedicated criminal courts with jurisdiction over sexual offense cases, in Bong and Nimba counties, contributing to the reduction of severely backlogged SGBV cases.



Moreover, the PBF has been supporting the Government to strengthen its policy, planning and budgeting for greater GEWE. The PBF supported the development of the second National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) (2019-2023),

in alignment with Liberia's National Development Plan, National Action Plan on GBV and the National Gender Policy, ensuring greater dedicated attention to women's needs in all sectors, including peacebuilding. In its 2020-2021 Fiscal Year, the Government has allocated USD200,000 to directly support implementation of the second NAP, for example, which – while modest – is a significant increase from previous allocations. The Government has also established Gender and Social Inclusion Units in six key ministries for greater attention to GEWE across the sectors. The PBF is supporting these units with capacity building on innovative financing intended to identify alternative sources of funding for the NAP implementation. The Government has also been demonstrating its increased global commitment to GEWE, for example, by submitting in 2019 its Report on the African Union Continental Results Framework on Women, Peace and Security. This Framework serves as a continent-wide monitoring tool on the WPS, holding Governments accountable for GEWE commitments.

Increased women's participation in conflict prevention and resolution

The PBF support has also focused on strengthening women's role and voice in community conflict prevention and resolution, working with local and community driven structures and leaders. The PBF-supported Peace Huts are a good example of effective, community-led alternatives to the often male-dominated mechanisms of conflict resolution. Thirty three such Huts have provided spaces for women to engage in mediating local disputes through townhall meetings, hold police and justice services more accountable, lead advocacy to prevent SGBV, refer victims to support services, raise community awareness on peacebuilding priorities, and to mobilize peacefully on critical issues such as local security, elections and women's political participation. To enable women to participate in such mechanisms fully, the PBF simultaneously provided a socio-economic empowerment component, providing women with alternative livelihood opportunities and helping them to organize into village saving loans schemes. Through such interventions, PBF has supported capacity building and economic empowerment for over 10,000 women and girls, many of whom are now small business owners.

Recognizing land disputes as a major cause of tensions in Liberia, especially in concession zones, and cognizant of women's frequent disempowerment from land ownership and use, the PBF has supported specific efforts at strengthening women's voices in land governance. The PBF has supported the establishment of Multi-stakeholder Platforms (MSPs) in concession communities in western, central, northern, and south-eastern Liberia, ensuring high and active participation of women. These platforms, where women play pivotal roles, have been used to resolve numerous land conflicts between the communities and concession companies, or between adjoining communities. To quote just one recent example in Bong County, in December 2020, the MSP – with strong involvement of women members – intervened to address a conflict between community members regarding access to contracts with the gold mining company in the zone. The Platform negotiated a better contract modality which was accepted by the community, thereby preventing escalation of conflict.



Strengthened women's engagement in public spheres and political processes



At the same time, the PBF has supported the Government and the civil society to strengthen and place more value on active participation of women in male-dominated political and social spaces and sustaining peace initiatives. Through dedicated support to peaceful democratic participation, conflict resolution and civic education, the PBF has worked with young women and men to pre-identify and mitigate political violence and promote peacebuilding values before, during and after elections. In addition, the PBF has encouraged local-level initiatives led by women to highlight and promote their role within communities. For example, an innovative PBF project enabled the creation of a network of 45 female filmmakers who highlighted issues affecting women across the country through six films. These films were performed at national theaters and a national film festival, reaching a broad audience and demonstrating women's capacity and confidence to engage in debate, raise sensitive issues and participate in decisions on peace.

Although the challenge around gender inequality persists in Liberia, especially with regards to political participation, the PBF support has been helping to build women leaders' confidence to participate in political fora at community and national levels and to defend women's rights. Two most recent PBF projects on GEWE in Liberia – approved at the start of 2021 – will continue this trend. A project with Stichting ZOA aims to promote women's leadership and participation in civic and political life and their strengthened role in conflict prevention and resolution, especially among political actors, including through an early warning mechanism. Another project with Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation aims to improve the protection of women Human Rights Defenders and LGBTQI Rights Defenders and activists and strengthen their participation in democratic processes and community decision-making. In late 2021 the PBF approved a new project focussing specifically on women political empowerment and prevention of violence against women in politics in the context of 2023 elections.

LESSONS LEARNED ON SUPPORTING GEWE IN PEACEBUILDING

- 💡 Having women in decision-making roles is key to promoting their interests and defending their rights including in matters of sustaining peace. Through their leadership in local mechanisms in Liberia, like MSPs and the Peace Huts, women's interests in security and land governance have been promoted and inclusive community solutions respectful of women's rights found.
- 💡 While pro-active measures on placing women in decision-making roles and bodies are important, quantity does not equal quality of participation. Attention is needed to strengthen the quality of women's participation through accompanying measures, capacity building and support to overcome contextual barriers.
- 💡 Low-cost, local, and women-led interventions fulfill important roles in community conflict mediation, policing, awareness raising, and sensitization and should be supported. They fill the gap where communities lack immediate access to rule of law mechanisms of police and judicial systems. Similarly, investing in women CSOs ensures more sustainable and high-quality inclusion of women's needs, interests and initiatives in peacebuilding.
- 💡 Promoting GEWE in peacebuilding requires addressing multiple issues simultaneously, for example, making the link between peace actions, women's security and economic empowerment to enable women to participate by also supporting their income-generating activities.
- 💡 In order to change mindsets on women's roles and rights, it is important to invest in both male and female change agents, champions and leaders of all ages at local and national level, in public institutions, local authorities and the private sector.
- 💡 It is important to work simultaneously at community and government levels to identify women's priorities and bottlenecks to their empowerment and address them through institutional changes, while enabling grassroots community initiatives on GEWE. Similarly, as change in political participation takes a long time, it is important to also promote an active role of women in specific themes, sectors, fora and issues of peacebuilding that directly concern them, such as land, community security, and local dispute resolution.
- 💡 Women should be empowered not just through project activities but also through the way projects are designed, implemented and monitored with women being involved in all stages to ensure their needs, interests and voices are integrated. Equally, projects must insist on collecting sex-and age disaggregated data to better monitor, understand and adjust their interventions for GEWE.
- 💡 When designing peacebuilding projects focussed on GEWE, attention needs to be paid to the differing needs and contexts of different sub-groups of women, including women of different age groups (and especially younger women who tend to be more marginalised) and women of different socio-economic backgrounds, who are affected by conflict factors in different ways.

ABOUT THE PEACEBUILDING FUND

The UN Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund is the organization's financial instrument of first resort to sustain peace in countries or situations at risk or affected by violent conflict. The Fund may invest with UN entities, governments, regional organizations, multilateral banks, national multi-donor trust funds or civil society organizations.

The Fund works across pillars and supports integrated UN responses to fill critical gaps; respond quickly and with flexibility to peacebuilding opportunities; and catalyze processes and resources in a risk-tolerant fashion.