

The challenge of unlearning

A study of gender norms and masculinities in Liberia

Final version, March 2019



Marie Nilsson
Selima Consulting

Joseph Howard and
Francis Konyon
Center for Peace and
Justice Studies

Heather Tucker
Independent gender
expert

Summary

Emerging evidence on the effectiveness of interventions to tackle a wide range of VAWG suggests that interventions that address gender norms, behaviours and inequalities, and challenge dominant notions of masculinity linked to controlling and aggressive behaviours are more effective at reducing VAWG than those that do not.¹

This study has been commissioned by the Swedish Embassy, with input from and the support of UN Women, in Monrovia to contribute to a better understanding of masculinities and gender norms in Liberia and how these could be addressed to promote more positive forms of masculinities. This study has furthermore assessed how gender norms impact sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). The research builds on both desk-based research as well as field work in five counties in Liberia – **Bong, Lofa, Margibi, Montserrado and Nimba** - during the period from December 2018 to March 2019.

The research has captured the view of 261 people (130 women and 131 men) through a survey and an additional 308 people (141 women and 167 men) through the means of focus group discussions, in the five selected counties as well as in the capital of Monrovia. The team has moreover conducted more than 30 interviews, reaching more than 50 informants. In total, more than **610 women and men have contributed to this study**.

Through these various means of data collection, the study has **identified a number of key elements crucial for the understanding of current gender norms in Liberia, their linkages to SGBV and how these can be challenged if a more gender equal society with less violence against women and girls is to be seen in Liberia**. This research has been framed from the perspective that there is a need to redefine and deconstruct the various forms of masculinities in Liberia, as the cultural expectations of men and boys have proven harmful for women and girls. This gendered oppression takes different forms, and at its most dangerous, is a core cause of SGBV. Violence against women perpetrated by men is a result of harmful beliefs about gender and unequal power relations between sexes.

This research shows that the **gender norms that exist in the Liberian society follow a traditional and conservative pattern**. They are also connected to the larger structures of economy, legal framework and religion. The understanding of the gender binary in the context constructs real men to be those that are heads of households, who are the breadwinners of and take control of the family and are the primary decision makers. This notion of being a man is also understood as a part of a gendered hierarchy, in which men have the right to control and use violence. On the other end of the gender binary, gendered norms about what it means to be a real woman are conflated with submissiveness, pride and dignity, taking care of the family and domestic duties and therefore regulated to the private sphere, with limitations on her mobility, appearance and behaviour.

¹ Alexander-Scott, M. Bell, E. and Holden, J. (2016) "DFID Guidance Note: Shifting Social Norms to Tackle Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)"

It furthermore shows that the **willingness to challenge these traditional gender norms varies**, and that there are many structural obstacles to overcome in this process. These barriers include, but are not limited to, the **patriarchal construction of the Liberian society, negative community pressure, harmful cultural practices, impunity, religious interference and wide spread levels of violence** towards both adults and children. Liberia's violent history through **multiple conflicts as well as recent crises** have furthermore contributed to negative economic development, high levels of unemployment and abruption in education, all contributing to negative, or toxic, forms of masculinities which can impact SGBV.

At the same time as forming obstacles, some of these elements constitute possible solutions to address negative gender norms. For example, despite that representatives from both major religions interviewed underlined that God created women as secondary to men, and that this order must not be questioned, working through **religious leaders may be an effective way of conveying positive messages on social norms**, which in turn can lead to a transformative change which challenges the current gender hierarchy. Likewise, **engaging with community leaders**, including traditional practitioners, is crucial to create a positive community cohesion which is affirmative to values on gender equality. This is moreover needed to ensure that the change agents, i.e. individuals or groups at local level, are supported by the community structures.

The research has also identified a number of positive forms of male gender norms in Liberia, as well as platforms and channels to develop these further. These positive forms of masculinity norms can be organised in three themes: i) **men's behaviours in relationship to their children and the home**, ii) **men's behaviours in relationship to women** and iii) **non-violent men**.

This research has furthermore highlighted a number of **best practices which have proven successful** in Liberia and in other countries, which may serve as basis for replication and upscaling. These best practices include, for example, men's dialogue groups, focus on active fatherhood, use of popular media for outreach as well as reinforced legislation. It has moreover provided elements, with reference to previous work, on aspects that need to be taken into consideration when designing interventions on social norms change. Previous efforts on tackling negative gender norms have been characterised by **slow progress, short term initiatives, activities reaching only small numbers and a gap between positive attitudes and the actual willingness to give up privileges amongst men**. Evaluations of these efforts point at the need for new, innovative, sustained, and larger approaches. At the same time, there is currently a **global backlash against gender equality and feminism**, which goes hand in hand with nationalism, racism, homophobia, conservatism and religious fundamentalism, which also need to be addressed carefully.

The theory of change takes aspects of **gender norms and translates them into accessible discussions through various channels, creating an understanding of and examples of positive norms and new practices**. In order for this theory of change to take place, this work has to be done on **several levels simultaneously and during an extended time span with systematic coordination amongst stakeholders**. It furthermore requires the active involvement of community leaders, including traditional leaders, religious leaders or others in power. This chain

of events is dependent on external influencing factors which can either push change in the right direction or pose hinderances for development. These external influencing factors include broad drivers of change, for example **economic development, political mobilisation, conflict and crises, laws and policies, demographic change, urbanisation, education and information.**

The recommendations which are posed in this study are organised into four groups: **overall recommendations, programming, choice of collaborating partners and the use of dialogue as an instrument for change.** These read:

General

- Use a clear and inclusive terminology when discussing gender norms and SGBV to ensure clarity and the roles of the involved parties. This means, for example, recognise that in the large majority of cases the SGBV discussion is about men's and boys' violence against women and girls.
- Understand that gender norms are experienced intersectionally and thus differently depending on class, age, ethnicity, sexuality etc.
- Avoid regarding SGBV as a stand-alone topic. Recognise that SGBV is one of many forms that gender inequality may take. Adopt a multisectoral approach addressing power imbalances in society.
- Focus on the positive. What are the positive norms that can be promoted? What aspects in the local culture are affirmative for gender equality? What are the positive aspects of religion which could be used working with gender norms?
- Use a rights-based approach and define the roles of both duty bearers and rights holders in addressing SGBV.

Programming

- Recognise the complexity of transformative social norms change. There are no quick fixes.
- Consider the ways in which structural factors, such as access to education, employment, income, drive SGBV as an outcome of masculinities in crises. Seek to engage with policy changes and dialogue with the institutions that can change this. This implies collaboration with, for example, relevant ministries (e.g. Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection and Ministry of Education) and civil society organisations.
- Engage in further research on gender norms focusing on children and adolescents. Adolescence is a critical time period when gender roles can either be consolidated or challenged and transformed. Influencing social and gender norms during adolescence shapes the life trajectories of adolescent girls and boys and the opportunities and vulnerabilities that they may face.
- Consider funding a new programme, fully focusing on gender norms and masculinities in a long-term commitment engaging both national and international actors. Address this through the theme of women's and girls' economic empowerment to simultaneously address women's financial dependency on men and lack of access to resources.

- Engage with young women and men, including children and adolescent boys and girls through new, innovative approaches combining creativity and social norms change.
- Start at household level, for example by engaging men in reproductive and maternal health and addressing unpaid work.
- Ensure a strong and broad engagement in the communities. Individuals alone cannot carry the burden of change. The change has to build on collectively agreed values and norms if it is to have long term sustainable impact.
- Build on the current positive forms of gender norms in Liberia and develop further through existing community-based and family-oriented structures.
- Strengthen already ongoing Sida projects and programmes in Liberia by adding a social norms component. For example, the existing programme on modernising the curriculum for SRHR in Liberian schools could be one entry point. Another could be to strengthen the gender norms perspective in the ongoing collaboration between The Swedish Police Authority's and the Liberian National Police (such as addressing the aspects raised regarding the Women and Children Protection Section (WACPS), p. 25). This would however require a separate portfolio analysis to identify entry points, activities and possible collaborating partner organisations.
- Ensure funding, support, and partnership with LGBTI or sexual and gender minority led organisations for a broader and more inclusive approach to addressing gender norms. Start at urban level in the capital of Monrovia.
- Address SGBV through the entry point of violence against children (VAC) to break the circle of violence.
- Link activities on gender norms and SGBV to the EU/UN Spotlight Initiative in Liberia to ensure harmonisation and to avoid duplication of efforts.
- Ensure sophisticated monitoring and evaluation systems that can measure both quantitative and qualitative social norms change, and which seek to avoid gender binaries and reinforcing heteronormative assumptions about gender. Seek inspiration amongst actors with long and documented experience, for example Promundo or DFID.

Choice of partners

- Ensure funding to local women's organisations in Liberia when addressing gender norms. As this study has showed, activities on positive masculinities and men's involvement must be informed by the voices of women and girls. Local women's organisations possess in-depth knowledge about, and access to, women and girls in Liberia.
- Involve youth and children's organisations to address the intergenerational cycle of violence. This could, for example, imply working with attitudes, behaviours and norms in schools.
- Involve local leaders to engage in their own process of change as trendsetters, acknowledging at the same time the possible negative effects community may have on individuals. This includes working with secret societies as a possible arena for change.
- Engage with traditional healers and practitioners to address the use of witchcraft aiming at minimising harmful practices.

- Invite religious bodies to convey messages on positive gender norms to unleash their potential to promote gender equality. However, understand the complexity of working with actors who could contribute to stigmatisation and exclusion, for example, of sexual and gender minorities or victims of SGBV. Contribute to building capacity within religious bodies, focusing on identifying key individuals who are in favour of progressive change. Conduct further research on religious bodies' role in changing gender norms, if needed.
- Partner with the private sector in the change process, for example internet or mobile operators, media actors or marketing agencies, to convey positive messages on gender norms through, for example, social media and cell phones.

Dialogue

- Develop a working group on masculinities and gender norms amongst key stakeholders in Liberia. Sweden could take the lead the first year and thereafter this could rotate amongst members. The purpose of such a group is to draw attention to the theme of masculinities through mapping ongoing initiatives and relevant research, but also to undertake joint initiatives and activities.
- Make gender norms and positive masculinities a key dialogue question for Sweden in Liberia by regularly including it in statements, speeches, in dialogue with the government and other counterparts.
- Use the various platforms for Sweden's voice in Liberia to convey messages on positive gender norms. This could be translated in to a campaign package at the Swedish embassy which includes a wide range of activities, e.g. Swedish Dads photo exhibition,² essay competition amongst young Liberians, poetry slam, social media campaigns, posters etc.
- Advocate for stronger legislation on domestic violence in Liberia. Support actions to adopt the Domestic Violence Bill including key stakeholders and activists behind the bill. Use popular media to create public awareness.

² Exhibition developed by the Swedish Institute with photos showing fathers active in rearing their children.

Table of content

Summary

Definitions

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Methodology	3
2.1 Overall approach and objectives	3
2.2 Quality assurance	3
2.3 Desk review.....	4
2.4 Survey	4
2.5 Focus group discussions (FGDs)	5
2.6 Key informant interviews.....	7
2.7 Methodological challenges.....	7
3. Theoretical framework.....	8
3.1 Defining masculinities.....	8
3.2 Masculinities and violence.....	9
3.3 From a women-based focus to involving boys and men to requiring social norms change.....	10
3.4 Theoretical framework	12
4. Masculinities in Liberia – characteristics and enabling factors	12
4.1 The view of “real men” in Liberia.....	12
4.2 To challenge the norms.....	14
4.3 When toxic masculinities become violent.....	17
4.4 Community cohesion – two sides of the same coin	20
4.5 The impact of witchcraft and sorcery – the demons amongst us	21
4.6 A heritage from the war – the challenge of unlearning.....	22
4.7 Impunity – the broader approach.....	23
4.7.1 Access to justice	23
4.7.2 The impunity amongst us	25
4.8 The role of religion – the unwillingness to change the power imbalance.....	26
4.9 The vicious circle of violence – it starts with the children	27
4.10 Summary of identified key elements.....	29
5. Positive forms of social norms and positive aspects of masculinity.....	29
5.1 Introduction	29
5.2 Identified positive forms of social norms	30
5.2.1 Men contributing to unpaid work, including through active fatherhood	30

5.2.2	Men who are supportive of women.....	31
5.2.3	Non-violent men	32
5.3	<i>Platforms for change</i>	33
5.3.1	Community structures and practices.....	33
5.3.2	Family oriented activities.....	33
5.3.3	Secret societies	33
5.3.4	Programming	34
6.	Theories of change – what works?	37
6.1	<i>Introduction</i>	37
6.2	<i>Intervention logic</i>	38
6.3	<i>Other best practices</i>	40
7.	Recommendations	41
7.1	<i>General</i>	41
7.2	<i>Programming</i>	42
7.3	<i>Choice of partners</i>	43
7.4	<i>Dialogue</i>	43
8.	Conclusions.....	44
Annex 1.	Literature list.....	47
	<i>Web resources</i>	50
Annex 2.	Survey summary.....	51
Annex 3.	List of respondents	52
	<i>Part 1. Interviews</i>	52
	<i>Part 2. Focus group discussions</i>	53
Annex 4.	Interview guidelines	54

Definitions

Gender refers to the roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society at a given time considers appropriate for men and women. In addition to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, gender also refers to the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialisation processes. They are context/ time-specific and changeable.³

Gender relations are the specific sub-set of social relations uniting men and women as social groups in a particular community, including how power and access to and control over resources are distributed between the sexes. Gender relations intersect with all other influences on social relations – age, ethnicity, race, religion – to determine the position and identity of people in a social group. Since gender relations are a social construct, they can be transformed over time to become more equitable.⁴

Gender roles refer to social and behavioural norms that, within a specific culture, are widely considered to be socially appropriate for individuals of a specific sex. These often determine the traditional responsibilities and tasks assigned to men, women, boys and girls (see gender division of labour). Gender-specific roles are often conditioned by household structure, access to resources, specific impacts of the global economy, occurrence of conflict or disaster, and other locally relevant factors such as ecological conditions. Like gender itself, gender roles can evolve over time, in particular through the empowerment of women and transformation of masculinities.⁵

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will and that is based on socially ascribed (gender) differences between females and males. The nature and extent of specific types of SGBV vary across cultures, countries and regions. Examples include sexual violence, including sexual exploitation/abuse and forced prostitution; domestic violence; trafficking; forced/early marriage; harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation; honour killings; and widow inheritance.⁶

Social norms are rules of behaviour that people in a group conform to because they believe that i) Most other people in the group do conform to it (i.e. it is typical behaviour) and ii) Most other people in the group believe they ought to conform to it (i.e. it is appropriate behaviour).⁷

³ Definition from UN Women Training Centre's Glossary

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Alexander-Scott, M. Bell, E. and Holden, J. (2016) "DFID Guidance Note: Shifting Social Norms to Tackle Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)"

1. Introduction

To become what is expected of a man can be difficult, leaving men confused by the expectations of masculine performance and their inability to perform this particular set of masculinities. They want to be the protector and the breadwinner, but in many households the reality is that they are neither. The ability to perform the role of the 'traditional man' is rapidly diminishing, but a new model of "manhood" has not materialised to fill the gap, leaving many [...] men frustrated and angry.⁸

Liberia is a society where gender inequalities are wide-spread, based on patriarchal values and manifested in cultural practices. Women and girls are in a disadvantaged position in practically all spheres of society, whether it is about economic power, political voice, intra-household decision making power or role in the hierarchy of violence. Liberia is listed at place 154 out of 160 ranked countries in the UNDP Gender Inequality Index (as compared to place 181 out of 188 for Human Development Index - HDI) with low performance on women's political participation, high maternal mortality rates and low levels of education for girls.⁹ Only Mali, Chad, Yemen, Central African Republic (CAR), Ivory Coast and Papua New Guinea have a lower overall scores on gender equality.

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), especially that perpetrated by men and boys against women and girls, is at elevated levels in Liberia. As this report will show, SGBV cases are heavily underreported due to social and structural factors, including but not limited to unequal power relations, deeply rooted gender norms, poor legislation and a weak justice system. Poor reporting structures at community, district and county level, further contributes to an unclear picture of the prevalence of SGBV in Liberia.

The research builds on the notion that the current patriarchal structure in Liberia hinders women and girls to fully participate in society. These structures build on a system which legitimizes the male dominant position over women in society, in the form of suppression, neglect and violence. This system constitutes a concrete obstacle for poverty reduction and development; for individuals as well as society at large. To challenge these negative structures, new collectively agreed social norms have to be constructed which are in favour of gender equality and condemns SGBV.

Social norms are defined as "[...] *shared beliefs about what is typical and appropriate behaviour in a valued reference group. They can be defined as a rule of behaviour that people in a group conform to because they believe: (a) most other people in the group do conform to it; and (b) most other people in the group believe they ought to conform to it.*"¹⁰ These norms attribute characteristics and behaviours that seen as "correct" for each gender category. In some cases, these gender norms are harmful, for example by using various forms of violence; SGBV, control and abuse.

⁸ UNFPA (2014) "Men, masculinities and changing power"

⁹ UNDP (2018) "Human Development Report – Statistical Update 2018"

¹⁰ Alexander-Scott, M. Bell, E. and Holden, J. (2016) "DFID Guidance Note: Shifting Social Norms to Tackle Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)"

There is growing acknowledgement and evidence that the approach of empowering women and girls alone will not have the desired and necessary effects of creating greater gender equality. Feminist research moreover shows that involving boys and men as participants is merely not enough to challenge and change negative gender norms.¹¹ It is therefore critical to assess the structural and social causes of destructive masculinity norms which limit boys and men and have negative effects on both their own wellbeing as well as on lives of girls and women.

Negative or toxic forms of masculinities take different forms and have multiple effects on all persons in society. One of its most harmful expressions of masculinities is that of SGBV. SGBV refers to any act that is perpetrated against a person's will and is based on gender norms and unequal power relationships, and includes but is not limited to domestic violence, early marriage, rape, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced abortion. Violence against women is a symptom of gender inequalities, but also of structural factors in society.

DFID research from 2016 lists a number of factors which interact to drive and sustain harmful behaviours such as SGBV. These are organised in four sub groups: i) **Structural forces**, conflicts, legal framework and ideologies such as the patriarchy; ii) **Social factors**; harmful social and gender norms; iii) **Material realities** – access to all kind of resources; and iv) **Individual factors** - attitudes, behaviours and beliefs.¹² This research analyses some of these factors, their effects on social norms and their impact on SGBV.

This study has been commissioned by the Swedish Embassy in Monrovia, with input from and the support of UN Women, to contribute to a better understanding of masculinities and gender norms in Liberia and how these could be addressed to promote more positive forms of masculinities. This study furthermore assesses how gender norms impact SGBV.

The first section of the report describes the methodology used, including the means for data collection and quality assurance, as well as challenges encountered. Thereafter the theoretical framework and concepts are introduced. The third part of the report presents the findings organised in nine sub-themes. Based on these findings, the following section outlines the intervention logics and presents best practices. The final section of the report presents conclusions and ends with key recommendations.

¹¹ For example, Cornwall (2011) "Men and Development: Politicising masculinities", Edström et al (2015) "Engendering Men – a collaborative review of evidence on men and boys in social change and gender equality", Paul Dover (2014) "Gender and development cooperation: Scaling up work with men and boys".

¹² Ibid

2. Methodology

2.1 Overall approach and objectives

This study has been undertaken during the period from December 2018 to March 2019, as a response to the terms of reference from the Embassy of Sweden in Monrovia, and outlines the following four objectives:

1. Explore how gender norms and masculinities in Liberia are constructed, what forms they take and what effects they have on women, girls, boys and men, and society at large.¹³
2. Explore specifically how norms of masculinity impact SGBV.
3. Explore positive social norms and positive aspects of masculinity that can present opportunities to involve men in ending violence against women and girls (VAW/G).
4. Develop theories of change and development interventions that begin challenging negative notions of masculinity, which can be used by the Embassy and other development partners in Liberia.

The core research team included team leader Marie Nilsson from Selima Consulting, and both Joseph D. Howard and Francis S. Konyon from the Center for Justice and Peace Studies, Monrovia. In addition to this, the research was also assisted by local moderators and field staff. The research is based on both desk-based research as well as field work in five counties in Liberia, the latter during the period 9-20 January 2019.

The research was conducted in five counties; Bong, Lofa, Margibi, Montserrado and Nimba. In addition to this, data collection was undertaken separately in the capital of Monrovia to capture urban aspects, as well as provide access to organisations located in the capital. The choice of counties was made in discussion with the assignor. The final choice was also made to avoid the risk of duplication with similar studies, for example, the recent research on gender norms by OXFAM Liberia.

2.2 Quality assurance

This report has been subject to quality assurance from an external, independent gender expert, Heather Tucker. This fulfils the purpose of a critical review of the report through a gender lens from an academic researcher to ensure that the objectives of the study are met, that the argumentation is clear and that the report is designed in a reader friendly and format. This has also included a review of the English language.

Data has been triangulated to the extent possible using the key instruments of literature review, survey, focus groups and key informant interviews. Deviations between these are explained in

¹³ This study has not targeted children and adolescents as respondents, but still captured some of the effects of negative gender norms on these groups.

the text. The survey was not pre-tested in the communities due to time constraints. The focus groups have followed a standardised format to ensure a harmonised approach. No sensitive questions, for example testimonies of sexual violence, were collected.

To minimise the risk of respondents providing “correct” answers (i.e. what they think you as researcher want to hear), the formulation of the questions was carefully considered. The format of focus groups also provided the possibility to ask follow-up questions to obtain further arguments and justifications to the respondents’ statements.

2.3 Desk review

A literature review of reports, studies, articles, project documentation, legislation etc. was conducted to create an understanding of the topic of gender norms and masculinities. The researchers drew on global resources as well as literature that focuses on Liberia. Although there were gaps in specific regional literature on gender norms and masculinities in Liberia, there have been interesting and recent contributions from Tearfund and OXFAM which explore how gender norms take different forms, including toxic masculinities, and the factors which contribute to the manifestation of these norms into SGBV.

Global research on the topic includes in-depth research that identifies common patterns as well as possible solutions. This research has included academic literature from the field of men’s studies and social norms change, as well as large scale surveys such as those conducted by Promundo.¹⁴ A wide range of resources which discuss involvement of boys and men in gender equality promotion have also been used.

In addition to these, the desk review has included an analysis of project documents and reports from a wide range of actors in Liberia (the government, UN-agencies, donors, international and national NGOs). These include components and/or activities that address gender norms and masculinities, although on a small scale and with limited in-depth evaluation results to rely on for replication and upscaling.

A full list of literature and web resources used is to be found in annex 1.

2.4 Survey

A survey (annex 2) consisting of 15 questions was developed jointly by the team leader and CJPS with the primary goal to respond to the first two objectives of this study, i.e. i) to identify how gender norms and masculinities are constructed, what forms they take, and what effects they have on women, girls, boys and men, and society at large, as well as ii) how these forms of masculinities impact SGBV. This methodology was chosen as it has the potential to capture a large

¹⁴ Promundo has undertaken 12 country reports and 2 regional reports on masculinities and SGBV under the IMAGES umbrella, <https://promundoglobal.org/programs/international-men-and-gender-equality-survey-images/>

number of opinions in a time efficient way, as well as allows the respondents to be anonymous. The survey moreover formed the basis for the focus groups discussions.

The survey used the format of presenting a statement, followed by five alternatives: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree. All questions were developed as clear and direct as possible to ensure that the target audience understood all statements. The questions were also designed to be neutral, i.e. not to reveal any biases or prejudices that the researchers may have. Some words had to be explained during the sessions, for example respondents were more familiar with the term “beating” instead of “hitting” in referring to violence.

The survey was led by local moderators who distributed the survey, explained questions, translated when needed and provided support and assistance to the groups. The moderators worked in teams with both female and male staff. The moderators were recruited on the following criteria:

- Must be able to speak and understand pigeon or Liberian English and local languages.
- Must have interest in gender issues and understand the current trends in the sector; s/he must also have a good understanding of the county context.
- Must have experience in conducting survey and focus group discussions.

The respondents were selected through a participatory process where CJPS field offices liaised with community leaders and community-based organisations to identify the participants. The survey, which was conducted in December 2018, reached 261 people (230 women and 231 men) in five counties; Bong, Lofa, Margibi, Montserrado and Nimba. At each location, several districts have been surveyed, as according to the table below:

County	District/communities
Bong	Gbarnga, Beilla, Balama, Weanzue
Lofa	Salayea, Zorzor, Voinjama, Kolahun, Foyah
Margibi	Kakata, Wohn, Cotton Tree Community, Dolo’s Town, Compound’s Town
Montserrado	Varney Goyah Town, Nyehn, Kingsville (also known as #7), Monrovia, Duala
Nimba	Ganta, Sanniquellie, Saclepea, Bahn, Bunadin

Table 1. Geographical focus of the survey

2.5 Focus group discussions (FGDs)

The focus groups were undertaken on two different occasions; the first round of 25 groups were undertaken during the field phase and the second round of 6 focus groups were done as part of the revision process to collect supplementary data. In total 308 people (141 women and 167 men) participated in the 31 focus groups. A list of all focus group discussions undertaken can be found in annex 3.

In the first round, 25 focus group discussions reaching 116 women and 132 men (in total 248) were conducted in the five selected counties. Participants in the focus groups were not the same

sample as for the survey. The focus groups were designed to complement the information gathered from the survey to add in-depth information and qualitative aspects. The format of focus groups allowed the team to further explore certain aspects found in the analysis of the survey and provided explanations to findings. To allow for an open and inclusive discussion, the groups gathered a maximum of 10 people. At each of the five locations, the team conducted two focus groups with women (one age group of 18-35 year old women, and one age group of 36-55 year old women), two with men (same age span as for women) and one with community leaders, local authorities, traditional leaders and religious leaders. In total, the focus group discussions were carried out with five groups at each location. The focus group reached more men than women because the focus group with local leaders was predominantly men.

Each focus group lasted for 1 – 1.5 hour and was led by either the team leader or CJPS senior staff. At all locations, translation was provided between the participants and the team leader. The team carried out the FGDs jointly at the first location, and thereafter split up in two teams to cover the rest of the selected geographical locations. The discussion focused on four key discussions themes:

1. The first part focused on gendered categories and was assessed through a game in which respondents were asked to share word associations with masculinities and femininities, to identify how these categories were understood or given meaning, and what attributes the respondents linked to each category.
2. The second part focused on respondents sharing what happens if someone challenges specific gendered norms, i.e. if a man shows characteristics that society associates with being feminine, or the opposite, a woman shows characteristics that society associates with being masculine.
3. The third part of the discussion addressed sexual violence; what drives men to use violence/sexual violence, and how existing forms of masculinities impact SGBV.
4. The fourth and last theme covered in the focus groups was the change needed to challenge these norms and end SGBV. This theme was approached through a discussion amongst respondents regarding roles in the gendered power structure, and elaborations on what individuals and communities can do to hinder the dominance of toxic masculinities and challenge gender roles.

The second round of focus groups were undertaken as part of the revision process with the purpose to collect specific data on positive masculinities. Six (6) focus groups were undertaken reaching 60 participants (25 women and 35 men) in the two counties of Margibi and Montserrado. Questions were posed on different forms of positive masculinities, the impact of these and what traditions/practices that can contribute to positive gender norms. The groups also discussed the non-violent men – who are they and what are the underlying reasons for their approach.

2.6 Key informant interviews

33 key informant interviews reaching 51 persons (32 women and 19 men)¹⁵ were undertaken, both in the capital of Monrovia and in the five counties. These interviews were conducted by the team with representatives from the Liberian government (both at the national and county levels), UN agencies, donors, international civil society organisations, local NGOs, academic institutions and independent experts. These interviews served the purpose to collect general information on gender equality and gender norms in Liberia as well as data on relevant legislation and best practices.

The interview guide is found in annex 4.

2.7 Methodological challenges

Because of the limited time assigned to the study, focus was given to two variables: geographical location and sex (female and or male) as factors of social differentiation in the analysis of the data. The ethnicity of the respondents has not been traced in the survey, nor in the focus groups and interviews. This has been a deliberate choice of the authors. However, in the selection of participants for the focus groups, although not tracked in the final data, ethnicity was one selection criteria.

Due to time constraints, this study does not involve children and adolescents. The age span was limited to 18-55 years old. The researchers are aware of the limitations this provides and thus underlines the need for further research which includes these age groups. Working with adolescents, who are in the transition between childhood and adulthood, provides an important entry point for programming which has the opportunity of transforming gender norms with long lasting and sustainable impact.

The research relied on data gender norms based on a binary notion of men and women. This norm has been used in both the survey and in the FGDs. Therefore, the survey has been heteronormative, e.g. it stems from the perspective of wife and husband as the normative relationship. These choices were made in order to simplify the questions and responses.

Using words such as “masculinities” and “gender norms” was proven less useful in the survey and focus groups conducted. Therefore, the team unpacked the terminology and translated these into more simplified terms, including, for example, asking broader questions about equality and how women and men are living together in communities. Moreover, to further explain the questions, examples from the local culture have been used to illustrate the case.

¹⁵ List of organisations met to be found in annex 3.

3. Theoretical framework

3.1 Defining masculinities

Gender norms are socially constructed social norms that refer to beliefs and perceptions of certain roles of men and women in any given context. These gender norms are typically reinforced through normalised notions of what is masculine and feminine, which may be fluid over time, multiple, and vary in different contexts. While there are variations between different geographical locations on what it means to be “a real man” or “a real woman,” there are common similarities which seem to be universal and are informed by social, cultural, economic, and institutional forces.

Despite the multiple ways of being a man or woman, these gender norms are reproduced over generations and upheld by the patriarchal values in society such as the valuing of masculinity and masculine or male power, male inheritance and control over female movement and reproduction. While there may be multiple expressions or forms of masculinities in gendered relations there may be a hierarchy of masculinities through which certain forms of masculinity become dominant. For instance, masculinities scholar R. W. Connell defines this as a form of hegemonic pattern of masculinity.¹⁶

As this report will show, respondents of this research in Liberia articulated specific characteristics associated with being a “real” man and or a “real” woman in Liberian society. According to the research, a hegemonic masculinity did exist as a dominate form of masculinity. This includes associating being “masculine,” with physical strength, providing protection, taking on the role of breadwinner, solving problems, making decisions, hiding emotions, and being hard and dominant. On the other hand, providing caregiving, being emotional, soft, and submissive are typically considered to be “feminine,” and or would be considered a lesser form of masculinity.

This research thus confirms that Liberian society, as in other contexts, relies on commonly understood notions of what is masculine and feminine as described above. Men are moreover instructed to refrain from showing emotions, whereas women are seen as more emotional than men. This is often argued in biological terms, i.e. that women and men have biological differences which make men more aggressive and women submissive.

In line with the respondents understanding of gender roles in this study, the notion that common understandings of gender and masculinity exist in Africa as elsewhere is confirmed by Barker and Ricardo¹⁷ who argue that, while there is no “*typical young man in sub-Saharan Africa and no single African version of manhood...*” these common gender roles including masculinity often “*revolve around financial independence, employment/income and the ability to start a family.*” The authors argue that these common forms of masculinity are therefore largely influenced by larger

¹⁶ Connell (1987) “Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics”

¹⁷ Barker and Ricardo (2005) “Young Men and the Construction of Masculinity in Sub-Saharan Africa: Implications for HIV/AIDS, Conflict, and Violence”

societal pressures and norms, despite the fact that there are “*numerous African masculinities*” that also change over time, including “*urban and rural*” and “*various versions of manhood associated with war, or being warriors and others associated with farming or cattle herding.*”

3.2 Masculinities and violence

Some characteristics of hegemonic masculine norms are linked to violence, including intimate partner violence, sexual violence, homicide and violent crimes. This link can be based on social conditions, life circumstances, poverty, childhood experiences, militarism or conflict, political economy, and gender attitudes, amongst various other structural factors. These masculine norms are also expressed through coercion and control over women. This includes the masculine notion that it is normal for men to control women’s behaviour, mobility, income and appearance. This form of violence is upheld by hegemonic patriarchal notions of power which rely on male entitlement and societal permission.¹⁸ By allowing impunity through silence, sexual violence becomes unchallenged and normalised in society.

Masculinities are also deeply linked to conflicts and crises.¹⁹ Firstly, masculinities may become “*gasoline on a fire*” in a conflict situation in that masculine behaviours and norms may aggravate problems and escalate aggressions.²⁰ When stereotyped negative forms of masculinities are allowed to flourish these can contribute negatively to an already ongoing crisis, for example in the form of SGBV. The second case is the reverse, i.e. that negative forms of masculinities come as a result of a crisis, recognised by Connell who argues that “[...] *some violent patterns of masculinities develop in response to violence.*”²¹ In the latter case, the conflict results in more aggressive, toxic, and hegemonic forms of masculinities. This creates, higher levels of sexual violence or men’s violence against women which increase during conflict remaining in society in times of peace, for example. These patterns can be found in conflict and post conflict societies, including Liberia, where repeated conflicts and crises (such as the Ebola crisis that recently hit Liberia) have led to a “*crisis in masculinities.*”²²

These negative forms of masculinities are harmful for both women and men. Men are encouraged to conform with the norm within the “*narrow concepts of manhood*”²³ which could lead to excessive risk taking, physical aggression, unwillingness to seek support, increased consumption of alcohol/drugs and unhealthy views on sex, women and violence. For women, men’s identity of dominance leads to different forms of control and power performance, in its worst form as SGBV. These views are confirmed by the American Psychological Association (APA) in its recent guidelines on how to address negative forms of masculinities. APA states that traditional masculinity ideology includes elements of “*anti-femininity, achievement, eschewal of the*

¹⁸ Promundo (2018) “Masculine norms and violence – making the connection”

¹⁹ Hearn, J. (2004) “From Hegemonic Masculinity to the Hegemony of Men”, *Feminist Theory*, Vol. 5, No. 1

²⁰ Holter (2000) in UNESCO “Male roles, masculinities and violence: a culture of peace perspective”

²¹ Connell (2000) in UNESCO “Male roles, masculinities and violence: a culture of peace perspective”

²² Christensen Florescu (2010) “Gender Policy and SGBV – the case of Liberia”

²³ UNFPA (2014) “Men, masculinities and changing power”

appearance of weakness, and adventure, risk, and violence,” which are harmful to both women and men. They continue stating that “*constricted notions of masculinity*” are linked to aggression, homophobia and misogyny, often in the form of violence.²⁴

3.3 From a women-based focus to involving boys and men to requiring social norms change

The traditional development approach to fight gender inequalities, including but not limited to sexual violence, has focussed on empowerment of women and girls. This approach has been built on theories that stem from the notion that by educating, training and making women and girls aware, in combination with structural reforms and legislation, gender equality will occur automatically. While empowering women and girls is key to this process, this single-faceted approach risks excluding those who uphold the structures, are in power and use the violence, i.e. working directly with perpetrators, or men as partners for change.²⁵ In most societies round the world, including Liberia, this group is constituted of men and boys.

With the realisation that men’s and boys’ engagement is critical if we are to achieve gender equality and to greatly reduce violence against women, involving boys and men became the buzzword of donors and organisations wanting to broaden their gender equality agendas. Men as decision makers, legislators, judges, community leaders, fathers and husbands have power over women’s and girls’ lives, and hence must be involved in interventions if oppressive patriarchal structures are to be challenged. Moreover, research shows that men want to be involved, and that men and boys are trapped in negative forms of masculinities that they want to change.

Nevertheless, studies show²⁶ that engaging men and boys does involve risks, mainly as it can distract attention and resources away from feminist goals and organisations working with women’s rights. Involving boys and men therefore must also be guided by a pro-feminist approach. Swedish Men for Gender Equality states that there has to be a holistic approach when engaging men and boys: “*this means taking into account the relative power positions and privileges of men and boys to that of women and girls, the vulnerabilities that dominant forms of masculinities create for men and boys and the diversities that exist within any population of men.*”²⁷ Furthermore, other research pieces have showed that by simply involving men through participation in interventions and programming, the discussions on gender equality tend to focus on men only. Additionally, power inequalities from society were replicated in activities, giving men more talking time than women. Following these previous outcomes, promoting positive

²⁴ American Psychological Association, Boys and Men Guidelines Group. (2018). “APA guidelines for psychological practice with boys and men”

²⁵ See for example research by Andrea Cornwall

²⁶ For example, Michael Flood (2008)

²⁷ Män för Jämställdhet (2012)

masculinities must be seen as a developmental imperative within the context of empowering women and girls.²⁸

The researcher Michael Kaufman²⁹ outlines the following risks with not addressing and involving men and boys in efforts on gender equality:

1. It fails to acknowledge men's roles as gatekeepers of the gender status quo and their capacity to hinder, ignore, or pay lip service to gender equality initiatives.
2. By excluding boys and men, it perpetuates the assumption that gender issues are only about women and women's experiences.
3. Leaving out men limits us from getting to some of the underlying structures and dynamics involved in the oppression of women. This is because gender power is a dynamic relation between the sexes and among each sex. Programs to empower women and girls are critical, but face limits if we are not also reshaping the world of men's power.

In recent years, involvement of boys and men has been viewed as insufficient in gender programming. Development theories now underline the need for transformative social norms change, i.e. to go beyond participating in activities to challenging and changing gender norms.³⁰ This places stronger requirements on boys and men to change and speak up for gender equality and to move towards a reformed definition of what it means to be masculine.³¹ This also requires recognising men as a heterogenous group with diverse needs, experiences and appetite for gender equality. Furthermore, it means acknowledging the various or multiple forms of masculinities that exist, as well as the intersectional experiences of gender norms. A UN report from 2013 underlines this in:

The elimination of harmful gender norms and practices can only be achieved through the engagement of men and boys. Understanding men's own diverse experiences, within the context of deep-rooted patriarchal systems and structures that enable men to assert power and control over women, will help us target the underlying drivers of violence against women and girls to stop violence before it starts.³²

This gender transformative change approach aims at addressing the power balance in gender relations, by identifying enablers that work as push factors towards a more gender equal society. This is moreover about understanding the process of change, i.e. not only what has happened, but how.

²⁸ Lesjane, D. (2017) "Exploring the Linkages of Gender, Masculinities and Faith: A Qualitative Research Report on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Liberia"

²⁹ Kaufman (2007) "Successfully Involving Men and Boys to End Violence Against Women Lessons from Around the World from the White Ribbon Campaign", slightly revised

³⁰ Alexander-Scott, M. Bell, E. and Holden, J. (2016) "DFID Guidance Note: Shifting Social Norms to Tackle Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)"

³¹ Jewkes, R. K., Flood, M. G. and Lang, J. (2015) "From work with men and boys to changes of social norms and reduction of inequities in gender relations: A conceptual shift in prevention of violence against women and girls"

³² Fulu, E., Warner, X., Miedema, S., Jewkes, R., Roselli, T. and Lang, J. (2013). "Why Do Some Men Use Violence Against Women and How Can We Prevent It? Quantitative Findings from the United Nations Multi-country Study on Men and Violence in Asia and the Pacific. Bangkok: UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women and UNV."

3.4 Theoretical framework

In summary of the above, this study is built on Connell’s theories of a hegemonic pattern of masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is defined as a practice that legitimises men's dominant position in society and explain how and why men maintain dominant social roles over women, and other gender identities. This means that gender roles in Liberia follow a patriarchal structure, where masculinity is valued higher than femininity, thus giving power and privilege to men and boys. This furthermore means that some of the current forms of male gender norms in Liberia are toxic and unhealthy and may be harmful for both men and for women and girls, and hence need to change.

Moreover, this research recognises that men and boys have to drive this transformative process towards positive masculinities, but that it has to be informed by the voices of women and girls. The process furthermore needs to be contextualised to ensure long term sustainable change. In the Liberia case this means for example to take into account the violent history, the wide spread use of SGBV and local structures and practices.

4. Masculinities in Liberia – characteristics and enabling factors

This chapter presents the findings – quantitative as well as qualitative – from the data collection in the five counties in Liberia, responding to the two first objectives of the study: i) Explore how gender norms and masculinities in Liberia are constructed, what forms they take and what effects they have on women, girls, boys and men, and society at large, and ii) Explore specifically how norms of masculinity impact SGBV. The two first sections (4.1 - 4.2) define gender norms in Liberia and the process of challenging these norms. The next sub section (4.3) addresses how norms of masculinity impact SGBV. This is followed by sub chapters 4.4 to 4.9 on influential factors which contribute – positively or negatively - to the current gender norms in Liberia.

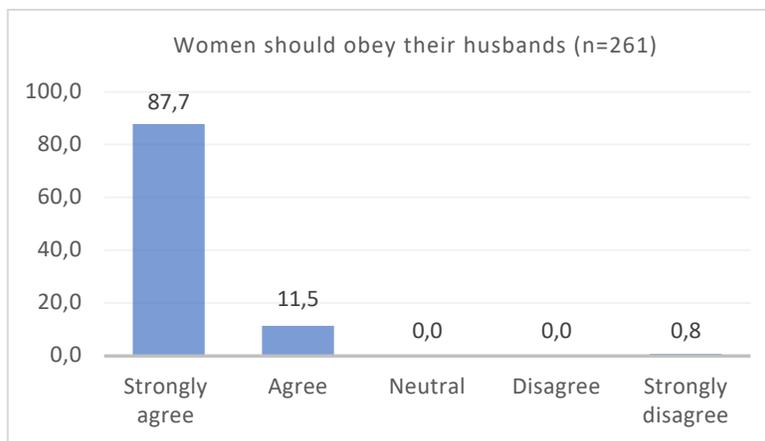
4.1 The view of “real men” in Liberia

The participants from the 25 focus groups were asked to attribute characteristics, behaviours and actions to women and men in Liberia. The following table shows the words associated with each gender.

Women	Men
home bound, patient, accommodative, household work, caring, family oriented, don't talk too much, don't argue with husband, protect family, "the glue that brings family together", pride, dignity, care for community, mother, loving, don't gossip, respect rules and regulations, role model, have a biblical orientation and act as helper to men, moral, know her ways/manners in the community, prepare food on time, dress, committed, value herself, obedient to her	respectful, reasonable, knowledgeable, strong, authority, "he does what he wants", virility, patient, good relationships in the community, peace maker, violence, consume alcohol, arrogant, dishonest, action oriented, wealth, provide for the family, involve wife in decision making, have connections, intelligent, leader, protection, keep his word, don't cry, wise, reliable, has many sexual partners, mature, high self-esteem, brave, moderate, rulers, educated

husband, productive, embrace others, humble, troublesome, developmental, powerless, forgiving

The survey showed a similar pattern; in that participants associated notions such as income generation, protection and strength with men, whereas notions such as obedience, homeliness and submissiveness were linked to women. 97% of the respondents (n = 261) either agreed or strongly agreed that men should be physically strong, with no statistical difference between women’s and men’s views. Likewise, as much as 99.2% of the survey respondents, both women and men, either agreed or strongly agreed that women should obey their husbands.



Graph 1. Results from the survey statement 11: “Women should obey their husbands”

One of the survey indicators that showed a significant difference between women’s and men’s responses was the statement “Men should not display emotions.” 67.7% of female respondents in the survey either agreed or strongly agreed to this, compared to 86.3% of men, i.e. more women wanted men to show emotions. This was reinforced in the focus groups in which men referred to a mentality that “boys don’t cry” and the notion that “...women can express emotions in words, men can’t. This leads to lack of self-control, which leads to violence.”³³

These gender norms lay the foundation for how women and men are perceived in Liberian society but also determine and regulate proper gendered behaviour. These are entrenched in traditions, culture and religion; which are all elements of a patriarchal structure.

The participants in focus groups referred this to biological differences, and not to socially constructed norms. This understanding of gender as based on biological differences was in combination with biblical references on the creation of humankind. These understandings were reflected in responses such as, “men and women should not do the same things. They are not the

³³ Male respondent focus group discussion, Margibi

same,”³⁴ “women and men are not equal and should not be equal”³⁵ or “women are weaker vessels.”³⁶

Some men’s perceptions of gender programmes are linked to how men and boys are portrayed; as perpetrators instead of change-makers. One of the key informants raised this issue that men need to be viewed in a more positive manner if wanting them on-board: “Women and women rights organisation need to stop talking negative thing about men, they need to see men as partners and not enemies.”³⁷

4.2 To challenge the norms

When people become knowledgeable and informed, they can challenge the system we have.³⁸

Although the respondents’ views, as shown above, point at very traditional gender roles in Liberia in which men are in power in almost all spheres of society and women are primarily confined to the private sphere, changes are taking place in Liberian society. Respondents underlined that the process of challenging these norms were mostly seen in urban areas, referring to the belief that the young, modern crowd of the capital would take stand against traditional gender roles. However, this change is seen as being slow and on a small-scale. For instance, one of the respondents indicated that, “Men are using the cultural norms to marginalise women”³⁹ which shows that some respondents are aware of the powerful effects of gendered discrimination and patriarchal power.

Although there was reference to the notion that change is taking place in urban areas, the urban – rural divide could not be confirmed through the research. For example, focus groups in Monrovia did not point towards more progressive views or behaviours on gender norms and SGBV.⁴⁰ One participant highlighted this in the following statement:

Some women behave like men if they have more wealth or educational status in society than their husbands. Such women will find it difficult to respect their husbands. Men should therefore not allow women to learn more than men so they that they do not become equal with men.⁴¹

These notions of gendered norms result in restrictions on how all persons should behave in order to be accepted in society. In naming these effects on men’s lived experiences and expressions,

³⁴ Focus group discussion with leaders, Margibi

³⁵ Focus group discussion with leaders, Margibi

³⁶ Key informant interview, Nimba

³⁷ Key informant interview, Lofa

³⁸ Key informant interview, Bong

³⁹ Key informant interview, Montserrado

⁴⁰ Focus group discussions, Monrovia

⁴¹ Key informant interview, Monrovia

these restrictions are referred to as the “*man box*” in masculinity studies literature.⁴² This means that the rules for being a “real man” limit men and boys to act within the social norms created by the content of the box, for example being strong, not showing emotions, being heterosexual etc. Challenging this means challenging the societal view on manhood, as well as questioning other men; “*Fear of other men becomes a constituent part of manhood. It’s a mechanism for men to police themselves, to not challenge words and behaviours that we find objectionable.*”⁴³ For many men, this process is difficult, from the fear of not conforming to society’s views, of losing privileges, and the reactions and social pressure from peers. Focus group discussions confirmed this, as some men shared that “*men feel that gender equality is threatening.*”⁴⁴

According to the respondents, when women and men challenge or transgress hegemonic gender norms in Liberian society, they are objected to name calling. Comments that were shared in the focus groups that also referred to this name calling or shaming included: shemale, muku,⁴⁵ stupid, slave to your woman, foolish, babysitter, kitchen-boy etc. “*You are acting like a woman,*” “*He is not serious if he is playing the role of a woman.*” When women transgress hegemonic forms of femininity, they are called ironwomen, animal, heartless, man-lappa,⁴⁶ stupid, demonic, lesbian and bewitched if taking up too much space or becoming too successful through income generating activities. Comments or shaming that occurs for women, includes, “*You are making the home lazier*” according to research participants. Women who were aiming for political power were referred to as “*an Ellen,*”⁴⁷ which can be seen as both derogatory and complimentary. One of the respondents said that women who do hard work outside of the home are referred to as “*yellow machines.*”⁴⁸ Despite being negative remarks this does however show that Liberian women are willing to challenge the traditional gender norms and perceptions of public spaces as being considered as masculine.

To what extent is change taking place in Liberia, and do people want to change? The responses varied. For those who were prepared to change, the majority underlined that “*we still have to keep the patriarchal system with men being superior*”⁴⁹ which means that even if changes were to take place, these have to be dealt with within the current system. Women in the focus group also provided varied replies, including: “*I want it to change, I want him to be supportive,*”⁵⁰ whereas another woman at the same location said, “*I am ok with how it is.*” All women, both those showing progressive views and those wanting to keep the current order, agreed that the

⁴² For example, Greene, M. (2013) “The Man Box: The link between emotional suppression and male violence” or Edwards, K.E. (2012) “Man in a Box: The traditional hegemonic definition of masculinity”.

⁴³ <https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/books/2019/01/05/men-must-join-the-gender-equality-revolution-heres-why.html>

⁴⁴ Key informant interview, Monrovia

⁴⁵ Local word (slang) for someone who is considered stupid and challenge the acceptable norms concerning male and female roles in a particular community.

⁴⁶ Local word (slang) for women who have high sexual desire

⁴⁷ Focus group discussion, Margibi, referring to former president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

⁴⁸ Focus group discussion, Nimba, referring to machines such as bull dozers, trucks etc., often yellow

⁴⁹ Focus group discussion, Bong

⁵⁰ Focus group discussion, Margibi

violence they are victims of must end. This points to that patriarchy and gendered norms are challenged but at the same time internalised by women.

Some respondents in focus group (both female and male respondents) discussed how notions of traditional masculine roles in the home can be challenged. Some men underlined that they already contribute to the household through certain tasks and that they want to continue this despite being name called or pressured by the community to stop this behaviour. It was noted that this view was more prevalent amongst men who already have a certain level of power in the community. This provides evidence of the intersectionality of masculinities and how those with less power are more susceptible to hegemonic forms.

There was no significant difference amongst younger and older generations of men in the willingness to change. The belief that gender inequalities will change with time or with the next generation could hence be questioned, as young men interviewed unfortunately did not show signs of progressive ideas on gender equality. The IMAGES study from the Middle East and North African region, shows a similar trend, i.e. that younger men's views on gender equality do not differ substantially from those of older men.⁵¹ The said IMAGES study furthermore concludes that *"younger women in the region are yearning for more equality, but their male peers fail to share or support such aspirations."*⁵²

One aspect of challenging the traditional gender norms is linked to sexual and gender minorities (SGM), who adhere to a variety of gender norms and who don't conform to the two-sex norm and the gender binary of women and men.⁵³ When it comes to the societal norm regarding masculinity in Liberia, it is typically understood as holding power, dominance, and authority. Hence, sexual and gender minorities also uphold hierarchal power structures. This structure mirrors gender norms in society as a whole i.e. men are more represented and have more power, and social factors such as income provision or protection. This means that even within the LGBTI community there is a power pyramid with, if simplifying, white gay men at the top and trans people at the bottom.

Belonging to the sexual and gender minorities in Liberia is sensitive as it challenges the current gender norms and the two-sex system. Many are oppressed, through exclusion from communities and families, have poor access to health care and education services, are poorly represented in decision making, or are victims of violence. This violence comes from both within the LGBTI community as well as from the outside.

The current Penal Code of Liberia, Section 14.74, criminalises adult, consensual sexual conduct by same sex couples.⁵⁴ The current legislation adds to a culture in which heteronormative sexuality

⁵¹ Promundo and UN Women (2017) "Understanding Masculinities: Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) – Middle East and North Africa"

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Key informant interviews, Monrovia

⁵⁴ Stop AIDS Liberia et al (2017) "Human Rights Violations Against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) People in Liberia: Submitted for consideration at the 120th Session of the Human Rights Committee"

as well as relationships are the norm. In accordance with these cultural and legislative norms, sexual minority people are pressured to also have heteronormative relationships and must be discrete about same-sex practices or relationships. These norms mean that not everyone who practices same sex desire may use an identity label (for example lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender), and sexual minority persons may also experience the same social pressure to adhere to gendered norms as normative women or men. These heteronormative social pressures include pressure to marry, bear children, marriage, child bearing, how occupy space, how to speak in public, how to dress etc.

4.3 When toxic masculinities become violent

SGBV is a global problem, affecting women and girls in all countries with perpetrators within all ethnicities, income and education levels. The common factor is that in the majority of cases, it is men and boys that are committing these crimes, and women and girls who are the survivors of violence. One of the underlying causes of SGBV is the current imbalance of economic, political and social power, through which men dominate. As long as girls and women are viewed as secondary to men and boys, oppression will be present in the form of SGBV, exclusion from the political or public spheres, and other forms of neglect.

Recent data below from SCORE Liberia shows that the acceptance of SGBV varies between the counties studied, with Margibi coming out as the most conservative with the highest level of endorsement. Margibi is also the county which shows the lowest support to gender equality.

	Nimba	Lofa	Margibi	Montserrado	Bong
Endorsement of SGBV	2	1,9	3.7	1.9	1.5
Support for gender equality	8.1	7.3	4.6	7.3	6.3

Table 2. SCORE data on SGBV and gender equality in the selected counites.⁵⁵

Focus groups discussed what triggers or creates violence, and interestingly, these responses included two general causes according to respondents: external factors and women. External factors included: weak legislation, the bride price/dowry system, poverty, unemployment, use of drugs and alcohol, access to pornography, and social media. Additionally, some respondents expressed views that SGBV is a “foreign behaviour,” for example one respondent explained that *“men travel to countries or communities where they do not respect women, so they learn and bring that back to Lofa.”*⁵⁶

The other general cause, according to respondents as to why violence happens was linked to blaming women and girls or blaming the victims of violence. Some of the respondents explained that women and girls caused violence through dishonesty, disrespect, refusing sex, being disobedient, talking inappropriately, challenging men’s manhood, showing mistrust, using

⁵⁵ Social Cohesion and Reconciliation (SCORE) Index, Liberia

⁵⁶ Focus group discussion, Lofa

abusive language, and dressing shamefully (*“our sisters are naking themselves”*).⁵⁷ This victim blaming is part of the patriarchal system and by no means unique to the Liberian context, and is practiced in both public and private sphere. For example, professionals within the juridical systems tend to blame the victim – implicitly or explicitly – in questioning why the woman did not report the violence earlier or why the woman has returned to a violent relationship.⁵⁸

Two indicators from the survey are of relevance here. Firstly, 88.9% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed to the statement *“Sometimes women contribute to sexual harassment, violence or rape (for example by the way she dresses, how she talks, where she is etc.)”*. There was no significant difference between women’s and men’s perceptions. Neither were there any strong differences between counties, as table 3 below shows.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Bong	84.0	10.0	0	2.0	4.0
Margibi	71.7	16.7	0	6.7	5.0
Montserrado	80.4	13.7	0	2.0	3.9
Lofa	66.0	20.0	0	14.0	0
Nimba	74.0	8.0	0	5.9	12.0

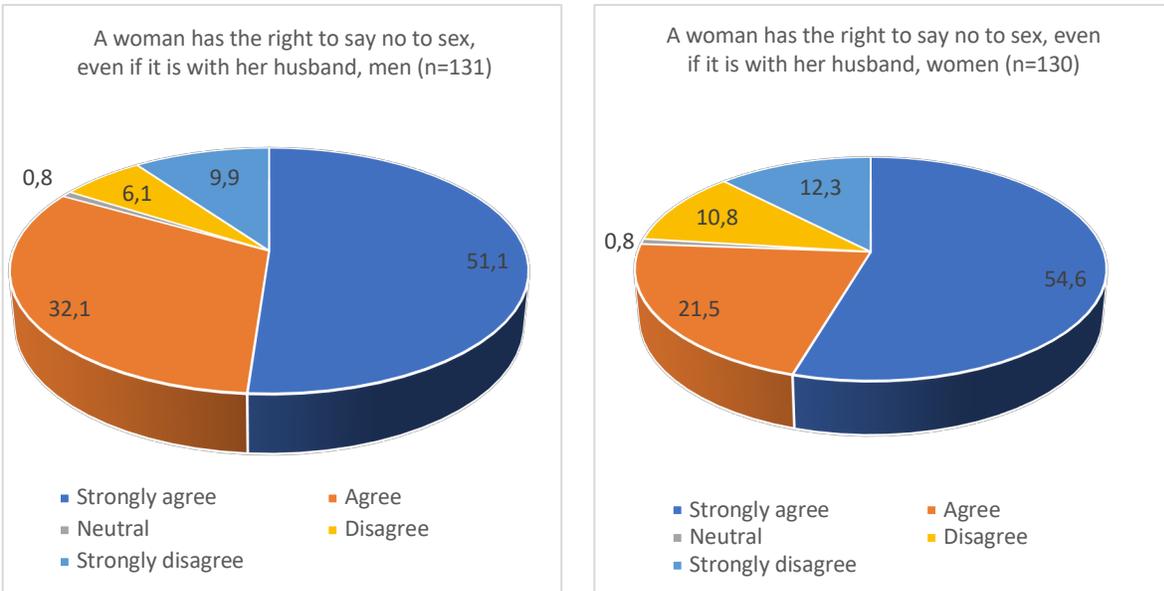
Table 3. Survey responses to statement *“Sometimes women contribute to sexual harassment, violence or rape (for example by the way she dresses, how she talks, where she is etc.)”* per county.

Secondly, almost 80% either agreed or strongly agreed that *“A woman has the right to say no to sex, even if it is with her husband.”* For this indicator, men were more progressive with 83.2% agreeing compared to 76.2% women. Here, the data collected provides a contradictory view. While the survey shows that people think that women have the right to say no to sex, the contrary was also discussed in all of the focus groups. Therefore, while a majority of both women and men responding to the survey agreed that women have the right to say no to sex, there was evidence that both women and men in focus groups of the opposite. These respondents said that women cannot refuse sex, and if they refuse, the husband will use force. As a male respondent expressed it: *“Sex is a right for me.”*⁵⁹ This also shows that both women and men participate in upholding harmful and hegemonic gender norms.

⁵⁷ Focus group discussion, Bong

⁵⁸ See for example, Grubb, Amy & Turner, Emily. (2012) *“Attribution of blame in rape cases: A review of the impact of rape myth acceptance, gender role conformity and substance use on victim blaming”*

⁵⁹ Focus group discussion, Margibi



Graph 2 and 3. Results from the survey statement 5 “A woman has the right to say no to sex, even if it is with her husband”, men and women respectively, in percentage.

The Liberian Demographic Health Survey (LDHS) also makes reference to violence against women perpetrated by men.⁶⁰ In this survey, 43% of women believed that a husband has the right to hit or beat his wife for at least one of the five specified reasons: if she burns the food; if she argues with him; if she goes out without telling him; if she neglects the children; and if she refuses to have sexual intercourse with him. Also, according to the survey, rural women were more likely to agree to this notion than urban women (49% and 39%, respectively). The outcome also varied depending on income and education levels. For men, this figure is 24%, i.e. the LDHS indicates that women justified violence committed by men against them to a higher degree than men.

There were also contradictory views in the focus groups whether or not violence is a sign of love. Some respondents shared that “*If you love your wife, you don’t beat her,*” whereas others stated the opposite that “*violence is a way of showing love.*”⁶¹ Furthermore, when violence against women was up for discussion, many participants – both women and men – were quick to underline that women also use violence, sometimes against men but more often towards children. This latter highlights the intersectional and hierarchal effects on violence, based on factors such as gender and age.

When asked about who these violent men were, respondents in the focus groups used words such as poor men, street men, drug users, drunk men and arrogant men to describe the types of men. This indicates that perpetrators of violence against women are considered to be of lower income, abusing substances, and or of a specific personality type. However, all men in the focus groups admitted using violence against women, without identifying as those men described

⁶⁰ Liberia Demographic and Health Survey 2013, Attitudes toward wife beating

⁶¹ Focus group discussions, Margibi and Bong

above. Respondents used various justifications for what triggers violence, which can be divided into five themes (not presented in level of occurrence): i) **Control** – “*Violence happens when men feel that they are not in control,*”⁶² ii) **Biology** - “*Violence is part of men’s nature,*”⁶³ iii) **Expectations** - “*Due to the societal orientation of boys: men are supposed to be violent,*”⁶⁴ iv) **Sexual desire** - “*Men cannot control sexual emotions*”⁶⁵ or v) **Superiority** - “*Egos drive men to use violence.*”⁶⁶

Also, according to respondents, rape was defined as an act committed outside of marriage, i.e. non-consensual sex within marriage is not understood as rape (i.e. marital rape). “*There are no rape cases here,*” said one young woman in rural Montserrado.⁶⁷ This view is problematic and linked to the view of men’s “right” to sex as part of having paid dowry (bride price) and now has the right to “use” his wife as he wants, as an expression of a hegemonic form of masculinity.

4.4 Community cohesion – two sides of the same coin

In Liberian society, the notion of community cohesion represents “togetherness” and the extended family and is a central component to people’s lives. The community (including extended family, neighbours, community leaders and structures) provides advice and settles disputes. You live in and with your community.

But what happens when community cohesion becomes a negative factor? Many respondents witnessed that although they wanted to challenge gender norms, it is difficult to put this into practice against community pressures to conform to gendered roles; “*We can change, but the communities have to change at the same time.*”⁶⁸ This is in particular crucial in project activities in which men were asked to “lead the way” as gender champions. The pressure of conforming to the norms was confirmed in respondent statements such as: “*Men will hinder other men from assisting at home with household tasks.*”⁶⁹

The community can also negatively impact the handling of SGBV cases. As community settlements are the preferred way, according to the respondents, of dealing with SGBV cases through either the use of customary courts, or through community led negotiations, many cases are silently concluded in an effort to not to disturb the order. A recent Liberia SCORE report refers to this, explaining that “[...] *community cooperation is reinforcing SGBV, which indicates that local communities with strong bonds are more likely to condone SGBV to protect community*

⁶² Key informant interview, Monrovia

⁶³ Key informant interview, Nimba

⁶⁴ Focus group discussion, Nimba

⁶⁵ Focus group discussion, Montserrado

⁶⁶ Key informant interview, Margibi

⁶⁷ Focus group discussion, Montserrado

⁶⁸ Focus group discussion, Bong

⁶⁹ Focus group discussion, Bong

*harmony.*⁷⁰ Likewise, research by NUPI⁷¹ from Nimba county shows that when settling cases in the community there is a risk of the survivor experiencing community alienation. This is an example on how local communities use customary conflict resolution mechanisms which contributes to impunity (see section 4.7 for more information on this).

Additionally, respondents in focus groups underlined the role of powerful men (so called “strong men”) in society and how they may impact the process in SGBV cases, sharing, for instance, that *“Influential people in the communities will influence the process and ask for friendship agreements.”*⁷²

Another research piece on intimate partner violence (IPV) in Liberia and Sierra Leone from 2015⁷³ identifies multiple interrelated factors influencing the decision-making of women experiencing IPV, in which the community play a key role. It reads: *“At the individual level, emotional factors and women's knowledge of their rights and options influence their decision-making. At the relational level, the role of neighbours, family and friends is crucial, both for emotional support and practical assistance. At the community level, more formal structures play a role, such as chiefs and women's groups, though their effectiveness varies. At the structural level are barriers to effective responses, including a poorly functioning criminal justice system and a social system in which children often stay with fathers following separation or divorce. Strong cultural beliefs operate to keep women in abusive relationships.”*

Following this information, community cohesion, therefore, must be addressed in a balanced way. While community cohesion is a source of potential in creating conditions for co-existence, including fighting toxic forms of masculinities and SGBV, there are also possible negative impacts it may have when not conforming to the community norm and responding to SGBV.

4.5 The impact of witchcraft and sorcery – the demons amongst us

The belief in spirits – good and bad – is wide spread in the Liberian society, both in rural and urban areas. When negative things happen such as disease, accidents, violence, or death, these are often explained as a result of witchcraft.⁷⁴ Traditional medicine men and spiritual healers are considered to offer solutions and healing in response to witchcraft and sorcery, and people at all levels of Liberian society hold these practitioners and healers in high regard. Respondents, both in focus groups and in the key informant interviews, raised the issue of witchcraft as an important social factor when it comes to gendered norms.

⁷⁰ Presentation from SCORE on SDG5 highlights of 2018

⁷¹ Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) (2016) “Gender Based Violence and Access to Justice: the case of Ganta, Liberia”

⁷² Focus group discussion, Bong

⁷³ Horn et al (2015) “I don’t need an eye for an eye’: Women's responses to intimate partner violence in Sierra Leone and Liberia”

⁷⁴ OHCHR and UNMIL (2015) “An Assessment of Human Rights Issues Emanating from Traditional Practices in Liberia”

For instance, witchcraft is also referred to as the explanation for women who hold power in society and transgress gendered norms. Witchcraft was often explained as the reason that women rebel against becoming a “real woman” in society, i.e. becoming a leader or working in male-dominated sectors. These transgressions were perceived as the “*magical powers of women*,”⁷⁵ in the focus group discussions. Likewise, when men are carrying out tasks that are considered to be a woman’s role, e.g. household duties or child care, they are said to be under a woman’s spell. Thus, regardless of who is challenging the norm – women or men – the blame is often put on women and their use of witchcraft. Additionally, survivors of Ebola and children are frequently accused of witchcraft in Liberia. In the case of children accused of witchcraft, they are often rejected by their families and forced to live on streets, often leading to a life of violence. Another form of witchcraft affecting children in Liberia is ritual rape of young children for the purpose of gaining wealth and power.⁷⁶

The Liberian civil wars have also influenced another type of sorcery according to the respondents. This sorcery is identified as the immortal and spiritual powers that young children, primarily boys, proclaimed to embody as they fought in the wars, giving them the right to kill, use violence and rape. In peacetime, these children have now grown up to adult violent men, according to a respondent, and “*live amongst us without having had the demons released from their bodies.*”⁷⁷

It is easy to dismiss the issue of witchcraft and sorcery as of less importance, but during interviews and focus groups it was evident that this is something that plays a role in people’s lives in Liberia, in both rural and urban areas influencing society. Many of its believers are also active Christians, i.e. for them there is no contradiction in believing in the two at the same time. Thus, the issue needs to be factored when contextualising efforts when designing interventions to address SGBV in Liberia.

4.6A heritage from the war – the challenge of unlearning

Wars, conflict, or other types of crises are linked to increased instances of SGBV. Evidence shows that all forms of violence increases in the times of economic disparity that usually follow war and conflict. Poor protection for victims in combination with the increase in circulation of arms may lead to stronger traditional norms which support violence. Thus, while the conflict is not necessarily the cause for SGBV, it catalyses it.⁷⁸

Liberia has a violent history. The two Liberian wars (1989-1997 and 1999-2003) left the country in very poor shape and a population in trauma and despair. Both key informants and participants in the focus groups agreed that the wars have had a negative impact on the social construction

⁷⁵ Focus group discussion, Margibi

⁷⁶ See for example, Thornhill (2017) “Power, predation, and postwar state formation: the public discourse of ritual child rape in Liberia”

⁷⁷ Focus group discussion, Bong

⁷⁸ Email interview masculinity researcher

of masculine norms and the current levels of SGBV in the country, and referred to an era in which *“our minds were trained to use violence.”*⁷⁹ Participants also shared that during the conflicts, men and boys took what they wanted, both property and women. Respondents argued that doctrines from the war still remain in the country, sharing that *“There were no proper rehabilitation programmes for the former fighters.”*⁸⁰ Therefore, following the conflict, violence, including but not limited to SGBV, became normalised. The respondents referred to this as the challenge of unlearning – *“we were born in it, we saw the violence”*⁸¹

International Rescue Committee (IRC) lifts this in a research report from 2012 through a discussion on gender norms in transformation after the Liberian wars:

Gender roles were seen to have undergone a significant shift as women took on increased responsibilities as breadwinners and heads of household during the war and as women’s empowerment initiatives flourished after the war. [...] War transforms women’s roles within the home, the community and in the economy—and women take full advantage of these opportunities to grow. While a push for women’s equality may provoke backlash, women feel that such threats to their empowerment are neither inevitable nor a justification for putting the brakes on change.⁸²

The pattern of changing gender roles as a result of conflicts is by no means unique to Liberia and have been studied elsewhere both in neighbouring African countries and in Europe.

Moreover, the wars caused a disrupted schooling which created a generation of young people without adequate levels of education, leading to a generation experiencing unemployment. As many respondents witnessed, the inability to fulfil the expectations as family breadwinner due to unemployment, led to a *“loss of manhood,”*⁸³ as referred to by one of the respondents and may lead to SGBV.

4.7 Impunity – the broader approach

4.7.1 Access to justice

When you are dependent on the man completely, you can’t leave. He can do anything to you. You have to remain there because you are dependent on him. That’s the reason some women can remain there until they get killed.⁸⁴

Liberia has a dual justice system. This means that there is both a formal court hierarchy under the judiciary and a system of customary courts. The formal justice system is perceived as slow,

⁷⁹ Key informant interview, Monrovia

⁸⁰ Focus group discussion, Nimba

⁸¹ Focus group discussion, Margibi

⁸² IRC (2012) “Let me not die before my time – Domestic violence in West Africa”

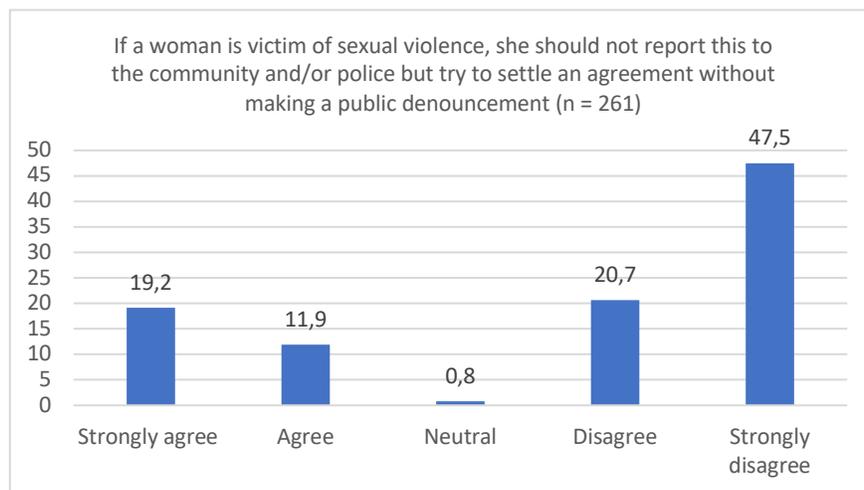
⁸³ Focus group discussion, Bong

⁸⁴ Ibid

expensive and non-accessible.⁸⁵ There is also a sense of mistrust of the system, as many cases are dropped due to a lack of evidence. One respondent also added that there were cases in which *“the police reduce the age of the perpetrators to below 18 to be able to drop the case.”*⁸⁶ This latter statement is anecdotal and needs to be studied further to confirm its level of accuracy.

When these judicial processes were discussed in the focus groups, participants raised the issue of power imbalance. For example, one respondent asked, *“How can I report my husband whom I am financially dependent on?”*⁸⁷ As mentioned before, the majority of cases of SGBV are settled in friendship agreements through customary courts or by the church/mosque. If the man is judged as guilty, he will pay a fine and, in some cases, be expelled from the community for a few months and thereafter return. This was voiced by a woman in Bong county in: *“You find a way to cope.”*⁸⁸ Fear of losing access to facilities or opportunities were also raised: *“If you are with a man who is wealthy and improved living conditions like: big furnished house, electricity, car and others, you may not want to report violence against due to fear of the quitting the relationship; and if that happens, you will have to return to the village where you will not have access to those facilities.”*⁸⁹

In the survey conducted, 68.2% either disagrees or strongly disagrees with the statement: *“If a woman is victim of sexual violence, she should not report this to the community and/or police but try to settle an agreement without making a public denouncement.”* Women and men showed similar responses. This is interesting, i.e. as it shows that a majority believes that cases should not be settled in friendship agreements, while the focus group responses show the contrary. As women are, according to focus group participants, bearers of pride and dignity, they are selected to *“preserve the family’s’ name and honour,”*⁹⁰ which results in many women opting for silent agreements which will not bring any negative attention to the family.



⁸⁵ WONGOSOL (2017) “Policy brief on access to justice”

⁸⁶ Key informant interview, Monrovia

⁸⁷ Focus group discussion, Bong

⁸⁸ Focus group discussion, Bong

⁸⁹ Focus group discussion, Lofa

⁹⁰ Key informant interview, Nimba

Graph 4. Results from the survey statement 15 “If a woman is victim of sexual violence, she should not report this to the community and/or police but try to settle an agreement without making a public denouncement”, in percentage.

The Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) study from Nimba county shows similar results where domestic violence cases tend to be settled through community or family negotiations:

When GBV offences are committed in a domestic setting, the overwhelming majority of respondents indicated that they will carry the issue to a customary conflict resolution mechanism. [...] Exceptions to this preference are cases when the victim is a ‘child’, and the committed crime is rape. [...] When it comes to GBV offenses committed by strangers or foreigners, both men and women agree that cases should be taken immediately to the statutory system.⁹¹

This contributes to an under reporting of SGBV cases in Liberia. Despite efforts to a Task Force on SGBV and special units at the police stations – such as the Women and Children Protection Section (WACPS), these are understaffed and poorly equipped to perform their duties. Besides, the staff who are responsible for reporting SGBV cases from the counties to national level are unpaid staff, which provides no incentives to report accurate data.

Staff from WACPS units⁹² confirmed what other reports and literature suggests, that the majority of survivors are females below the age of 15, and that perpetrators are adult males. When asked about procedures, WACPS staff stated that “*Most cases are now being reported to the police*”⁹³ which seems to be contradictory as discussed above. Furthermore, one of the inspectors from the WACPS stated that “*the promotion of rights – child rights or women rights – without emphasizing the corresponding responsibilities is contributing to an increase in SGBV.*”⁹⁴ This points at the risk of a backlash in response to women’s rights and the need to coordinate efforts by women’s organisations with men and boys.

A combination of these elements points towards a dysfunctional and uninformed formal justice system poorly equipped to deal with the large amount of SGBV cases in Liberia, and which operates based on a stereotyped and conservative view of gender norms.

4.7.2 The impunity amongst us

It is important to also look at the other form of impunity when discussing SGBV; namely that of a silent agreement. Women and men who are not in positions of power in the community or have an ability to hold perpetrators accountable, do not to intervene in issues related to the private sphere, including cases of domestic violence or other forms of SGBV. This means that violence is

⁹¹ Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) (2016) “Gender Based Violence and Access to Justice: the case of Ganta, Liberia”

⁹² WACPS Nimba and Lofa counties

⁹³ Interviews with WACPS officers

⁹⁴ Ibid

allowed due to a silent understanding, and therefore continues without repercussions or punishment.

Here, the community, as discussed above, plays a key role. As long as communities don't condemn, or have proper resources and knowledge to address this, these crimes will continue. Global research shows that when introducing a bystander approach, i.e. providing people with knowledge and resources on how to intervene at the scene of an assault, SGBV decreases. Masculinity researcher Katz defines a bystander as "[...] *a family member, friend, classmate, teammate, co-worker—anyone who has a family, school, social, or professional relationship with someone who might in some way be abusive or experiencing abuse. Bystander also refers to anyone in a larger peer culture, whether or not they are present at the time of a specific incident. The goal is to help people move from being passive bystanders to being empowered and active ones, and thus contribute to a change in the social acceptability of harassment, abuse or violence.*"⁹⁵ Thus, it is when peers and family around us start publicly denouncing SGBV, that changes can be seen.

The respondents voiced that the opinions of peers are very important. Thus, if no one condemns the violence openly, it is seen as justified. This, in combination of the normalisation of violence, creates an environment in which few people intervene.

4.8 The role of religion – the unwillingness to change the power imbalance

The issue of the role of religion in fighting SGBV and other negative effects of toxic masculinities is complex. In a recent study by Tearfund Liberia, it is underlined that "*Faith communities have a critical role to play in responding to SGBV but their capacity for the task is inadequate. This incapacity includes the lack of both adequate and up-to-date theological and theoretical knowledge beyond their church practices and doctrines, and the requisite knowledge of practices and strategies in the gender equality/women's rights sector.*"⁹⁶ This means that despite having a potential positive role to play in fighting gender stereotypes towards a more gender equal society, faith communities (Christian as well as Muslim) seem to play the opposite role in cementing traditional values.

Faith leaders consulted in focus group format, as well as faith-based organisations interviewed, mentioned that the church/mosque has the ability to constitute a platform for change. Leaders mentioned that through Friday prayer or Sunday mass, they have the ability to preach about gender norms and to take a stand against SGBV, to change the mindset of the population. In reference to solutions to end SGBV, faith leaders mentioned the following statements: "*follow religious principles,*" "*obey God,*" and "*pray for the nation.*"⁹⁷ At the same time, representatives

⁹⁵ <https://www.mvpstrat.com/the-bystander-approach/>

⁹⁶ Lesjane, D. (2017) "Exploring the Linkages of Gender, Masculinities and Faith: A Qualitative Research Report on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Liberia"

⁹⁷ Focus group discussions in all five counties

from both major religions underlined that God created women as secondary to men, and that this order must not be questioned.

This said, involving leaders from the religious communities is still key if wanting to address harmful gender norms, as they play a vital role in influencing the daily lives of women and men in Liberian society. The question is how to identify the right religious actors to unleash this enormous potential that religion could have in serving as a major channel for conveying messages about positive forms of masculinities and ending SGBV.

The above-mentioned report by Tearfund studies this phenomenon but does not provide clarity on how this process should be addressed. Other research⁹⁸ underlines the need for the religious bodies to fully acknowledging the problem before engaging in activities that can lead to change. This entails capacity building of religious leaders (sometimes separated by religion to provide text specific references, for example to the Bible or Koran) as well as create community support groups who can spread the word in the communities. It is important to underline that the work that the religious bodies undertake is not limited to Sunday mass or Friday prayer (although these serve as possible platform to convey positive messages on gender equality), but also includes community work and other outreach activities, for example pre-marital counselling and post-marriage guidance. Sonke Gender Justice⁹⁹ has, through its work in Kenya, targeted religious leaders to achieve a more gender equal society. This work engages religious leaders in strengthening their capacities on SGBV and harmful practices, the role of religion, empowerment of women through men and boys and promoting family harmony.

These interventions all share the same finding that this is a time-consuming process, which the findings from this research piece also indicate. The values that stems from the traditional religious sources have been taught and communicated over a long time. However, most faith communities do evolve and change with time to reflect the society, providing the possibility for gender equal messaging on gender roles in Liberia.

4.9 The vicious circle of violence – it starts with the children

Women and men use violence within their jurisdictions –
men beat women and women are violent against children.¹⁰⁰

Global research on SGBV perpetrator profiling shows that although the perpetrators of SGBV come from all spheres of society regardless of class, race, education level, income, geographical area, ethnicity, etc., there are some characteristics that are common. One shared characteristic is that typically a perpetrator is someone that was exposed to violence in childhood; either as a witness or as a victim.

⁹⁸ For example, Raising Voices and Trocaire (2016) "SASA! Faith: A guide for faith communities to prevent violence against women and HIV"

⁹⁹ <https://genderjustice.org.za/photography/shifting-male-gender-norms-religious-leaders/>

¹⁰⁰ Key informant interview, Bong

When SGBV was discussed in the focus groups it triggered many follow up discussions on the broader spectra of violence, including violence against children. It became evident that adults – both women and men – to a high degree use violence against their children on a regular basis. The violence was justified either i) **punishment**, ii) **prevention** or iii) to release an **adult's negative emotions**. *“When I am angry, I beat my child,”* said one woman in Margibi county.¹⁰¹

There was also consensus amongst respondents that children of today are rude and have *“too many rights.”*¹⁰² Respondents argued that with the introduction of children's rights, children can do whatever they want. NUPI reconfirms this view in their research in Grand Bassa.¹⁰³

In our traditional system, the only problem we are facing is human rights, especially child rights. If you discipline the child today, the child can go to the police. Discipline is not allowed. (...) I prefer a balancing, the new law [statutory] has some very good logic. The old law [customary] also has very good logic for children. They say today that “don't beat your child.” That places a burden on poor parents. It is good to educate the child, but you cannot allow too much freedom. Only forced rights and no duties are not good. I think it is important to protect children from abuse, like forced labour. But it's also important to pay attention to parents' rights.

Childhood and adolescence are often viewed as the best period to formulate positive attitudes. Through adults introducing positive and non-violent forms of masculinities to children at an early age, children learn how to challenge the current vicious circle of violence inherited over generations. If successfully addressed, this may lead to a reduction in SGBV in adulthood.

By examining the social norms of female and male children and adolescents more in detail, this could provide in-depth information on issues or factors which contribute to negative forms of gender norms as well as those leading to positive forms. In this process, the educational environment plays a key role. Children learn by imitating and repeating behaviours and values they find amongst adults, as well as peers. By introducing education on gender equality which critically examines current gender norms in Liberia at an early stage, this has great potential in resulting in children entering into adolescence with more gender equal values.

Likewise, adolescence is a critical period in a person's life, regardless of sex, when transforming from childhood into adulthood. This is also a period when social norms become even more gendered. Girls enter adolescence with a different set of expectations, often related to their future role as housewife and mother which creates barriers and limitations, for example, on education, mobility and choice of partner. This is also the age when the previously mentioned attributes of “dignity and pride” become more important. Boys also have gendered expectations linked to their role as family provider and decision maker. By addressing gender norms at an early stage, one limits the risk of this latter role becoming violent and oppressive.

¹⁰¹ Focus group discussion, Margibi

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) (2016) “Gender-Based Violence and Access to Justice: Grand Bassa County, Liberia”

4.10 Summary of identified key elements

This chapter has showed that there are a number of elements that have impact on social norms in the Liberian society, that these are all interlinked and have effects on SGBV. The strong notions on how masculinities and femininities are perceived in combination with a strong community pressure to adhere to these categories, make change difficult, especially for those women and men who are not in power or lack a voice in society. It has furthermore showed that religion and witchcraft have influence on how these gender norms are perceived and set limits on what kind of changes that can occur within the current power structure. Likewise, conflicts and crises, have had effects on social norms in Liberia and the elevated levels of SGBV, through the conflicts' consequences on unemployment, aborted schooling and economic crises. Impunity, whether by the official juridical system or by community cohesion, also have consequences on SGBV, by not condemning the practice or punishing the perpetrators. These factors all contribute to the normalisation of harmful gender norms, including hegemonic toxic masculinities, and high levels to SGBV.

As the next chapter will show, larger structural factors also impact social norms and SGBV. For example, economic development, or more explicitly women's economic empowerment is crucial for women's position within the household and thus impacting the prevalence of violence. With poor or no access to financial resources and a high dependency on the family breadwinner – often the husband - women are in a disadvantaged position to claim rights, including an end to SGBV. Likewise, with low political participation of women at all levels, women are pushed to the private sphere without adequate influence in decision making.

5. Positive forms of social norms and positive aspects of masculinity

This chapter addresses the third objective of the study, namely to “*explore positive social norms and positive aspects of masculinity that can present opportunities to involve men in ending violence against women and girls (VAW/G)*”. To analyse the respondents' views on positive forms of masculinities, six focus group discussions were conducted which focussed solely on this theme as part of the revision process. 60 participants (25 women and 35 men) from two geographical areas (Margibi and Montserrado) voiced their opinions on the topic to identify what forms of positive masculinities exist in Liberia and what local traditions or practices could contribute to these positive gender norms.

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will specifically focus on positive male gender norms, i.e. positive forms of masculinities. The definition of positive masculinity is based on two overarching principles; i) emphasizing strengths and virtue over disease, weakness and damage, and ii) focusing on building in men and boys what is right rather than fixing what is wrong.¹⁰⁴ This means that positive

¹⁰⁴ Definition from the Positive Psychology/Positive Masculinity model (PPPM)

masculinity is a template for behavioural change in the transformation from toxic to healthy forms. This transformation will have benefits for all genders. This change is needed and desirable in Liberia as the current expressions that masculinities take are harmful for both men and boys themselves and others (women and men). This transformation is furthermore necessary to adapt to a modernised society, in which men and boys themselves want to transform.

To contextualise the definition to Liberia, positive masculinity hence refers to men and boys who understand and recognise the privileges and power that current patriarchal norms and views give them, but use these in a positive way to promote women's and girls' empowerment.

5.2 Identified positive forms of social norms

What are some of the existing positive forms of masculinity in Liberia? Respondents in the focus groups raised a number of positive forms of masculinity norms which can be organised in three themes: i) men's behaviours in relationship to their children and the home, ii) men's behaviours in relationship to women and iii) non-violent men.

5.2.1 Men contributing to unpaid work, including through active fatherhood

One key to successful social norms change programs has been the inclusion of the notion of active fatherhood, which has not been widely tested or implemented in the Liberian context, but raised by respondents as a desirable "real man".¹⁰⁵ The notion of active fatherhood as a program element stems from the idea that when men get more involved in child care as well as other domestic household tasks, an understanding of women's work load is created and relationships become healthier and less violent.

Respondents in the focus groups underlined that active fatherhood is a key element of positive masculinities in order to show positive role models and to take an active part in children's development.¹⁰⁶ They moreover underlined that this role is irrespective of if the children are biological children or other children that are part of the family structure.¹⁰⁷ One female respondent in the focus groups suggested that, "*Men need to be active with their children,*"¹⁰⁸ as a way forward.

At the same time, the survey revealed interesting views of men's involvement in domestic work, including child care, with 63.1% of women and 53.4% of men either agreeing or strongly agreeing to the statement that "*Domestic work is not for men.*" From a positive standpoint, almost half of the men disagreed, which shows signs of willingness to change the current gendered division of labour, and points at a possible entry point to address gender norms.

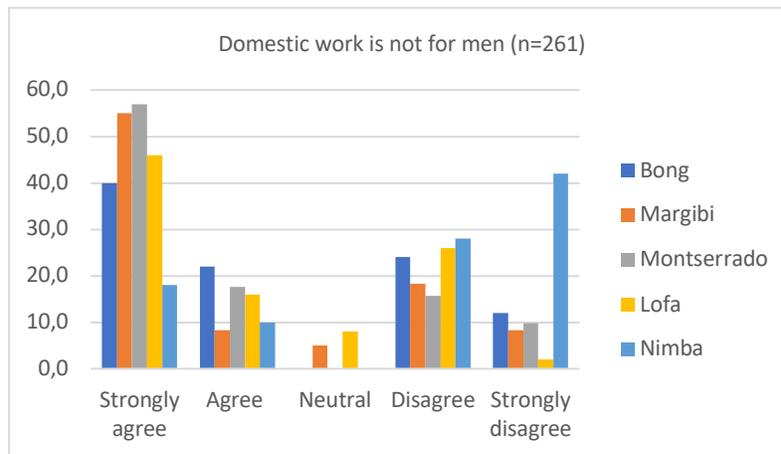
¹⁰⁵ For example, Promundo, *Män för Jämställdhet*

¹⁰⁶ Focus groups, women, Monrovia

¹⁰⁷ Focus group, women, Margibi

¹⁰⁸ Focus group discussion, Monrovia

The responses are shown in the graph below, highlighting geographical differences between the counties studied. For example, Nimba stands out on this statement with 42% of respondents strongly disagreeing and 28% disagreeing. In total, 70% of women and men in Nimba have open minds to the idea of equally sharing household tasks. It is difficult to know if this is a sign of Nimba being more progressive than other counties as the sample is too small to generalise from. It could also be the case that Nimba has been subject for progressive interventions on the topic.



Graph 5. Results from survey question 10 “Domestic work is not for men”, divided per county

5.2.2 Men who are supportive of women

“Supportive men” was defined by respondents in focus groups to be men who positively promote women and girls to be active in society; through providing access for women and girls to higher education, income generating activities and decision-making power. In short, they are men who use their privilege to ensure empowerment of women and girls.

Participants in the focus groups provided various responses to how this supportive process is to happen. Some examples of supportive actions mentioned were “*support women to become entrepreneurs*”, “*encourage women and girls to participate in discussions*” or “*provide access to money*”.¹⁰⁹ One male respondent in Montserrado county proposed that “*Men need to give their time, talent and treasure (the 3 Ts) in their support to women*”.

Literature suggests¹¹⁰ that supportive men are those who acknowledge their male privilege to show solidarity with women and challenge negative forms of masculinities. This means that men and boys sometimes need to challenge the views of their peers and their community, which previous chapter of this report showed can be difficult. Furthermore, being supportive means to both take concrete action and step back when needed. This was voiced by the respondents in

¹⁰⁹ Focus groups Margibi and Montserrado

¹¹⁰ See for example, Plan International, World Economic Forum

focus groups in relation to providing access for women to decision making power; *“Men need to be more open and include women in decision making”*.¹¹¹

It is important to underline that the responses from the focus groups stem from a traditional view on gender roles in a patriarchal system. Thus, the replies build on the notion of the man being the head of the household or community where women’s and girls’ agency is dependent on the degree of power given to them by men and boys. As such, women’s empowerment is not seen as a human right by the majority of the respondents of this study, but rather something that is given by or handed over by men and boys to women and girls.

5.2.3 Non-violent men

This research links certain toxic forms of masculinities with SGBV and outlines a number of factors which can influence the use of men’s and boys’ violence against women and girls. One of the key characteristics of a positive, healthy masculinity is hence about being non-violent.

The issue of non-violent men is complex. Some respondents from the focus groups perceived men’s violence against women (primarily their wives) as part of manhood, i.e. that women and girls have to be controlled through violence in certain cases,¹¹² whereas others viewed non-violent men as a positive form of masculinity. It is thus important to underline that men’s violence against women is not only viewed from a negative point of view, but also seen as part of the obligations of being a man, husband, brother or male relative.

When asked why some men don’t use violence against women and girls, the responses interestingly focused on men’s fear, voiced in statements such as *“They have fear of God”* or *“They fear problems or punishments.”*¹¹³ Very few suggested that the non-violence stemmed from benevolence or a human rights perspective of freedom from violence. Female participants in focus groups, for example in Margibi, said that they were not aware of any men in their communities who don’t use violence, which indicates how widespread and normalised violence is in these communities. They furthermore underlined that violence is both physical and psychological and hence sometimes difficult to discover; *“this is a silent weapon”*.¹¹⁴

The notion of a non-violent man was linked to *“elderly, religious and working men”*,¹¹⁵ but there are no statistics or research that validates that this group is less violent than other men in Liberia. Other respondents mentioned that non-violent men have been trained in gender equality or *“socialised differently.”*¹¹⁶

¹¹¹ Female respondent focus group Montserrado

¹¹² Focus groups on all five locations

¹¹³ Focus group, men, Monrovia

¹¹⁴ Female respondent, focus group, Margibi

¹¹⁵ Focus groups, men, Margibi and Montserrado

¹¹⁶ Female respondent, focus group Monrovia

5.3 Platforms for change

The participants of the focus groups raised a number of practices, arenas and traditions which can be used to promote positive forms of gender norms in the Liberian society. The responses can be grouped in four segments: i) community-based structures and practices, ii) family-oriented activities, iii) secret societies and iv) programming.

5.3.1 Community structures and practices

In all Liberian communities there are a number of structures that play important roles in people's lives, and are a natural component in forming and challenging gender norms and roles. Examples raised by respondents from the focus groups were sport clubs, savings groups ("susu clubs"), tribal meetings and religion.¹¹⁷ Respondents in focus groups, both female and male, mentioned that these structures could be used to a greater extent to promote positive forms of masculinities and non-violence. By encouraging discussions on healthy forms of gender norms and how both individuals as well as society as a whole would benefit from these, this would "*create peace*" and "*promote development*".¹¹⁸

5.3.2 Family oriented activities

In addition to community-based structures, the respondents of the focus groups¹¹⁹ also brought attention to various family-oriented activities that could be used to discuss, and change, gender norms. For example, funeral ceremonies are used to discuss family matters. Members – both female and male – are expected to voice their needs and provide "*updates about their relationship*".¹²⁰ Likewise, birthday clubs that bring people together to celebrate the achievements of individual members are used to discuss current topics. Both women and men also referred to family meetings, sometimes in the smaller family format and other times with the extended family structure, as possible platforms for change. This is particularly relevant to harmful practices such as the use of female genital mutilation (FGM), child marriage and other traditional practices which may harm girls and women.

5.3.3 Secret societies

In Liberia, as in other West-African countries, there are so called secret societies for women and men. For women, the structure is called *Sande* and for men *Poro*. These societies are still powerful and influential in Liberia despite debates on the role of these structures and whether rituals and ceremonies are voluntary. Some rituals practiced are forbidden by law. Secret societies uphold the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) in Liberia.

¹¹⁷ Focus groups, women and men, Margibi and Montserrado

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Focus group, women, Monrovia

The Sande and Poro societies play important roles in the transition from childhood to adulthood. Girls are taught how to take care of their husbands, conduct housework, motherhood, local medicine and social etiquette, whereas boys learn how to be “real men”, breadwinners and be supportive. This is done through rituals and ceremonies.

Respondents showed positive opinions on these societies in training young women and men to enter adulthood in statements such as “*The Poro society trains boys to be responsible, hardworking and respectful men*”.¹²¹ At the same time, these societies could have negative impact in cementing traditional gender roles and hinder progressive development.

5.3.4 Programming

5.3.4.1 Dialogue groups for men and boys

Dialogue groups for men and boys is one of the approaches that have been tested both globally and in the Liberian context. For example, Tearfund, PLAN International, UNWOMEN and IRC have undertaken activities with fruitful results in various counties in Liberia. Through this approach, a number of selected men participated in a series of dialogue meetings to discuss masculinities, manhood, SGBV and the broader concept of gender equality. As put by Tearfund’s partner EQUIP: “*Self-discovery is a powerful tool;*” you see yourself from the outside and identify the need to change. After participating in the dialogue groups, men are encouraged to spread the word to peers in the community, aspiring for a snowball effect which will inspire other men to change. This is also a successful way of ensuring that men do not feel excluded.¹²²

Men are encouraged to reflect on rigid gender norms, to examine their personal attitudes and beliefs, and to question traditional ideas about household decision making and division of labour, caring for children and sharing household tasks. The activities also promote men’s acceptance of and support for their wives’ participation in groups for economic empowerment, and encourage men to see women in a different light and treat them with greater respect.¹²³

An evaluation from a similar intervention in DR Congo by Living Peace showed dramatic changes in men’s attitudes and behaviour after having participated in the 15-week long course. For example, when being asked to react to the statement, “*When I feel disrespected by my wife, I beat her,*” 53.9% agreed to this before the intervention, whereas only 5.5% agreed post-intervention. Likewise, 43.3% agreed to the statement, “*When my wife refuses to have sex with me, I force myself upon her,*” before the intervention, and only 4.5% agreed to the statement when the project ended.¹²⁴

¹²¹ Focus group, women, Monrovia

¹²² Focus group discussion, Bong

¹²³ Sleg, H.; Pawlak, P.; Barker, G (2012) “Journeys of transformation: A training manual for engaging men as allies in women’s economic empowerment”

¹²⁴ Living Peace Institute (2018) “Annual Narrative Report 2017: Working with Men to Increase Security and Stabilization in North and South Kivu”

Previous development projects with initiatives on men's dialogue groups, both in Liberia and elsewhere, have been criticized for having too few dialogue groups that have not reached all men and boys, and therefore having a smaller impact. There is hence a need for massive scaling up in the targeting of both individual men and boys as well as community structures, to ensure that a larger impact and the potential for change.

5.3.4.2 Strengthened legislation

There is little evidence that legal reforms actually lead to a decrease in SGBV. It is however an important policy commitment. The legislation on SGBV in Liberia is weak. A Domestic Violence Bill has been introduced to the parliament, but not yet been adopted due to disagreements on sensitive topics such as FGM. Women's organisations were instrumental in arriving at this stage. At the end of January 2018, the outgoing President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf issued an executive order, temporarily banning domestic violence, including FGM. This executive order has expired and not be renewed by the current leadership.

Even when there is relevant legislation, for example, the Liberian Rape Law from 2005, implementation is poor. Moreover, the knowledge of its existence and content of the law is poor amongst rights holders. As mentioned before, respondents tend to have a very narrow definition of rape, often only including children as victims, which narrows the usability of the law. As a manifestation of SGBV, rape is the second most common crime reported in Liberia. A large proportion of these cases involved minors below 18 years old, with only 2% of the reported cases leading to a conviction.

Legislation is also interpreted at the local level, by the introduction of so-called by-laws. These are local laws which apply to specific communities, i.e. not juridically binding, but seen as guiding in the communities. Respondents to this study underlined that by-laws are more respected and known at the local levels, and that these legal structures could be an efficient way of addressing SGBV at local level.

Evaluations from other initiatives on strengthening the legal framework show that these have to go hand in hand with efforts to create public awareness of new laws. This can be done through mass media, drafting of popular versions, translation to local languages, and activities such as drama, comics or debates. For example, the Family Code in DR Congo was adopted in 2016, giving women and girls access to more rights and made harmful practices illegal. While this was an incredible legal move forward, the diffusion was very poor. An evaluation undertaken in 2018¹²⁵ showed that very few people knew about the revised Code. Moreover, few people could actual read the law as it was produced in only one of the four official languages.

¹²⁵ Glasshouse Initiative (2018)

5.3.4.3 Campaigns – to spread the word

The global He for She campaign, which aims at inviting “*men and people of all genders to stand in solidarity with women to create a bold, visible and united force for gender equality,*”¹²⁶ has been used as an umbrella campaign for some interventions in Liberia. For example, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, in collaboration with UN Women, has organised two conferences for men in gender equality. In Monrovia in 2017, the conference, “*Liberian men: Stepping it up for gender equality*” took place, and in Bong in 2018, the conference, “*Gender Equality: A Call for Men’s Action Now - Repair the Past and Push Women Forward*”¹²⁷ was organised. The conferences were seen as successful in bringing attention to a lesser studied topic, as from the UN Women Country Representative in the following statement:

The success of the campaign shows that men, as positive role models can be incredibly powerful, by building a new, positive view of masculinity they think and act in gender equitable ways and speak out against violence against women, both publicly and privately.¹²⁸

Other global campaigns included the annual 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, International Women’s Day, amongst others. These kinds of initiatives may seem small and isolated, but they draw attention to the problem. In combination with other activities such as social media campaigns, photo exhibitions or essay competitions, to mention some, such initiatives can contribute positively to reforms and progressive legislation, and changes in attitudes and behaviours at both individual and community level.

5.3.4.4 The innovative young crowd – the use of popular media to reach out

Other types of interventions for gender equality in Liberia that is a road less travelled concerns new, innovative approaches conveying messages through new communication channels. Such channels may be poetry slam, graffiti, video, social media (including vloggers, blogs, Instagram, social media influencers, social media campaigns etc.) Although these forms of media may be viewed as only reaching the urban, connected population, this target group should not be underestimated. Statistics show that 8.1% of the population use internet regularly, and 6.8% of the population have Facebook accounts.¹²⁹ Although these internet users are a small portion of the population, they can play a key role in creating awareness and leading the way. The prevalence of smart phones and mobile technologies, as well as access to affordable internet connection, could be key elements in social movements.

One example of alternative messaging worth mentioning is the use of messaging by OXFAM Liberia as a part of the #SayEnoughLiberia campaign. This messaging included recording and

¹²⁶ He for She website: www.heforshe.org

¹²⁷ UN Women Liberia

¹²⁸ <https://www.liberianobserver.com/news/3-day-all-men-conference-begins-in-gbarnga/>

¹²⁹ <https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#lr>

distributing a CD with a rap song containing a powerful message on ending violence against women.¹³⁰ Another example of innovative messages is UN Women Liberia’s messaging as a part of the 16 Days of Activism. This messaging included a song contest on the theme of ending gender-based violence and promoting gender equality and women and girls’ empowerment.¹³¹

In addition to these innovative forms of messaging, liaising with young women and men including boys and girls in Liberia to place them in the driving seat to define how the change is to take place, creates a sense of ownership over the task of ending SGBV. This also reduces the risk of viewing gender equality as forced upon the population from an external source and as an external value system. Liaising with Liberian youth will furthermore build on creativity and the use of artistic expressions as a means for developing innovative routes to change.

6. Theories of change – what works?

This chapter responds to the fourth and last objective of the research; develop theories of change and development interventions that begin challenging negative notions of masculinity, which can be used by the Embassy and other development partners in Liberia.

6.1 Introduction

Regarding successful interventions for challenging harmful gender norms and ending SGBV in Liberia, this research has focused on global literature, project reports and evaluations from interventions in Liberia. The question of possible solutions and approaches has also been discussed in the focus groups, in which almost all participants unanimously stated that awareness raising through training, education and campaigns would be the correct way forward. Informants moreover raised the need to reform the gender equality agenda; *“Gender equality is misunderstood in Liberia. We don’t know how to do this.”*¹³² This follows the logic that when basic concepts are not understood correctly, men will withdraw from participation. This was further reinforced in another interview in Monrovia, stating that *“Imposition of strange values, not taking into account the context of the local communities makes interventions not to be impactful and sustainable.”*¹³³

This brings the need to focus on the critical issue to contextualise prevention efforts. As research has shown, it is necessary to approach specific contexts with an understanding of both the local and global, and to take universally successful interventions and adapt them to specific contexts. It is important to underline that even though projects on reforming and redefining masculinities may be relatively new to Liberia, a wide range of efforts have been tried elsewhere in the world. This is an excellent opportunity to learn from mistakes and replicate successes. This said, there is always a need to look into the specific context. Even though Liberian women’s and men’s views

¹³⁰ Key informant interview, Monrovia

¹³¹ <https://tunesliberia.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Singing-competition--Detailed-information.pdf>

¹³² Key informant interview, Bong

¹³³ Key informant interview, Monrovia

mirror other views in similar traditional settings, i.e. studies undertaken in other traditional contexts show more or less the same results: there is always a need to look into the connections between traditional practices, gender norms, forms of violence, and specific legislative frameworks that contextualise violence. As this research has showed, these factors are linked to cultural practices, religion and other elements.

The role of the community is critical in this process, especially the role of local women's organisations. These possess knowledge about women and girls in the communities and have access to information and data to guide the process and could thus play a key role in programming on gender norms.

Cislaghi and Heise (2018)¹³⁴ have identified eight learnings for actors to keep in mind when planning to integrate a social norms perspective in their interventions. These learnings are:

1. Social norms and attitudes are different; people may voice attitudes that are not the social norm in that specific society. This can lead to misbeliefs on practices and mistargeted solutions.
2. At the same time, social norms and attitudes can coincide.
3. Protective norms can offer important resources for achieving effective social improvement in people's health-related practices. By viewing culture as negative only, actors may miss the opportunity to work with positive factors from the cultural heritage that could be used as part of the solution.
4. Harmful practices are sustained by a matrix of factors that need to be understood in their interactions, i.e. social norms are not the sole driver of SGBV.
5. The prevalence of a norm is not necessarily a sign of its strength.
6. Social norms can exert both direct and indirect influence.
7. Publicising the prevalence of a harmful practice can make things worse. This can influence people's behaviour and reinforce a negative practice.
8. People-led social norm change is both the right and the smart thing to do – change needs to come from the inside.

6.2 Intervention logic

This theory of change from Promundo¹³⁵ is based on a socio-ecological model¹³⁶ and addresses multiple levels in society. These levels include both individual, situational and socio-cultural factors, for example relationships, social institutions, gatekeepers and community leaders. This means that changes need to be promoted at the society-wide and community levels beyond just the individual level. Promundo explains this theory of change in that:

Men and women i) learn through questioning and critical reflection about gender norms, ii) rehearse equitable and non-violent attitudes and behaviours in a comfortable space, iii)

¹³⁴ Cislaghi and Heise (2018) "Globalization and Health", 14:83

¹³⁵ Promundo (2016) "Promoting Gender-Transformative Change with Men and Boys"

¹³⁶ See for example Heise 1998, 2011

internalise these new gender attitudes and norms, and iv) applying them in their own relationships and lives. Supporting institutions and structures, when accompanying this integral group education process, give individuals and organisations involved the tools to become agents of change for gender and social justice. Ultimately, this process contributes to achieving gender equality and to attitudinal and behavioural change.¹³⁷

This theory of change takes aspects of gender norms and translates them into accessible discussions through various channels, creating an understanding of and examples of positive norms and new practices. In order for this theory of change to take place, this work has to be done on several levels simultaneously and during an extended time span. It furthermore requires the active involvement of community leaders, including traditional leaders, religious leaders or others in power.



This chain of events is dependent on external influencing factors which can either push change in the right direction or pose hinderances for development. These external influencing factors include broad drivers of change, for example economic development, political mobilisation, conflict and crises, laws and policies, demographic change, urbanisation, education and information, amongst others.¹³⁸

ODI (2014)¹³⁹ has summarised some of the conditions that help or hinder changes in gender norms in the following table:

¹³⁷ Promundo (2016) "Promoting Gender-Transformative Change with Men and Boys"

¹³⁸ ODI (2014) "How do gender norms change?"

¹³⁹ Ibid

Gender norms are more likely to change when...	They are less likely to change when...
.. no one stands to lose out economically from change or to gain from keeping old norms in place .. people have a strong economic interest in changing certain norms	... there are strong economic interests in upholding existing norms and practices
.. no one's power is directly threatened by change	.. certain groups perceive their power and status to be directly undermined by change
.. one key factor underpins a norm (e.g. lack of information)	.. several factors contribute to upholding a norm (e.g. lack of information, pressure of social expectations, economic constraints)
.. there are no religious mandates requiring a certain particular practice	.. the practices in question are seen as mandated by religion
.. a critical mass of others has already changed what they do	.. very few others have changed what they do
.. role models and opinion leaders (including religious leaders) promote a different norm	.. role models and opinion leaders (including religious leaders) promote the status quo
.. changes in the institutional or political context provide opportunities for different practices	.. the broader institutional or political environment is resistant to change
.. programmes or policies designed to change norms are accompanied by opportunities for people to put new ideas into practice	.. people don't know how to do things differently
.. change is understood as seizing or preparing for new opportunities	.. change is mainly experienced as a loss (of power, of valued culture or traditions) or otherwise unwelcome
.. there is change in the wider society – for instance, with women gaining more of a voice or gaining newfound economic power	.. change is isolated

Table 4. Factors influencing gender norms change

6.3 Other best practices

The following list includes a number of interventions world-wide which may serve as inspiration for progressive gender norms change:

- **Engaging Men through Accountable Practice (EMAP)** by the International Rescue Committee (IRC): transformation of men's behaviours guided by women's voices.¹⁴⁰
- **The Bystander approach:** encouraging men who have been taught to remain silent when witnessing violence against women to stand up and denounce violence - the power of peer contexts.¹⁴¹
- **Men Care:** a global fatherhood campaign aiming at promoting men's involvement as equitable, nonviolent fathers and caregivers in order to achieve family well-being, gender equality, and better health for mothers, fathers, and children.¹⁴²
- **Gender Roles, Equality and Transformations (GREAT):** improving gender norms related to sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence through a mix of dialogue, radio drama and provision of

¹⁴⁰ <https://gbvresponders.org/resources/#PREVENTION>

¹⁴¹ Banyard V.L. (2015) in "Toward the next generation of bystander prevention of sexual and relationship violence"

¹⁴² <https://men-care.org>

SRHR services, targeting adolescents in the ages of 10-19 years old.¹⁴³ **Engaging with children and adolescents** is an important window of opportunity to address gender norms.

- **Male Norms Initiative:** working with young men's norms and attitudes to reduce SGBV and the spread of HIV/AIDS.¹⁴⁴
- **The Gender Equity Movement in Schools (GEMS):** a school-based approach to foster more gender-equitable norms among adolescent female and male students (age 12-14), in India.¹⁴⁵
- **Programme H by Promundo:** community intervention programme that focuses on peer-to-peer education sessions facilitated by young men through social norms marketing campaigns to promote gender equality and reduce SGBV. The programme encourages critical reflection about rigid norms related to manhood and encourages transformation of stereotypical roles associated with gender.¹⁴⁶
- **SASA!:** aims to prevent VAW and HIV in more than 15 countries through mobilising communities to reassess the acceptability of violence and gender inequality.¹⁴⁷
- **Soul City:** uses edutainment – television and radio drama, and mass distribution of booklets – to address empowerment of women and girls, inequitable masculinities and SGBV. The programme has been active since 2008 in South Africa.¹⁴⁸
- **Machofabriken:** an initiative from a Swedish civil society organisation that focuses on how oppressive social norms and values of masculinity can be challenged.¹⁴⁹

7. Recommendations

The following recommendations target the Swedish Embassy in Monrovia, Liberia and involve several work areas under the embassy umbrella. Some recommendations are directly targeting the Swedish embassy, whereas others require involvement of partner organisations. The authors recognise that some of these recommendations could be perceived as sensitive and require a careful analysis of the context before addressing further.

7.1 General

- Use a clear and inclusive terminology when discussing gender norms and SGBV to ensure clarity and the roles of the involved parties. This means, for example, recognise that in the large majority of cases the SGBV discussion is about men's and boys' violence against women and girls.
- Understand that gender norms are experienced intersectionally and thus differently depending on class, age, ethnicity, sexuality etc.
- Avoid regarding SGBV as a stand-alone topic. Recognise that SGBV is one of many forms that gender inequality may take. Adopt a multisectoral approach addressing power imbalances in society.

¹⁴³ https://www.k4health.org/sites/default/files/great_project_how-to-guide.pdf

¹⁴⁴ https://path.azureedge.net/media/documents/GVR_gen_eq_eth_rpt.pdf

¹⁴⁵ <https://www.icrw.org/research-programs/gender-equity-movement-in-schools-gems/>

¹⁴⁶ <https://promundoglobal.org/programs/program-h/>

¹⁴⁷ <http://raisingvoices.org/sasa/>

¹⁴⁸ <https://www.soulcity.org.za>

¹⁴⁹ <http://www.machofabriken.se>

- Focus on the positive. What are the positive norms that can be promoted? What aspects in the local culture are affirmative for gender equality? What are the positive aspects of religion which could be used working with gender norms?
- Use a rights-based approach and define the roles of both duty bearers and rights holders in addressing SGBV.

7.2 Programming

- Recognise the complexity of transformative social norms change. There are no quick fixes.
- Consider the ways in which structural factors, such as access to education, employment, income, drive SGBV as an outcome of masculinities in crises. Seek to engage with policy changes and dialogue with the institutions that can change this. This implies collaboration with, for example, relevant ministries (e.g. Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection and Ministry of Education) and civil society organisations.
- Engage in further research on gender norms focusing on children and adolescents. Adolescence is a critical time period when gender roles can either be consolidated or challenged and transformed. Influencing social and gender norms during adolescence shapes the life trajectories of adolescent girls and boys and the opportunities and vulnerabilities that they may face.
- Consider funding a new programme, fully focusing on gender norms and masculinities in a long-term commitment engaging both national and international actors. Address this through the theme of women's and girls' economic empowerment to simultaneously address women's financial dependency on men and lack of access to resources.
- Engage with young women and men, including children and adolescent boys and girls through new, innovative approaches combining creativity and social norms change.
- Start at household level, for example by engaging men in reproductive and maternal health and addressing unpaid work.
- Ensure a strong and broad engagement in the communities. Individuals alone cannot carry the burden of change. The change has to build on collectively agreed values and norms if it is to have long term sustainable impact.
- Build on the current positive forms of gender norms in Liberia and develop further through existing community-based and family-oriented structures.
- Strengthen already ongoing Sida projects and programmes in Liberia by adding a social norms component. For example, the existing programme on modernising the curriculum for SRHR in Liberian schools could be one entry point. Another could be to strengthen the gender norms perspective in the ongoing collaboration between The Swedish Police Authority's and the Liberian National Police (such as addressing the aspects raised regarding the Women and Children Protection Section (WACPS), p. 25). This would however require a separate portfolio analysis to identify entry points, activities and possible collaborating partner organisations.
- Ensure funding, support, and partnership with LGBTI or sexual and gender minority led organisations for a broader and more inclusive approach to addressing gender norms. Start at urban level in the capital of Monrovia.

- Address SGBV through the entry point of violence against children (VAC) to break the circle of violence.
- Link activities on gender norms and SGBV to the EU/UN Spotlight Initiative in Liberia to ensure harmonisation and to avoid duplication of efforts.
- Ensure sophisticated monitoring and evaluation systems that can measure both quantitative and qualitative social norms change, and which seek to avoid gender binaries and reinforcing heteronormative assumptions about gender. Seek inspiration amongst actors with long and documented experience, for example Promundo or DFID.

7.3 Choice of partners

- Ensure funding to local women’s organisations in Liberia when addressing gender norms. As this study has showed, activities on positive masculinities and men’s involvement must be informed by the voices of women and girls. Local women’s organisations possess in-depth knowledge about, and access to, women and girls in Liberia.
- Involve youth and children’s organisations to address the intergenerational cycle of violence. This could, for example, imply working with attitudes, behaviours and norms in schools.
- Involve local leaders to engage in their own process of change as trendsetters, acknowledging at the same time the possible negative effects community may have on individuals. This includes working with secret societies as a possible arena for change.
- Engage with traditional healers and practitioners to address the use of witchcraft aiming at minimising harmful practices.
- Invite religious bodies to convey messages on positive gender norms to unleash their potential to promote gender equality. However, understand the complexity of working with actors who could contribute to stigmatisation and exclusion, for example of sexual and gender minorities or victims of SGBV. Contribute to building capacity within religious bodies, focusing on identifying key individuals who are in favour of progressive change. Conduct further research on the religious bodies’ role in changing gender norms, if needed.
- Partner with the private sector in the change process, for example internet or mobile operators, media actors or marketing agencies, to convey positive messages on gender norms through, for example, social media and cell phones.

7.4 Dialogue

- Develop a working group on masculinities and gender norms amongst key stakeholders in Liberia. Sweden could take the lead the first year and thereafter this could rotate amongst members. The purpose of such a group is to draw attention to the theme of masculinities through mapping ongoing initiatives and relevant research, but also to undertake joint initiatives and activities.

- Make gender norms and positive masculinities a key dialogue question for Sweden in Liberia by regularly including it in statements, speeches, in dialogue with the government and other counterparts.
- Use the various platforms for Sweden's voice in Liberia to convey messages on positive gender norms. This could be translated in to a campaign package at the Swedish embassy which includes a wide range of activities, e.g. Swedish Dads photo exhibition,¹⁵⁰ essay competition amongst young Liberians, poetry slam, social media campaigns, posters etc.
- Advocate for stronger legislation on domestic violence in Liberia. Support actions to adopt the Domestic Violence Bill including key stakeholders and activists behind the bill. Use popular media to create public awareness.

8. Conclusions

Masculine superiority is a social fabrication in which patriarchal society moulds the new members from the moment of his birth.¹⁵¹

Gender norms are socially constructed roles and responsibilities by society. These norms are culturally and structurally inherited and change over time. These norms moreover attribute certain characteristics, behaviour and attitudes to all sexes and gendered realities, which in turn lead to stereotyped gender roles through which individuals are expected to conform. One of the attributes that is linked to "*being a man*" is the notion of being violent, a toxic form of masculinity. It is worth mentioning that not all men and boys adhere to hegemonic, violent forms of masculinities, just as not all women and girls are peaceful and non-violent. Gender norms operate on a spectrum, through which hegemonic masculinities and femininities are the poles and to which individuals and society expects individuals to conform. The reality, however, is that there are a variety of gendered experiences that do not necessarily conform to the roles expected of individuals in society according to their perceived sex. It is also important to understand that not all men and boys, or women and girls, commit to the values of gender equality. They are simply not convinced or are driven by cultural and religious motives which give men and boys privileges they do not want to give up.

Gender inequalities are perpetuated through the language we use. In order to find the solutions to the problems we investigate, the terminology used has to be clear and inclusive. The conceptual shift from a women-based focus to transformative change involving boys and men also comes with the necessity to address the issue linguistically by using the correct labels. As stated by masculinity researcher Katz: "*We talk about how many women were raped last year, not about how many men raped women.*"¹⁵² It furthermore requires a broader view on the categories on woman and men to understand their complexities and that not all people conform to these.

¹⁵⁰ Exhibition developed by the Swedish Institute with photos showing fathers active in rearing their children.

¹⁵¹ Rois Pineda (2000) in UNESCO "Male roles, masculinities and violence - a culture of peace perspective"

¹⁵² Jackson Katz "The language of gender violence"

This research has studied the various understandings of masculinities and their formations in Liberia, what effects these have on women and girls (as well as boys and men) and how this is connected to SGBV. It has not studied details or the prevalence of different forms of SGBV; i.e. domestic violence, rape, FGM, or other harmful acts.

This research has been framed from the perspective that there is a need to redefine and deconstruct the various forms of masculinities in Liberia, as the cultural expectations of men have proven harmful for women. This gendered oppression takes different forms, and at its most dangerous, is a core cause of SGBV. Violence against women perpetrated by men is a result of harmful beliefs about gender and unequal power relations between sexes.

Previous efforts on tackling negative gender norms have been characterised by slow progress, short term initiatives, activities reaching only small numbers and a gap between positive attitudes and the actual willingness to give up privileges amongst men.¹⁵³ These have also been characterised by poor and irregular coordination. Evaluations of these efforts point at the need for new, innovative, sustained, and larger approaches. At the same time, there is currently a global backlash against gender equality and feminism, which goes hand in hand with nationalism, racism, homophobia, conservatism and religious fundamentalism, which also need to be addressed carefully.

SGBV is one of many expressions that negative forms of masculinities take. In order to address SGBV, one needs to look at gender inequalities in a broader sense. As many studies also have shown, it is important that the efforts in engaging men and boys are based on feminist principles and that women's and girls' voices are guiding interventions as well. At the same time, interventions need to be framed in a way that makes involvement attractive for men and boys; they need to see the benefits of challenging existing gender norms.

There is moreover a need to focus on the positive as well as to study what factors are root causes for men who don't use violence. What are those common features? Who are the men and boys who can be catalysts for change? This research has showed that women and men are willing to challenge norms, but that the price they pay at an individual level sometimes is too high. Both the women and men who informed this research voice the need for new forms of masculinities, including but not limited to: men taking a more active part in parenthood, men who are supportive of women and girls who challenge the current female stereotype and non-violent men. This research has also showed that there are practices and traditions in Liberia which can be used as platforms for this transformative change to happen. Some of these platforms or traditions may be sensitive, for example the secret societies, and would require specific expertise to address.

This research based in the Liberian context furthermore shows that gender norms that exist in society follow a traditional and conservative pattern. They are also connected to the larger structures of economy, legal framework and religion. The understanding of the gender binary in the context constructs real men to be those that are heads of households, who are the

¹⁵³ Ibid

breadwinners of and take control of the family and are the primary decision makers. This notion of being a man is also understood as a part of a gendered hierarchy, in which men have the right to control and use violence. On the other end of the gender binary, gendered norms about what it means to be a real woman are conflated with submissiveness, pride and dignity, taking care of the family and domestic duties and therefore regulated to the private sphere, with limitations on her mobility, appearance and behaviour.

The research shows that change towards a more progressive gender equal society is slow, even in urban areas, and the willingness to change is limited. Some men simply can't challenge powerful community cohesion, whereas others refer to religious and cultural reasons for maintaining the current gendered order. The change-pace is also being held back by economical and educational opportunities that come as a result of Liberia being post-conflict and post-crises.

SGBV in Liberia is widespread, especially as domestic violence is culturally as well as socially accepted. Cases of SGBV are often processed outside the formal justice system, leading to impunity and community acceptance. In some cases, the community, including religious bodies, actually reinforce negative forms of masculinities and hinder progressive attempts to challenge these norms.

A large body of global research shows that when men and boys become more active in the household, through active fatherhood or sharing of household tasks, and parallelly are given tools through dialogue with peers to put emotions into words, this will lead to healthier and less violent relationships. As toxic and hegemonic gendered norms are challenged, and notions of being a man or boy move beyond a "boys don't cry" discourse to a more balanced understanding of a variety of gendered experiences as a man, everyone from every gender and sex will benefit. However, this requires that men and boys are willing to step out of the boxes that society has created, and that they are supported by communities to take this step.

The Swedish embassy in Monrovia has a unique opportunity to address these issues through programming and dialogue, through building fruitful and innovative alliances with likeminded partners at both the national and community levels.

Annex 1. Literature list

Alexander-Scott, Bell and Holden (2016) *"DFID Guidance Note: Shifting Social Norms to Tackle Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)"*

American Psychological Association, Boys and Men Guidelines Group. (2018). *"APA guidelines for psychological practice with boys and men"*

Banyard (2015) *"Toward the next generation of bystander prevention of sexual and relationship violence"*

Barker and Ricardo (2005) *"Young Men and the Construction of Masculinity in Sub-Saharan Africa: Implications for HIV/AIDS, Conflict, and Violence"*

Breines, Convell and Eide, UNESCO (2000) *"Male roles, masculinities and violence – a culture of peace perspectives"*

Bojin (2013) *"Feminist solidarity: no boys allowed"*

Cahn (2010) *"Gender, Masculinities and Transition in Conflicted Societies"*

Christensen Florescu (2010) *"Gender Policy and SGBV – the case of Liberia"*

Cislaghi and Heise (2018) *"Globalization and Health"*, 14:83

Connell (1987) *"Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics"*

Connell (2000) *"Understanding men: Gender sociology and the new international research on masculinities"*

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) *"Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept"*

Cornwall et al (2011) *"Men and Development: politicising masculinities"*

Dover (2014) *"Scaling up work with boys and men"*

Doyle, Levtov, Barker, Bastian, Bingenheimer, Kazimbaya et al. (2018) *"Gender-transformative Bandedereho couples' intervention to promote male engagement in reproductive and maternal health and violence prevention in Rwanda: Findings from a randomized controlled trial"*

Edström et al (2015) *"Engendering Men – a collaborative review of evidence on men and boys in social change and gender equality"*

Edwards (2012) *"Man in a Box: The traditional hegemonic definition of masculinity"*

Fulu, Warner, Miedema, Jewkes, Roselli and Lang (2013). *“Why Do Some Men Use Violence Against Women and How Can We Prevent It? Quantitative Findings from the United Nations Multi-country Study on Men and Violence in Asia and the Pacific. Bangkok: UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women and UNV”*

Government of Liberia *“Liberia Demographic and Health Survey 2013”*

Greene et al (2011) *“Masculinities, social change and development”*

Greene (2013) *“The Man Box: The link between emotional suppression and male violence”*

Grubb, Amy & Turner, Emily. (2012) *“Attribution of blame in rape cases: A review of the impact of rape myth acceptance, gender role conformity and substance use on victim blaming”*

Heilman with Barker (2018) *“Masculine Norms and Violence: Making the Connections”*

Heise (2011) *“What Works to Prevent Partner Violence? An evidence overview”*, DFID

Hearn (2004) *“From Hegemonic Masculinity to the Hegemony of Men”*, Feminist Theory, Vol.5, No. 1

Horn et al (2015) *“I don’t need an eye for an eye’: Women’s responses to intimate partner violence in Sierra Leone and Liberia”*

IMAGES (12 country reports and 2 regional studies), retrieved at:

<https://promundoglobal.org/programs/international-men-and-gender-equality-survey-images/>

Impunity Watch (2017) *“Masculinities, violence against women in leadership and participation in transitional societies”*

IRC (2012) *“Let me not die before my time – domestic violence in West Africa”*

IRCW/Promundo (2010) *“What men have to do with it: public policies to promote gender equality”*

Jewkes, Flood, and Lang (2014) *“From work with men and boys to changes of social norms and reduction of inequities in gender relations: a conceptual shift in prevention of violence against women and girls.”*

Kaufman (2007) *“Successfully Involving Men and Boys to End Violence Against Women Lessons from Around the World from the White Ribbon Campaign”*

Katz (2012) *“The language of gender violence”*

Lesjane (2017) *“Exploring the Linkages of Gender, Masculinities and Faith: A Qualitative Research Report on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Liberia”* Tearfund

Living Peace Institute (2018) *“Annual Narrative Report 2017: Working with Men to Increase Security and Stabilization in North and South Kivu”*

Marcus and Page (2014) *“Drivers of Change in Gender Norms. An annotated bibliography”*

NUPI (2016) *“Gender-Based Violence and Access to Justice: Grand Bassa County, Liberia”*

NUPI (2016) *“Gender Based Violence and Access to Justice: the case of Ganta, Liberia”*

OHCHR and UNMIL (2015) *“An Assessment of Human Rights Issues Emanating from Traditional Practices in Liberia”*

ODI (2014) *“How do gender norms change?”*

OXFAM (2018) *“Enough Excuses: Social Norms and Masculinity that Underpin Violence Against Women and Girls in Liberia”*, unpublished

Peacock and Barker (2012) *“Working with men and boys to promote gender equality”*

Pease (2008) *“Engaging men in men’s violence prevention”*

Promundo (2018) *“Masculine norms and violence – making the connection”*

Promundo and UN Women (2017) *“Understanding Masculinities: Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) – Middle East and North Africa”*

Raising Voices and Trocaire (2016) *“SASA! Faith: A guide for faith communities to prevent violence against women and HIV”*

Slegh, Pawlak, and Barker (2012) *“Journeys of transformation: A training manual for engaging men as allies in women’s economic empowerment”*

Social Cohesion and Reconciliation (SCORE) Index, Liberia

Stop AIDS Liberia et al (2017) *“Human Rights Violations Against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) People in Liberia: Submitted for consideration at the 120th Session of the Human Rights Committee”*

Thornhill (2017) *“Power, predation, and postwar state formation: the public discourse of ritual child rape in Liberia”*

UNFPA (2014) *“Men, masculinities and changing power”*

Wentzell et al (2014) *“Reconceiving masculinity and men as partners”*

WONGOSOL (2017) *“Policy brief on access to justice”*

Web resources

- www.heforshe.org
- <https://gbvresponders.org/resources/#PREVENTION>
- <https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#lr>
- <https://www.icrw.org/research-programs/gender-equity-movement-in-schools-gems/>
- <https://www.liberianobserver.com/news/3-day-all-men-conference-begins-in-gbarnga/>
- https://www.k4health.org/sites/default/files/great_project_how-to-guide.pdf
- <http://www.machofabriken.se>
- <https://men-care.org>
- <https://www.mvpstrat.com/the-bystander-approach/>
- https://path.azureedge.net/media/documents/GVR_gen_eq_eth_rpt.pdf
- www.promundo.org
- <http://raisingvoices.org/sasa/>
- <https://www.soulcity.org.za>
- <https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/books/2019/01/05/men-must-join-the-gender-equality-revolution-heres-why.html>

Annex 2. Survey summary

This table summarises the survey responses at an aggregated level (sex and county) and is presented in percentage.

No.	Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	Men should be physically strong	80,5	16,9	0,0	1,5	1,1
2	Men should not display emotions	55,9	21,1	1,1	14,6	5,7
3	Men should be the key breadwinners	58,6	14,2	2,3	15,7	8,4
4	It's ok for a man to hit his wife if the woman needs to be disciplined for bad behaviour or taught how to behave as a good wife	13,0	9,6	1,5	36,8	39,1
5	A woman has the right to say no to sex, even if it is with her husband	52,9	26,8	0,8	8,4	11,1
6	Men should not be challenged by women	59,0	26,1	1,1	8,8	4,2
7	Men are better leaders	37,2	23,0	3,4	25,3	11,1
8	Domestic work is not for men	43,7	14,6	2,7	22,2	14,6
9	Men should be better pay than women	16,9	13,0	3,8	35,6	29,9
10	Inheritance should be for the boy child	27,2	7,3	4,6	28,0	32,2
11	Women should obey their husbands	87,7	11,5	0,0	0,0	0,8
12	Important family decisions (e.g. household budget, number of children etc.) should be taken by the husband	30,7	15,3	3,8	25,7	24,5
13	Men are more violent than women	35,6	23,0	5,7	26,1	8,8
14	Sometimes women contributes to sexual harassment/violence/rape (for example by the way she dresses, how she talks, where she is etc.)	75,1	13,8	0,0	6,1	5,0
15	If a woman is victim of sexual violence, she should not report this to the community and/or police, but try to settle an agreement without making a public denouncement.	19,2	11,9	0,8	20,7	47,5

Annex 3. List of respondents

Part 1. Interviews

Organisation	Location	Date	Type of interview	Sex (F/M)
Embassy of Sweden	Monrovia	10 Jan 2019	Start-up meeting	F
Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA)	Congo Town, Montserrado County	10 Jan 2019	Interview	F
Helping Our People Excel (HOPE)	Congo Town, Montserrado County	10 Jan 2019	Interview	F
University of Liberia	Monrovia	10 Jan 2019	Interview	M
West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP-Liberia)	Sinkor, Montserrado County	10 Jan 2019	Interview	F
Tearfund	Monrovia	11 Jan 2019	Interview	M
EQUIP	Monrovia	11 Jan 2019	Group interview	3 F, 3 M
WONGOSOL	Monrovia	11 Jan 2019	Interview	F
Action Aid	Monrovia	11 Jan 2019	Interview	F
National Adults Education Association of Liberia (NAEAL)	Margibi County	11 Jan 2019	Interview	F
Development Education Network Liberia (DEN-L)	Gbangra, Bong	13 Jan 2019	Interview	M
Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, Bong county	Gbangra, Bong	13 Jan 2019	Interview	F
Foundation for International Dignity (FIND)	Gbarnga, Bong County	13 Jan 2019	Interview	M
Independent Gender expert	Gbangra, Bong	14 Jan 2019	Interview	F
LNP-WACPS	Margibi County	15 Jan 2019	Interview	2M
CH Rennie Hospital	Margibi County	15 Jan 2019	Interview	F
Concern Women Ganta	Ganta, Nimba County	15 Jan 2019	Interview	F
Concern Women Ganta	Ganta, Nimba County	15 Jan 2019	Group interview	5F
LNP-WACPS	Ganta, Nimba County	15 Jan 2019	Interview	M
LIPRIDE	Monrovia	16 Jan 2019	Interview	M
Gender Ministry Branch	Sanniquellie	16 Jan 2019	Interview	F
LNP-WACPS	Sanniquellie	16 Jan 2019	Interview	2F
Court/Justice	Sanniquellie	16 Jan 2019	Interview	2M
Gender Ministry Branch	Voinjama	17 Jan 2019	Interview	F

Court/Justice	Voinjama	17 Jan 2019	Interview	M
WACPS	Voinjama	17 Jan 2019	Interview	M
Rural Dweller Empowerment Concept Inc.	Voinjama	17 Jan 2019	Interview	M
Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection	Monrovia	17 Jan 2019	Interview	F
PLAN International	Monrovia	17 Jan 2019	Interview	1F, 1M
Embassy of Sweden	Monrovia	18 Jan 2019	Presentation	4F, 1M
UNWOMEN	Monrovia	18 Jan 2019	Interview	1F, 1M
OXFAM	Monrovia	18 Jan 2019	Interview	F
Irish Aid	Monrovia	18 Jan 2019	Interview	F

Part 2. Focus group discussions

County	District	Date	# of participants	Sex (F/M)	Sub group
Bong	Palala	14 January 2019	11	F	Women 36-55 years
Bong	Weinsue	14 January 2019	10	M	Men 36-55 years
Bong	Gbarnga	14 January 2019	9	5 F, 4 M	Leaders
Bong	Gbarnga	14 January 2019	10	10 F	Women 18 – 35 years
Bong	Suakoko	14 January 2019	10	10 M	Men 18 – 35 years
Margibi	Weala	15 January 2019	10	M	Men 36-55 years
Margibi	Kakata	15 January 2019	9	M	Men 18-35 years
Margibi	Kakata	15 January 2019	10	F	Women 36-55 years
Margibi	Kakata	15 January 2019	10	F	Women 18-35 years
Margibi	Kakata	15 January 2019	10	2 F, 8 M	Leaders
Nimba	Kpain	15 January 2019	10	10 M	Men 36 – 55 years
Nimba	Ganta	15 January 2019	10	10 F	Women 18 – 35 years
Nimba	Ganta	15 January 2019	9	2 F, 7 M	Leaders
Nimba	Sanniquellie	16 January 2019	10	10 M	Men 18 – 35 years
Nimba	Sanniquellie	16 January 2019	10	10 F	Women 36 – 55 years
Montserrado	Nyehn	16 January 2019	10	10 M	Men 36 – 55 years
Montserrado	Kingsville #7	16 January 2019	10	10 F	Women 18 – 35 years
Montserrado	Monrovia	17 January 2019	10	M	Men 18 – 35 years
Montserrado	Monrovia	17 January 2019	10	F	Women 36 – 55 years
Montserrado	Monrovia	17 January 2019	10	2 F, 8 M	Leaders
Lofa	Voinjama	17 January 2019	10	F	Women 18 - 35 years
Lofa	Voinjama	17 January 2019	10	F	Women 36 – 55 years
Lofa	Voinjama	17 January 2019	10	M	Men 36 -55 years
Lofa	Voinjama	17 January 2019	10	M	Men 18 – 35 years
Lofa	Voinjama	17 January 2019	10	4 F, 6 M	Leaders
Montserrado	Monrovia	26 February 2019	10	F	Women 18 - 35 years
Montserrado	Monrovia	26 February 2019	10	2F, 8F	Mixed 36-55 years
Montserrado	Nyehn	27 February 2019	10	M	Men 36 – 55 years
Margibi	Gbandi	27 February 2019	10	F	Women 36 – 55 years
Margibi	Kataka	27 February 2019	10	3F, 7M	Mixed 18-35 years
Montserrado	Kingsville #7	27 February 2019	10	M	Men 18 – 35 years
TOTAL			248	F: 141 M: 167	

Annex 4. Interview guidelines

Objective	Survey	FGDs	Interviews
<p>How gender norms and masculinity in Liberia are constructed, what forms they take and what effects they have on women, girls, boys and men, and society at large</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men should be physically strong • Men should not display emotions • Men should be the key breadwinners • Men are better leaders • Domestic work is not for men • Men should be better pay than women • Inheritance should be for the boy child • Important family decisions (e.g. household budget, number of children etc.) should be taken by the husband • Men are more violent than women • Men should not be challenged by women • Women should obey their husbands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Words you associate with masculinities (“to be a real man”) and femininities (“to be a good woman”). • What happens if someone challenge the norm, i.e. a man shows behaviours that society associates with being feminine or the opposite a woman entering into men’s world? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is society’s view on men and masculinities? • What upholds these structures? • What can challenge the patriarchal structure? • How do you interpret the term “toxic masculinity”? • What role does the post conflict environment play in forming masculinities in Liberia?
<p>How norms of masculinity impact SGBV</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It’s ok for a man to hit his wife if the woman needs to be disciplined for bad behaviour or taught how to behave as a good wife • A woman has the right to say no to sex, even if it is with her husband • Sometimes women contribute to sexual harassment/violence/rape (for example by the way she dresses, how she talks, where she is etc.) • If a woman is victim of sexual violence, she should not report this 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What drives men to use violence? • Sexual violence? • How do forms of masculinities impact SGBV? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What drives men to use violence? • Why do toxic masculinities result in SGBV? • Why do they take this specific form? • Is there any difference, in your view, on the SGBV committed against female minors (girls)?

	to the community and/or police, but try to settle an agreement without making a public denouncement.		
<p>Positive social norms and positive aspects of masculinity that can present opportunities to involve men in ending VAW/G</p> <p>Theories of change and development interventions that begin challenging negative notions of masculinity</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What forms of positive masculinities are present in your community? • In what way are these positive, what is the positive impact of these? • Are there any local traditions/practices which can contribute to positive gender norms (both women and men)? How can one build on these to create change? <i>For example, ceremonies, culture, rituals, events, social norms, marriages, births etc</i> • Which platforms could be used to create positive forms of gender norms? <i>For example, church, schools, home, dialogue groups, health centre etc.</i> • Who are the men who don't use violence? Who are the men who support their wives? The church and society both allow violence to a certain degree, how come that these men still are non-violent? On what do they base their decision NOT to use violence? • One aspect of positive masculinities is about recognising male entitlement, i.e. that men and boys need to understand their privileges. Only then, by realising this, change can happen. One arena is on decision making and power. How could men use their privileges in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kind of interventions are you aware of which have had positive effects on gender norms? • What results have these given? • What have been critical factors for success in these interventions? • How involve men in ending SGBV? • Literature proposes that the role of men and boys in gender equality has changed over time; from being involved (participation) to the need for men to change (transformative process). What is your take on this?

		<p>society to ensure empowerment for women and girls?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is needed to change gender roles and understanding privileges (from government, communities, families, individuals, men, women etc)? • What can you do to advocate for more gender equality in your community? 	
Justice sector			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the typical SGBV case look like in Liberia (age, sex, situation etc. – both survivor and perpetrator)? • Do you have any statistics to share on SGBV in the county/national level? • What drives, according to you, men to use violence against women? • How can it be stopped? • What role does customary judicial system play in settling cases on SGBV?
Community leaders/power structures			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can local communities work jointly to challenge oppressive gender norms? • What is the role of the church in this process?