

Violence Against Children: A Desk Review of the Children and Youth Sector in Liberia

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A desk review prepared by:
Monica Tulchinsky
Carter Center Legal Consultant
Sexual and Gender Based Violence Crimes Unit
Ministry of Justice
Monrovia, Liberia
+1 717 514 3234 (USA)
mk.tulchin@gmail.com

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

AfT	Agenda for Transformation
AGALI	Adolescent Girls' Advocacy and Leadership Initiative
BIN	Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CWC	Child Welfare Committees
DCI-Liberia	Defence for Children International-Liberia
EU	European Union
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GoL	Government of Liberia
HOPE	Helping Our People Excel, Inc.
HEAL	Holistic Education Advocating Leadership
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IRC	International Rescue Committee
JDJ	James N. Davis Jr. Memorial Hospital
JFK	John F. Kennedy Medical Center
LNP	Liberian National Police
MCP	Monrovia Central Prison
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoGD	Ministry of Gender and Development
MoIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs
MoHSW	Ministry of Health and Social Welfare
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MoL	Ministry of Labor
NACROG	National Child Rights Observation Group
NACOMAL	National Commission on Child Labor
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PLG	Program Learning Group
SGBV	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
THINK	Touching Humanity In Need of Kindness
TIP	Trafficking in Persons
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
UN WOMEN	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
WACPS	Women and Children Protection Section
WOLPNET	Women of Liberia Peace Network
WOSI	Women Solidarity Incorporated

Executive Summary

Context

This desk review was conducted in preparation for Search for Common Ground's European Union (EU) sponsored project aiming to contribute to the eradication of violence against children in three West Africa nations, including Liberia. The project will use a "Listening and Learning" methodology, consisting of more than 600 semi-structured peer conversations in Liberia, to identify the worst forms of violence against children. Search for Common Ground (SfCG) will then host curriculum summits for youth to generate tools and policy recommendations to influence country-level programmatic and policy actions involving children and youth. These recommendations will be shared with policy makers and other stakeholders to assist in the development of policies and initiatives that garner youth inclusion in decision making.

Through this desk review, SfCG seeks a more complete picture of the worst forms of violence against children and the cumulative impact of current approaches addressing them. The findings will be utilized to inform and shape the methodology and tools for the EU project's field research. It will ensure that the project's research builds on past work, taking the children and youth sector further and avoiding duplication. The desk review also aims to identify the information gaps that will need to be explored during the field research.

Methodology

The review was carried out in several stages. First, an internet search for published information was carried out. Based upon the information gleaned and the author's pre-existing contacts in the child protection area, approximately twelve (12) interview appointments were arranged at various government institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in the children and youth sector. These interviews were conducted between May 23, 2014 and June 3, 2014. Information and hard copy reports were collected at the interview sites. After the interviews, further internet research was conducted to follow up on newly gathered information.

Challenges and limitations included limited access to internet materials from government entities and NGOs in Liberia due to constraints surrounding internet access and computer literacy. There were also limitations in setting up interviews with child protection actors due to lack of regular phone and internet access in Liberia, particularly for local NGOs.

Main Findings

The major types of violence against children in Liberia uncovered by this study were sexual violence, female genital mutilation, early and forced marriage, domestic and international trafficking, child labor, domestic violence/corporal punishment, and detention of children in jails and prisons. While Liberia has excellent national action plans and policies for most of these areas of concern, implementation is problematic. Budgetary constraints, lack of resources and staff, and corruption contribute collectively to the failure to implement intricate government planning surrounding violence against children. Despite these challenges, both international and domestic NGOs have made great strides in combatting violence in Liberia's post-war setting. Awareness raising has been a primary focus of the work completed in combating violence against children, and many children are able to identify things like rape, corporal punishment, and child labor as violations of their rights.

Findings

National Legal Frameworks and Enforcement in Child Protection

Liberia's Children's Act was passed in 2011, largely due to the advocacy efforts of local NGOs HOPE and THINK in partnership with AGALI.¹ This law provides for a children's "Bill of Rights" in Article III, including basic rights (food, water, shelter, education, etc.); protection from harmful work practices; protection from sexual abuse; and protection from involvement in violent conflicts, among others. Articles VI and VII include additional protections from early and forced marriage, forced labor, domestic violence, torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, and other harmful practices.

Article XI of the Children's Act calls for the establishment of child welfare committees (CWCs) at the town or community level and calls for children's representative fora to be established at the town, district, and county levels. The CWCs are to include "a traditional leader, a man and woman representing parents, a female child, a male child, two representatives of organizations in the community, and three other local members from a variety of religious faiths."² Liberia's Ministry of Gender and Development (MoGD) is the government institution responsible for coordinating and implementing the Children's Act, in cooperation with other agencies and ministries.³ As such, the MoGD has established 420 initial CWCs in 7 of 15 counties.⁴ NGOs have also taken action on this front; DCI-Liberia has been involved in strengthening and establishing 20 child welfare committees in Montserrado and Bomi counties, and UNICEF has partnered with the MoGD in establishing CWCs as well.⁵

Instrumental in the passage of the Children's Act was the Liberian Children's Parliament, which is organized by the MoGD's Division of Children Protection and Development, headed by Ms. Beatrice Walker.⁶ The Children's Parliament meets the Children's Law requirement for children's representative fora at the town, district, and county levels. This national children's representative forum was established in 2002 as a result of a United Nations (UN) Special

¹ Pittman, Mary. (2012, September 24). *Passing the Children's Act in Liberia: A Story from the Adolescent Girls' Advocacy and Leadership Initiative*. Retrieved from <http://rhrealitycheck.org/article/2012/09/24/passing-childrens-act-in-liberia-story-from-adolescent-girls-advocacy-and-leade-1/>

² Adolescent Girls' Advocacy & Leadership Initiative, Public Health Institute, & United Nations Foundation. (2012). *Policy in Brief Liberia: The Children's Law*. Retrieved from www.letgirlslead.org/assets/pdfs/Childrens-Law-2011-Liberia.pdf

³ Republic of Liberia & International Organization for Migration. (2014). *Five-Year National Action Plan in the Fight Against the Trafficking of Human Beings 2013-2018* [Brochure]. Monrovia, Liberia: Author.

⁴ Ministry of Gender and Development Children's Protection and Development Division. *Convention on the Rights of the Child: some achievements* [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from www.cpcnetwork.org/admin/includes/doc_view.php?ID=974

⁵ Defence for Children International. (June 2012). *Liberia*. Retrieved from <https://www.defenceforchildren.org/dci-worldwide/dci-africa/liberia.html>

⁶ Pittman, Mary. (2012, September 24). *Passing the Children's Act in Liberia: A Story from the Adolescent Girls' Advocacy and Leadership Initiative*. Retrieved from <http://rhrealitycheck.org/article/2012/09/24/passing-childrens-act-in-liberia-story-from-adolescent-girls-advocacy-and-leade-1/>

Session on Children,⁷ and its mission is to advocate on behalf of the voiceless and report on community children's issues. The parliament consists of two representatives from each of the 15 counties in Liberia. Leadership positions in the Children's Parliament include speaker, deputy speaker, and secretary-general. Elections are held every two years, with the most recent elections scheduled for May 2014.⁸ The children's parliament has represented Liberia to other children's parliaments around the world, including participating in the Mano River Union Youth Parliament with Sierra Leone and Guinea.⁹

The Children's Parliament has existed for nearly 12 years and has faced some difficulty in that time. For example, in 2012 the speaker of the Children's Parliament resigned, citing challenges including lack of institutional support from the MoGD; failure to implement recommendations; and lack of financial support directly from the Government of Liberia, which relies heavily on donors.¹⁰ Most recently, in June 2014, the Acting Secretary General of the Children's Parliament called for allotment of funding for its activities from the Liberian legislature, noting that the Children's Parliament had never in its history been allotted any funding from Liberia's National Budget. The children's representative forum has been completely reliant on donor funding, which is becoming scarce, and the parliament was unable to celebrate the International Day of the African Child this year due to budgetary constraints.¹¹

Enforcement in the area of child protection is carried out by the members of the national Child Protection Network (CPN). The national CPN task force meets on the first Tuesday of every month at the MoGD to discuss challenges and achievements in the field of child protection. Membership of the CPN stands at 33, including government actors MoGD, Ministry of Justice (MoJ), Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MoHSW); NGOs Save the Children, Search for Common Ground, THINK, Plan Liberia, Samaritan's Purse, DCI-Liberia; and others. The CPN is coordinated by the MoGD with support from UNICEF. Member entities are expected to regularly submit monthly reports to the MoGD on their child protection efforts. The MoGD grants accreditation for institutions working in child protection, and failure to submit CPN reports can result in accreditation being revoked.

The CPN's current three-year strategic work plan will expire in July 2014. Quarterly reviews of the work plan were held in July 2012, January 2013, and September 2013. The fourth and final review was held on April 24, 2014 at the MoGD. Priorities of the CPN identified at the fourth quarterly review included 1) reinforcing the capacity structure of the CPN; 2) promoting the adoption, application, and monitoring of child focused laws, policies and standards; 3) developing an operationalized information management system to monitor, report, document, analyse and follow up on country-wide cases of child rights violations; and 4) supporting mechanisms for the active participation of children in decision-making processes affecting them, including better coordination of technical, mentoring, and logistical support to the Liberian Children's Parliament. Regarding the third priority—monitoring and reporting of child rights

⁷ UN High Commissioner for Refugees. (2004, June 8). Children's Parliament in Liberia Grapples with Return Issues. *ReliefWeb*. Retrieved from <http://reliefweb.int/report/liberia/childrens-parliament-liberia-grapples-return-issues>

⁸ Monica Tulchinsky. (2014, May 6). Notes taken at the public meeting of the Ministry of Gender and Development Child Protection Network. Monrovia, Liberia.

⁹ The Analyst. (2005, January 24). Liberia: Children's Parliament Calls for Support for Reparations and Resettlement of Child Soldiers. *The Analyst*. Retrieved from <http://www.afrika.no/Detailed/7007.html>

¹⁰ Zeongar, O. Testimony. (2012, June 12). Liberia: Children's Parliament Speaker Resigns for 'Lack of Gov't Support.' *AllAfrica.com*. Retrieved from <http://allafrica.com/stories/201206120854.html>

¹¹ Brooks, Calvin. (2014, June 17). Children Parliament Seeks Budgetary Allotment. *Liberia News Agency*. Retrieved from <http://www.liberianewsagency.org/pagesnews.php?nid=1602>

violations—MoGD is reportedly engaged in negotiations with the three telecommunications providers in Monrovia—Cellcom, LoneStar, and NovaFone—to establish a child abuse hotline.¹²

The Program Learning Group (PLG) is another network of child protection actors, boasting 51 members, including government entities MoGD, MoJ, MoHSW, Ministry of Education (MoE), and Ministry of Internal Affairs (MoIA); NGOs Save the Children and THINK; and international institutions such as UNICEF. Fifteen member organizations serve on the steering committee which meets every six weeks, and the MoGD serves as the steering committee chair. The larger PLG network meets four times per year. The PLG overlaps with the CPN in that PLG is a member of CPN, and vice versa. The PLG largely focuses on research, advocacy and learning. It conducts research workshops and has hosted an annual learning event for the past three years. Recently, it has developed a draft child protection curriculum for social work programs and is working with the University of Liberia and Cuttington University to pilot this curriculum in September 2014. Current social work curricula focus on case management, resulting in social workers who are completely untrained in the psychosocial area. Therefore, the newly developed curriculum has a psychosocial focus.¹³

The Child Justice Forum, headed by Sonnie Williams of the Child Justice Unit at the MoJ, meets on the last Thursday of every month. The Forum's primary focus is intervening in cases of children in contact or in conflict with the law (child victims and child perpetrators, respectively). To this end, the Child Justice Forum facilitates case tracking conferences regarding detained juveniles every Thursday. The Forum recently piloted a diversion program as an alternative to detention for juveniles at Monrovia Central Prison (MCP) and is currently seeking funding to continue the program. The Forum is also presently liaising with UNICEF and Ministry of Labor (MoL) to include MCP's detained juveniles in a national youth volunteer program to provide them with free educational services. The Forum's other current projects include facilitating the creation of Standard Operating Procedures for the Women and Children Protection Section (WACPS) of the Liberian National Police (LNP) in dealing with children as well as creating a directory for child justice actors. In addition, the Forum is the sponsor of a child justice hotline.

Sexual Violence

Under Liberian law, any form of sexual intercourse between a person over the age of 18 and a person under the age of 18 is rape. In many common law countries, this form of rape is referred to as "statutory rape." Forcible rape, by which a person has sexual intercourse with another person without his or her consent, is also criminalized in Liberia.¹⁴ The majority of child rape cases involve forcible rape, but the Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) Crimes Unit at the MoJ generally prosecutes these cases under Liberia's statutory rape law in order to more easily prosecute and convict offenders.

Of the 10 interviews conducted with child protection actors, seven named sexual violence as the worst form of violence affecting children in Liberia. This anecdotal evidence of high rates of sexual violence targeting children is confirmed by data gathering in the country. Rape and

¹² Interview with Katherine Redd, Holistic Education Advocating Leadership (HEAL), May 24, 2014

¹³ Interview with Henrietta Tolbert, Program and Advocacy Manager, ChildFund Liberia, May 29, 2014

¹⁴ Liberian Code of Laws Revised, Volume IV, Title 26, §§ 14.70(1), 14.70(1)(a)(ii)

domestic violence account for over 70% of all serious crimes reported in Liberia,¹⁵ and in 2012, 92% of the cases of sexual violence recorded by the MoGD involved children between the ages of three months to 17 years. The total number of child rape cases recorded that year was 1,348.¹⁶ In 2013, in the first six months alone, there were 814 rape cases reported by four hospitals in Monrovia, and 95% of those cases involved child victims.¹⁷

In addition to rape, transactional sex between young girls and older men also constitutes a form of sexual violence against children in Liberia. Families will often accept these arrangements as a way of providing for the family. A 2006 study by Save the Children documented this phenomenon particularly well among Liberian Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). During the course of its work in IDP camps, Save the Children discovered that girl children were engaging in transactional sex with older men in exchange for money, food, and other provisions or favors. The girls involved ranged in age from 8-18, with girls over the age of 12 regularly involved in transactional sex. Older men with power and money who were exploiting girls included camp officials, humanitarian aid workers, peacekeepers, businessmen, government workers, and teachers.

Causes of this phenomenon were primarily lack of economic opportunity and chronic poverty in the camps. Parents did not feel empowered to stop their children from engaging in these activities because they did not have the means to provide for them. In some cases, parents and other family members actually encouraged girls to engage in transactional sex to provide for the family, and those who tried to intervene to stop it would be seen as antagonists. Due to the population density of the camps, the mix of different traditional communities in one place, parents' inability to provide for their children's basic necessities, and lack of activities for children, the risk of sexual exploitation in the camps was high. Many of these causes and conditions carry over into densely populated impoverished communities in Monrovia and its environs today.¹⁸

Interviews with child protection actors indicate that perpetrators of sexual violence against children are almost exclusively male. They are primarily men known to the child, in their family or community. Typical perpetrators include uncles, step-fathers, neighbours, teachers, and mothers' boyfriends.¹⁹ Teachers in particular have been implicated in widespread sexual exploitation of girl children, the repercussions of which include girls dropping out of school in order to avoid abuse. Girls may also drop out when they become impregnated by their abuser.²⁰

¹⁵ United Nations in Liberia. (2013). *United Nations Development Assistance Framework, 2013-2017*. Retrieved from

<http://www.undg.org/unct.cfm?module=CoordinationProfile&page=Country&CountryID=LIR>

¹⁶ United Nations in Liberia, *Facts About Rape in Liberia*, Retrieved at unmil.unmissions.org/Portals/unmil/RapeFactSheet_FOLD_No_Bleed.pdf

¹⁷ United Nations in Liberia, *Facts About Rape in Liberia*, Retrieved at unmil.unmissions.org/Portals/unmil/RapeFactSheet_FOLD_No_Bleed.pdf

¹⁸ Save the Children UK. (2006). *From Camp to Community: Liberia study on exploitation of children*. Retrieved from www.crin.org/docs/save_uk_liberia.pdf

¹⁹ Interview with Christopher Ngwerume, Social Protection Specialist, UNICEF, May 28, 2014; Interview with Sallimatu Kamara, Founder & Director, WomenAID, May 23, 2014; Interview with Lindsey Gould, Women and Children Protection Section, Liberian National Police, May 26, 2014

²⁰ Zeongar, O. Testimony. (2012, April 10). Laureate Gbowee Opens Up on "Sexual Exploitation, Abuse of Girls" Here. *Heritage*. Retrieved from http://heritageliberia.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1413%3Alaureate-gbowee-opens-up-on-sexual-exploitation-abuse-of-girls-here&catid=68%3Ahuman-rights&Itemid=88

One of the major structural conditions in Liberia giving rise to the high incidence of sexual violence against children is poverty. Most parents are poor and do not have the means to provide for childcare when they are working. Youth programs for children are essentially non-existent, so if school is not in session, children are home. When these children are unsupervised, they are left vulnerable to sexual abuse.

Lack of parental supervision is not always poverty-related, however; it is also a Liberian cultural norm. The majority of parents allow their children to go out alone. For example, at night, when parents are not working, one may see children out walking by themselves.²¹ This is due to Liberian culture which follows an extended family structure by which other adults are typically around to supervise children. However, extended family structures have been disrupted due to the long civil conflict, and thus the traditional support network does not always function well today. In addition, younger Liberians who grew up during the era of the conflict may have had few to no parenting role models. These young parents, no matter their socioeconomic scale, may fail to properly supervise their children simply because they have not been taught to do so.²²

Cultural attitudes also contribute to sexual violence against children in that it is generally not culturally acceptable for a child in Liberian society to speak out and accuse an adult, particularly an adult who is close to the child, like a relative or teacher.²³ This culture of silence fosters the cycle of violence.

There are many consequences for child victims of sexual violence, from the immediate physical complications to longer-term psychological issues. In the most severe cases, this violation of children's bodies may result in death. In 2012, there were five recorded deaths of children as a result of rape, and in 2013 there were at least 10.²⁴ Fistulas are a serious medical complication that may result from child rape. In addition, children may contract sexually transmitted diseases (STDs); if this occurs, the child is stigmatized in the community, and community members will avoid contact with the child due to lack of knowledge surrounding STD transmission mechanisms.

In general, rape carries with it lifelong stigmatization for victims. As a result, child victims often cannot realize their full potential. Children who become pregnant as a result of rape will most often drop out of school. Some of them will end up on the streets engaging in prostitution in order to support themselves and their child. This becomes a vicious cycle in which the children of these young mothers also become teenage mothers due to lack of proper parental supervision. Generally, child victims of sexual violence will become depressed and withdrawn, and once a child is victimized, his or her chance of being victimized a second time rises dramatically. Communities also suffer when there are cases of sexual violence against children in that these cases produce a prevalence of vulnerable families in the community, in which children are raising children.²⁵

²¹ Interview with Lindsey Gould, Women and Children Protection Section, Liberian National Police, May 26, 2014

²² Schmidt, Susan. (June 2011). *Liberian Refugees: Cultural Considerations for Social Service Providers. Bridging Refugee Youth & Children's Services*. Retrieved from www.brycs.org/documents/upload/Liberian_Cultural_Considerations.pdf

²³ Interview with Christopher Ngwerume, Social Protection Specialist, UNICEF, May 28, 2014

²⁴ United Nations in Liberia, *Facts About Rape in Liberia*, Retrieved at unmil.unmissions.org/Portals/unmil/RapeFactSheet_FOLD_No_Bleed.pdf

²⁵ Interview with Christopher Ngwerume, Social Protection Specialist, UNICEF, May 28, 2014

The referral pathway for sexual violence survivors includes medical, counselling, police (WACPS), and legal support (SGBV Crimes Unit at MoJ). Medical support includes the MoHSW and all hospitals with the capacity to conduct medical exams on sexual violence survivors, including John F. Kennedy Medical Center (JFK) and James N. Davies Memorial Hospital (JDJ). The government has also been engaged in building one-stop centers for sexual violence survivors. There are currently five one-stop centers in Montserrado County at the following locations: 1) James N. Davies Memorial Hospital, Nezo Community, Paynesville; 2) Redemption Hospital, New Kru Town, Bushroad Island, Monrovia; 3) Duport Road Health Center, Duport Road, Paynesville; 4) Star of the Sea Health Center, West Point, Monrovia; and 5) Hope for Women International (HOPE), A.B. Tolbert Road, Paynesville. There is also one in Bomi County, at the Liberian Government Hospital in Tubmanburg, and one in Bong County, at C.B. Dunbar Hospital in Gbarnga.²⁶ The NGO Holistic Education Advocating Leadership (HEAL) is currently negotiating a contract with HOPE for a one-stop center partnership.²⁷ There have not been any known assessments of the effectiveness of the one-stop centers. Anecdotal evidence from child protection actors, particularly from the SGBV Crimes Unit, indicates that most of the centers are not fully functional at present.

HEAL is one of the child protection actors involved in prevention of sexual violence against children. The organization conducts awareness programming including “safe/unsafe touch” workshops. These workshops teach children ways in which it is and is not safe for adults and others to touch them. HEAL trained the staff at THINK to conduct these workshops and has collaborated with four schools since October 2013 to conduct workshops. THINK has also independently continued the “safe/unsafe touch” workshops in Paynesville.²⁸

The UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) is engaged in gender-based violence (GBV) monitoring and reporting as well as awareness activities. Within the Liberian government, UNMIL advocates on GBV issues and partners with the government on GBV awareness initiatives. UNMIL engages in institutional capacity building for various actors in the GBV arena, including government, stakeholders in the counties, and local civil society organizations (CSOs).²⁹

MoGD hosts monthly meetings of both the national GBV task force and county GBV task forces. GBV task forces in the other 14 counties also meet on a monthly basis. Attendees include UN agencies, Liberian government partners, and NGOs. UNMIL works with the Montserrado County task force putting reports together for the MoGD.³⁰

The three safe homes in Monrovia for sexual violence survivors are THINK, Liberia Crisis Center, and WomenAid. All three of these safe homes are suffering from drastic funding cuts due to donor flight. In fact, the founder and director of WomenAid stated that there have been cases in which the organization has had to turn children away due to lack of funding.³¹ Under the UN Joint Programme on GBV, UNFPA and UN WOMEN are working on supporting existing

²⁶ Ratnam, Rukshan. (2014, May 7). Message posted to liberia-expats electronic mailing list, archived at <https://groups.google.com/forum/m/#!msg/liberia-expats/ISfG1SCdl9s/Xy16VaynRksJ>

²⁷ Interview with Katherine Redd, Holistic Education Advocating Leadership (HEAL), May 24, 2014

²⁸ Interview with Katherine Redd, Holistic Education Advocating Leadership (HEAL), May 24, 2014

²⁹ Interview with Leetor Williams, Sexual and Gender Based Violence Focal Person, Human Rights Unit, United Nations Mission in Liberia, May 29, 2014

³⁰ Interview with Leetor Williams, Sexual and Gender Based Violence Focal Person, Human Rights Unit, United Nations Mission in Liberia, May 29, 2014

³¹ Interview with Sallimatu Kamara, Founder & Director, WomenAID, May 23, 2014

safe homes. There are issues surrounding sustainability because the government is not ready to take over safe home operations. While MoGD provides some support to safe homes, it is extremely limited. The government is supposed to have a significant influence on how safe homes are run; for example, the MoGD regulates safe homes under guidelines for safe home accreditation. However, in practice, regulation is quite limited.³²

Lack of funding is a major challenge affecting all anti-sexual violence actors in the Government of Liberia, including the SGBV Crimes Unit of the MoJ, which prosecutes sexual violence cases; the WACPS of the LNP, which investigates child rape cases; the Juvenile Division of the Department of Social Welfare at the MoHSW; and the Division of Child Protection and Development as well as the Adolescent Girls Unit at the MoGD.

One of the major challenges to combating sexual violence against children in Liberia is lack of reporting. Many parents will punish children who report because they believe rape is the child's fault, particularly where the parent or guardian had previously counselled the child in this regard.³³ Fear of punishment, along with the culture of silence in Liberia, results in children not reporting. There is also a lack of awareness amongst children regarding how to report sexual violence to child protection actors, like police and health workers, in cases in which children are not comfortable reporting to their parents or guardians. In general, children are afraid of the police; WACPS has attempted to address this issue by instituting a plainclothes policy in their police force.

Other challenges include gaining access to remote, rural areas where sexual violence against children is widespread. There are many remote areas that are seeing a rise in sexual violence against children and do not have an UNMIL presence or NGOs in the area to address the issue. For example, when one UNMIL officer visited a remote district of Grand Kru County, she found that 88% of the girls aged 12-18 were pregnant or already mothers. According to the people living there, there is a secret society operating in the village, and at certain times the town devil comes out. When this happens, men take girls from their homes, and if a parent does not allow his or her child to be taken, it will become a serious problem. Currently, there is still no UNMIL officer stationed in that county.³⁴

There is also a problem with sexual violence against children in refugee camps in Nimba and Grand Geddeh counties for Ivoirian refugees. There are currently no organizations offering comprehensive support for victims of SGBV in these camps. The International Rescue Committee (IRC) is the coordinating agency for the camps and refers child victims to Save the Children for counselling. However, no organization has funds allocated to responding to cases of sexual violence against children in the camps, and thus there is a tendency to compromise these cases. Save the Children is currently engaging in budget realignment and attempting to locate funds to address this issue. To create awareness surrounding this issue, a team from the United Kingdom created a film in partnership with Save the Children. This film is to be screened at the international Sexual Violence in Conflict Conference and raises awareness surrounding the issue of sexual violence in refugee camps and other post-conflict settings.³⁵

³² Interview with Christopher Ngwerume, Social Protection Specialist, UNICEF, May 28, 2014

³³ Interview with Lindsey Gould, Women and Children Protection Section, Liberian National Police, May 26, 2014

³⁴ Interview with Leetor Williams, Sexual and Gender Based Violence Focal Person, Human Rights Unit, United Nations Mission in Liberia, May 29, 2014

³⁵ Interview with Laila Khondkar, Save the Children, May 28, 2014

Generally, there are serious institutional weaknesses among the major players that form the referral pathway, which includes medical, counselling, police, and legal support. For example, there is not sufficient capacity within the LNP to properly preserve evidence; thus, if and when cases go to trial, there may not be enough evidence to convict, allowing perpetrators to walk.³⁶ Even if evidence is sufficiently preserved to provide a sample to the forensic center at JDJ Hospital, there is only one trained clinician there to conduct the analysis.³⁷

While there is a solid legal framework providing protections against sexual violence, institutions do not intervene. This is due to a variety of factors, including lack of competence and lack of funding. For example, the police officer to whom a sexual violence incident is reported may not be trained in how to properly handle cases of sexual violence against children. In the case that the police officer does intervene, he or she likely will not have the means to investigate the case due to lack of transportation (no vehicles and no budgetary allotments for transport). The legal system is also overburdened and understaffed in this area; for example, Criminal Court E, the sex crimes court, is statutorily mandated to have two judges but currently has only one.

Continuing in this vein, the high level of impunity for rape is a major challenge, which in turn becomes a driver for more cases. Prosecution of rape remains extremely low in Liberia, with only four cases going to trial in 2013, and only one of those resulting in a conviction.³⁸ Many of the cases are “compromised,” meaning that the family of the defendant pays the family of the victim to drop the charges and sign a waiver. Widespread corruption contributes to the problem of cases being compromised; any of the actors in the Sexual Violence Pathways Referral program, including the family of the victim, the police, and the prosecutors, may at some point encourage the victim to compromise the case. Child victims often do not have a choice; their families or guardians will decide to compromise without consulting the child. The high level of impunity contributes to the problem of compromised cases; when the family knows the formal legal system will not result in justice, they turn to these traditional forms of justice.

Coordination amongst child protection actors, including health workers, safe homes, social workers, the SGBV Crimes Unit, the MoGD, and international and national NGOs is an ever-present challenge.

Recommendations for addressing sexual violence against children in Liberia include recognizing communities’ ability to make change and engaging a cross-section of actors, including individuals, women’s groups, traditional societies, NGOs, and government authorities, in initiatives seeking to address sexual violence against children.³⁹ The following recommendations in addressing sexual violence are specific to Liberia as a post-conflict setting: 1) Provide mental health care services; 2) Develop programs that support reporting of sexual violence; 3) Conduct community awareness-raising surrounding sexual violence; 4) Invest in

³⁶ Interview with Christopher Ngwerume, Social Protection Specialist, UNICEF, May 28, 2014

³⁷ Interview with Katherine Redd, Holistic Education Advocating Leadership (HEAL), May 24, 2014

³⁸ U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. (2013). *Liberia 2013 Human Rights Report*. Retrieved from <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/220339.pdf>

³⁹ Government of Liberia/UN Joint Programme on Sexual and Gender Based Violence. (2011, October). *In-depth Study on Reasons for High Incidence of Sexual and Gender Based Violence in Liberia – Recommendations on Prevention and Response*. Retrieved from https://www.concern.net/sites/default/files/resource/2012/11/5876-final_high_incidence_of_sgbv_15_may.pdf

programs tackling hyper-masculinity; 5) Increase economic opportunities; and 6) Fund national action plans.⁴⁰

Early and Forced Marriage

Early and forced marriage occurs where one or both partners to a marriage are under the age of 18. It is a practice that predominantly affects girls in Liberia who, due to their age and maturity level, are not able to make a free and informed decision about this milestone in their lives. Liberia has one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world, with approximately 38% of girls married by age 18 and approximately 11% married by age 15.⁴¹ While rates of child marriage in Monrovia are relatively low (22%), rates in the interior are staggering, ranging from 40-50%.⁴²

According to Liberian traditional/customary law, girls are ready for marriage at the age of 16.⁴³ This conflicts with the Liberian legal code which criminalizes sexual intercourse by a person over the age of 18 with a person under the age of 18.⁴⁴ It also conflicts with Liberian civil law which sets the minimum age of marriage for girls at 18.⁴⁵ Within the Sande societies, or women's secret societies, in Liberia, once a girl child has learned all the values to become a wife and to care for a home, she is ready for marriage; this typically occurs at age 14 or 15. Members of the Sande society argue that, because the girls are attending traditional or bush schools, not participating in government-sponsored Western education, they are ready for marriage earlier. However, since the war, the bush schools have changed. Before the war, it took six or seven years in a bush school for a child to learn all he or she needed to learn to become an adult, and according to traditional laws it should take at least 1-2 years. Now, however, parents will send their children to a shortened form of bush school, for only 2-4 weeks.⁴⁶

Consequences of child marriage for girls are many. Early marriage effectively brings a girl's childhood to an end at a time when she is not physically, psychologically, or emotionally prepared to take on the adult roles and responsibilities bestowed upon her. Often marriage ends a girl's education, if she was previously enrolled. Sexual violence also plays a role; once married, girls often are unable to refuse to have sex with their husbands and are not able to insist on condom use. This leaves girls vulnerable to STD infection and early pregnancy. The

⁴⁰ Jones, N., Cooper, J., Presler-Marshall, E., & Walker, D. (2014, June). *The Fallout of Rape as a Weapon of War: The Life-Long and Intergenerational Impacts of Sexual Violence in Conflict*. Retrieved from www.odi.org.uk/sites/odi.../8990.pdf

⁴¹ UNICEF. (2013, December 27). *At a glance: Liberia*. Retrieved from http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/liberia_statistics.html#121

⁴² United Nations Population Fund. (2012). *Child Marriage Profiles: Liberia*. Retrieved from <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/reports-and-publications/unfpa-child-marriage-country-profile-liberia/>

⁴³ Interview with Leetor Williams, Sexual and Gender Based Violence Focal Person, Human Rights Unit, United Nations Mission in Liberia, May 29, 2014

⁴⁴ Liberian Code of Laws Revised, Volume IV, Title 26, § 14.70(1)

⁴⁵ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2012). *Social Institutions & Gender Index*. Retrieved from <http://genderindex.org/country/liberia>

⁴⁶ Interview with Leetor Williams, Sexual and Gender Based Violence Focal Person, Human Rights Unit, United Nations Mission in Liberia, May 29, 2014

teenage pregnancy rate in Liberia is 31% amongst girls aged 15-19.⁴⁷ Early pregnancy may result in complications during child birth due to lack of physical maturation. These complications may include obstructed labor resulting in fistula, which leaves girls incontinent, in pain, and shunned by their communities. In addition to these physical and psychological consequences, child marriage harms Liberian society by compromising girls' ability to reach their full potential as citizens and make productive contributions to the country's development.⁴⁸

The prevalence of child marriage is caused by Liberian cultural norms which view child marriage as beneficial to young girls by securing their future economic well-being. It is also seen as a guarantee that the girl will be protected from prostitution.⁴⁹ In addition to these pre-existing cultural norms, during the civil war girls were often abducted and used by warlords as "bush wives." Sometimes, girls were traded by their families in exchange for protection.⁵⁰ This phenomenon has served to further entrench child marriage in modern Liberian society.

According to the Ford Foundation's 2013 report "Mapping Early Child Marriage in West Africa," there are 18 programs addressing early marriage in Liberia. Six involve advocacy and community mobilization; five are education programs; three focus on adolescent empowerment; two are fistula interventions; and two focus on child rights and legal strategies.⁵¹

As an example, the organization GirlUp has conducted trainings on the negative consequences of child marriage. It has also conducted media campaigns, with the message "Child marriage can hurt your daughter's future" emblazoned on T-shirts, stickers and calendars.⁵² The UN Population Fund (UNFPA) has also conducted awareness surrounding early marriage. For example, in 2012 the theme of Liberia's celebration of the International Day of the Girl Child was "I am a Girl, not a wife." As part of the festivities, UNFPA collaborated with local and international NGOs to organize a consultative forum teaching girls the negative consequences of early marriage. Participants included girls aged 10-18.⁵³

Challenges to addressing child marriage include victim blaming. There is a prevailing attitude in Liberian society that girls are at fault for child marriage because of the way they dress, speak, or act. For example, at the 2012 International Day of the Girl Child celebrations, the representative from the MoIA Bureau of Culture, Mr. Ishmael Walker, stated that some adolescent girls bring about their own early marriage by the way they dress. The traditional chief at the event echoed the MoIA representative's sentiment, stating that forced marriage no longer existed in Liberia

⁴⁷ United Nations in Liberia. (2013). *United Nations Development Assistance Framework, 2013-2017*. Retrieved from

<http://www.undg.org/unct.cfm?module=CoordinationProfile&page=Country&CountryID=LIR>

⁴⁸ United Nations Population Fund. (2012). *Marrying Too Young: End Child Marriage*. Retrieved from <http://www.unfpa.org/webdav/site/global/shared/documents/publications/2012/MarryingTooYoung.pdf>

⁴⁹ Bradford, Danielle & Rubinoff, Casey. (2012, June 19). Women Leaders Combating Child Marriage; Perspectives from Liberia and Pakistan. *Vital Voices Global Partnership*. Retrieved from <http://www.vitalvoices.org/node/2720>

⁵⁰ United Nations Population Fund. (2012). *Marrying Too Young: End Child Marriage*. Retrieved from <http://www.unfpa.org/webdav/site/global/shared/documents/publications/2012/MarryingTooYoung.pdf>

⁵¹ Ford Foundation. (2013, September). *Mapping Early Marriage in West Africa: A Scan of Trends, Interventions, What Works, Best Practices and the Way Forward*. Retrieved from

<http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/mapping-child-marriage-in-west-africa-new-ford-foundation-study/>

⁵² GirlUp. (2012). *Great Hope for the Future*. Retrieved from <http://www.girlup.org/learn/liberia.html>

⁵³ Karmo, Henry. (2012, October 22). Internal Affairs Official Blames Adolescent Girls Early Marriages in Liberia. *Front Page Africa*. Retrieved from <http://www.frontpageafricaonline.com/old/news/general-news/4521-internal-affairs-official-blames-adolescent-girls-early-marriages-in-liberia.html>

and that nowadays girls were “giving themselves out to men.”⁵⁴ These are just two examples of the larger culture of misogyny in Liberia which blames young women and girls for sexist cultural practices that are damaging to them, including early marriage.

Best practices in combating child marriage and its consequences include identifying target areas of the country where girls are at highest risk. Married girls should be provided with access to sexual and reproductive health information and family planning programs to avoid early childbearing and its associated risks. Multi-pronged approaches to combating child marriage should include enforcement of pre-existing legislation banning child marriage, expanding girls’ opportunities for education post-primary school, and providing incentives to communities targeting the socioeconomic factors that lead to child marriage.⁵⁵

Successful programs have included those that empower at risk girls, for example with life skills training, safe spaces for discussion, information about future schooling options, and establishment of support networks. Provision of educational opportunities is essential; girls with secondary education are as much as six times less likely to fall prey to child marriage. Because girls’ families traditionally decide whom they will marry, it is necessary to work with communities and parents to mobilize transformation of cultural norms surrounding child marriage. Successful interventions have included dialogue among community members, informational sessions, involving males in the community, and mass media messaging about the negative consequences of child marriage and the importance of girls’ rights. These types of interventions have been demonstrated to be most effective when coupled with other forms of interventions, like those previously mentioned.⁵⁶

Incentive-based programs have also been successful in addressing child marriage due to the links between child marriage and poverty. Income-generating activities for girls who are unable to continue schooling can eliminate the need for families to marry off their girls. Loans, scholarships, subsidies, and conditional cash transfers can also serve this same goal. Imperative in the fight against child marriage is the promotion of birth and marriage registration. Many girls in Liberia do not have birth certificates, making cases of child marriage difficult to identify, and lack of marriage registration makes enforcement of the law against child marriage extremely challenging.

Harmful Traditional Practices/Female Genital Mutilation

In Liberia, female genital mutilation (FGM) is practiced as part of the initiation ritual girls undergo when becoming a member of a Sande society, or women’s secret society. Thousands of girls who are sent to traditional schools, also known as bush schools, return to their families each year having been circumcised. The form of FGM used in Liberia is classed by the World Health Organization as Type II and consists of the partial or total removal of the clitoris and inner labia, with or without the removal of the outer labia. The major ethnic groups practicing FGM are Mande speaking people in western Liberia (Gola and Kissi). The Kru, Grebo, Krahn, Congo

⁵⁴ Karmo, Henry. (2012, October 22). Internal Affairs Official Blames Adolescent Girls Early Marriages in Liberia. *Front Page Africa*. Retrieved from <http://www.frontpageafricaonline.com/old/news/general-news/4521-internal-affairs-official-blames-adolescent-girls-early-marriages-in-liberia.html>

⁵⁵ United Nations Population Fund. (2012). *Marrying Too Young: End Child Marriage*. Retrieved from <http://www.unfpa.org/webdav/site/global/shared/documents/publications/2012/MarryingTooYoung.pdf>

⁵⁶ United Nations Population Fund. (2012). *Marrying Too Young: End Child Marriage*. Retrieved from <http://www.unfpa.org/webdav/site/global/shared/documents/publications/2012/MarryingTooYoung.pdf>

people, and Mandingos do not practice it.⁵⁷ Between 10-13 of Liberia's 16 tribes are active practitioners of FGM.⁵⁸

In interviews with child protection actors, three of the 10 interviewees named FGM as one of the two worst forms of violence against children in Liberia. According to data from 2002-2012, approximately 66% of Liberian adult women have experienced FGM. Falling in the 51-80% range, Liberia is classed as a moderately high prevalence country for FGM, with only 12 countries worldwide having higher prevalence rates. However, rates appear to be dropping dramatically, with prevalence dropping by about half in adolescent girls; according to data from 1997-2011, only 44% of girls aged 15-19 had undergone FGM, as compared to 85% of women aged 45-49. In particular, prevalence rates appear to be declining much faster in South Central Liberia than in the North Central part of the country.⁵⁹ Some believe that the disruption of Liberian society caused by the civil war, particularly the relocation of people from many different tribal groups and rural areas to Monrovia, has caused the overall decline of the practice.⁶⁰

Psychological consequences for victims of FGM include stigmatization later on as adults; men from tribes who do not practice FGM will not accept these women as potential wives. Immediate physical consequences may include bleeding, delayed healing, infections, and, in the worst cases, haemorrhaging resulting in death. Long-term physical complications may include sterility, recurring urinary tract infections, dermoid cysts, damage to adjacent organs, and birth complications like excessive bleeding and the need for a Caesarian section.⁶¹ In some cases, during delivery excessive tearing and bleeding of the pre-existing tear where the clitoris was extracted may result in death. This occurs most often in rural areas where there is often no access to medical instruments to stitch the damage.⁶²

In Liberia, there is one medical provider known to cater to those who have undergone FGM; a clinic in Gardnersville provides medical care to those suffering from fistula due to FGM.⁶³ A fistula is a hole that is created between either the vaginal wall and bladder or the vaginal wall and rectum, resulting in urinary and/or faecal incontinence. Fistulae form due to unrelieved obstructed labour during child birth, which may be caused by aggravation of pre-existing damage to the vagina from FGM. Fistulae may also be caused by early marriage; young girls

⁵⁷ U.S. Department of State Office of the Senior Coordinator for International Women's Issues. (2001, June 1). *Liberia: Report on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) or Female Genital Cutting (FGC)*. Retrieved from <http://2001-2009.state.gov/g/wi/rls/rep/crfgm/10104.htm>

⁵⁸ Allen, Bonnie. (2012, March 29). Female Circumcision Temporarily Stopped in Liberia. *Public Radio International*. Retrieved from <http://www.pri.org/stories/2012-03-29/female-circumcision-temporarily-stopped-liberia>; Batha, Emma. (2014, February 6). Secret societies make Liberia one of the hardest places to end FGM. *Thomson Reuters*. Retrieved from <http://www.trust.org/item/20140205144950-niqxw/?source=dpagehead>

⁵⁹ UNICEF. (2013, July). *Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: A statistical overview and exploration of the dynamics of change*. Retrieved from www.unicef.org/media/files/FGCM_Lo_res.pdf

⁶⁰ U.S. Department of State Office of the Senior Coordinator for International Women's Issues. (2001, June 1). *Liberia: Report on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) or Female Genital Cutting (FGC)*. Retrieved from <http://2001-2009.state.gov/g/wi/rls/rep/crfgm/10104.htm>

⁶¹ UNICEF. (2013, July). *Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: A statistical overview and exploration of the dynamics of change*. Retrieved from www.unicef.org/media/files/FGCM_Lo_res.pdf

⁶² Azango, Mae. (2012, March 10). Tradition of Genital Cutting Threatens Health of Liberian Women. *FrontPage Africa*. Retrieved from <http://www.newnarratives.org/stories/mae-azango/sande-tradition-of-genital-cutting-threatens-health-of-liberian-women/>

⁶³ Interview with Leetor Williams, Sexual and Gender Based Violence Focal Person, Human Rights Unit, United Nations Mission in Liberia, May 29, 2014

who are not sufficiently physically developed may not easily deliver, resulting in obstructed labor and fistula.⁶⁴

There are currently no laws forbidding the practice of FGM in Liberia, making it one of nine African nations that do not specifically outlaw it.⁶⁵ A senior WACPS officer who encountered an FGM case lamented that, due to limitations in the law as well as ingrained cultural beliefs, he was not able to proceed with the case. In FGM cases, the police have attempted to charge perpetrators with assault, but due to family and cultural pressures, the cases do not move forward.⁶⁶

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has said little to nothing about the practice of FGM, and there is no official government policy condemning it. In fact, the MoIA regulates FGM and issues permits to FGM practitioners. In 2009, the UN committee overseeing CEDAW criticized the Liberian MoIA for implicitly condoning FGM by issuing these permits. In 2012, however, when some traditional leaders agreed to put a temporary stop to the practice, the government took advantage of the opportunity to have meetings and conduct trainings with traditional leaders to educate them about the harmful effects of FGM. This was the first time the Liberian government had ever taken action against FGM at the national level, which included a statement by the MoIA requesting that women desist from the practice.⁶⁷ The government announced in 2012 that it was suspending issuance of FGM licenses to Sande leaders, also known as zoes, but the practice still continues.⁶⁸

Data indicates that about the same number of Liberian women and girls believe the practice of FGM should stop as those who believe it should continue.⁶⁹ This indicates a perception among women and girls that the practice is not harmful, necessitating further awareness activities with women and girls on this issue. Unfortunately, there are very few child protection actors working on this issue in Liberia today. Programming on FGM in Liberia focuses on awareness raising, which is being conducted by ActionAid, WOSI, and UNMIL. UNMIL awareness activities are conducted by officers stationed in all 15 counties and include community awareness workshops, radio talk shows, trainings in schools, and work with government partners. UNMIL also conducts monitoring and reporting of FGM cases. WOSI conducts awareness raising programs from both the health and human rights perspectives. In workshops, this allows communities to acknowledge particular aspects of the practice are unhealthy without condemning the traditional practice altogether.⁷⁰ Rights groups WOLPNET and Equality Now are two organizations that

⁶⁴ The Foundation for Women's Health, Research and Development (FORWARD). (2014). *Fistula*. Retrieved from <http://www.forwarduk.org.uk/key-issues/fistula>

⁶⁵ Allen, Bonnie. (2012, March 29). Female Circumcision Temporarily Stopped in Liberia. *Public Radio International*. Retrieved from <http://www.pri.org/stories/2012-03-29/female-circumcision-temporarily-stopped-liberia>

⁶⁶ Interview with Lindsey Gould, Women and Children Protection Section, Liberian National Police, May 26, 2014

⁶⁷ Allen, Bonnie. (2012, March 29). Female Circumcision Temporarily Stopped in Liberia. *Public Radio International*. Retrieved from <http://www.pri.org/stories/2012-03-29/female-circumcision-temporarily-stopped-liberia>

⁶⁸ Batha, Emma. (2014, February 6). Secret societies make Liberia one of the hardest places to end FGM. *Thomson Reuters*. Retrieved from <http://www.trust.org/item/20140205144950-niqxw/?source=dpagehead>

⁶⁹ UNICEF. (2013, July). *Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: A statistical overview and exploration of the dynamics of change*. Retrieved from www.unicef.org/media/files/FGCM_Lo_res.pdf

⁷⁰ Interview with Leetor Williams, Sexual and Gender Based Violence Focal Person, Human Rights Unit, United Nations Mission in Liberia, May 29, 2014

engage in direct campaigning against FGM. Their campaigners are working directly with Sande leaders trying to convince them to abandon the practice, focusing on Lofa, Bomi, and Grand Cape Mount Counties in the north and northwest where FGM rates are not declining as rapidly as in other parts of the country. In addition to their work on the ground, they also advocate with the Liberian government for a law banning FGM. Their work is not without risk; campaigners have received death threats, had their houses burnt down, and have had to go into hiding. Despite these challenges, WOLPNET and Equality Now have succeeded in convincing 46 zoes in three counties to discontinue the practice of FGM as part of their initiation ceremonies.⁷¹

A major challenge to addressing the issue of FGM is the power and prevalence of Sande societies, or women's secret societies, in Liberia. Almost no one will discuss the initiation rites that are part of the Sande bush schools. When girls are inducted, they are sworn to secrecy and told that breaking this covenant will result in the death of a family member or themselves. The belief in the power of Sande is strong, and most people are scared to discuss anything about it, particularly FGM. Girls who experience complications from the procedure often will not even seek medical treatment until the condition is dire because of fear of breaking the oath of secrecy.⁷² In general, there is an attitude prevalent in Liberia that FGM is part of traditional culture, and any attempt to combat it is seen as unacceptable Western influence. For example, the bill for the 2011 Children's Law was stalled in the Senate for more than a year due to objections that parts of the bill's language surrounding FGM (as well as child labor and corporal punishment) contained unacceptable Western notions and ignored traditional cultural practices.⁷³

Direct work countering FGM is scarce due to the sensitivity of the issue. For example, a UNICEF consultant conducting FGM research was reportedly chased out of the community, and a Liberian reporter who published an expose on FGM received multiple threats and was forced to go into hiding.⁷⁴ Recommended best practices for those conducting trainings on FGM include approaching it from a human rights perspective, not a cultural perspective. Attempts to discuss FGM as a "harmful traditional practice" are met with resistance.⁷⁵ In particular, communities dislike the term "FGM" and prefer that it be discussed in terms of "traditional practices," "traditional schools," or "bush schools."⁷⁶ It is also recommended to conduct medical trainings with practitioners on how to reduce complications so that the procedure is at least performed safely, using antibiotics, etc.⁷⁷ These medical trainings can then be combined with human rights based approaches to discussing FGM in a culturally sensitive way that draws attention to some

⁷¹ Batha, Emma. (2014, February 6). Secret societies make Liberia one of the hardest places to end FGM. *Thomson Reuters*. Retrieved from <http://www.trust.org/item/20140205144950-niqxw/?source=dpagehead>

⁷² Azango, Mae. (2012, March 10). Tradition of Genital Cutting Threatens Health of Liberian Women. *FrontPage Africa*. Retrieved from <http://www.newnarratives.org/stories/mae-azango/sande-tradition-of-genital-cutting-threatens-health-of-liberian-women/>

⁷³ Ruiz-Casares, Mónica, Ph.D. (2011, September). Child Protection Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices in Central and Western Liberia. *Save the Children & USAID*. Retrieved from resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/sites/default/files/documents/5324.pdf

⁷⁴ Interview with Leetor Williams, Sexual and Gender Based Violence Focal Person, Human Rights Unit, United Nations Mission in Liberia, May 29, 2014; Allen, Bonnie. (2012, March 29). Female Circumcision Temporarily Stopped in Liberia. *Public Radio International*. Retrieved from <http://www.pri.org/stories/2012-03-29/female-circumcision-temporarily-stopped-liberia>

⁷⁵ Interview with Leetor Williams, Sexual and Gender Based Violence Focal Person, Human Rights Unit, United Nations Mission in Liberia, May 29, 2014

⁷⁶ Interview with Henrietta Tolbert, Program & Advocacy Manager, ChildFund Liberia, May 30, 2014

⁷⁷ Interview with Henrietta Tolbert, Program & Advocacy Manager, ChildFund Liberia, May 30, 2014

of the negative consequences without condemning the practice in its entirety.⁷⁸ One approach that has met with some success is discussing the option of waiting until the child turns 18 so that she can decide for herself whether she would like the practice performed on her or not.⁷⁹

Trafficking of Children

Human trafficking is defined in the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (also known as the Palermo Protocol) as “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.” Exploitation is defined to include sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery, servitude, or removal of organs.⁸⁰

Since the end of the Liberian civil war, there has been widespread evidence of trafficking of children for international adoption, labor and sex. Liberia has been ranked as a Tier 2 Watch List country in the U.S. government’s annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report for the past three years. In 2013, it was nearly moved to the worst ranking, Tier 3, but was granted a waiver due to the Liberian government’s formulation of the Five-Year National Action Plan (NAP) in the Fight Against the Trafficking, which was officially released in 2014.⁸¹ If not for the release of the NAP, Liberia’s status as a Tier 3 country may have resulted in sanctions.⁸²

The majority of trafficking occurs internally in Liberia as opposed to internationally.⁸³ Often traffickers take the form of wealthier family members who promise to take poorer family members’ children to Monrovia, provide for them, and send them to school.⁸⁴ These children are then exploited for the purpose of forced labor as well as domestic servitude.⁸⁵ Children trafficked to Liberia from Sierra Leone, Guinea, Cote d’Ivoire, and Nigeria are forced into the same forms

⁷⁸ Azango, Mae. (2012, March 10). Tradition of Genital Cutting Threatens Health of Liberian Women. *FrontPage Africa*. Retrieved from <http://www.newnarratives.org/stories/mae-azango/sande-tradition-of-genital-cutting-threatens-health-of-liberian-women/>

⁷⁹ Interview with Henrietta Tolbert, Program & Advocacy Manager, ChildFund Liberia, May 30, 2014; Interview with Lindsey Gould, Women and Children Protection Section, Liberian National Police, May 26, 2014

⁸⁰ Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime. (2000). Art. 3(a). Retrieved from http://www.uncjin.org/Documents/Conventions/dcatoc/final_documents_2/convention_%20traff_eng.pdf

⁸¹ Embassy of the United States. (2013). *Trafficking in Persons Report*. Monrovia, Liberia. Retrieved from <http://monrovia.usembassy.gov/reports/tips.html>

⁸² Republic of Liberia & International Organization for Migration. (2014). *Five-Year National Action Plan in the Fight Against the Trafficking of Human Beings 2013-2018* [Brochure]. Monrovia, Liberia: Author.

⁸³ Embassy of the United States. (2012). *Trafficking in Persons Report*. Monrovia, Liberia. Retrieved from <http://monrovia.usembassy.gov/reports/tips/2012.html>

⁸⁴ Embassy of the United States. (2012). *Trafficking in Persons Report*. Monrovia, Liberia. Retrieved from <http://monrovia.usembassy.gov/reports/tips/2012.html>

⁸⁵ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of International Labor Affairs. (2012). *2012 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor*. Retrieved from <http://www.dol.gov/ilab/reports/child-labor/liberia.htm>

of labor as those trafficked internally.⁸⁶ Many of the worst forms of violence linked to trafficking involve small scale miners, not large corporations, engaged in mining of diamond, gold, or other minerals. Recently, there has been an issue with trafficking in children from Grand Cape Mount County in Liberia to Sierra Leone for the purpose of logging.⁸⁷

Liberia suffers from the typical root causes of trafficking, which include poverty, weak governance, armed conflict, and lack of effective protections against exploitation and discrimination.⁸⁸ Regarding international trafficking, Liberia suffers from weak security and other governance structures, which leave it susceptible to cross-border traffickers.⁸⁹ Cultural factors in particular contribute to child trafficking. It is extremely common in Liberia for children to be sent to be raised by relatives outside of the child's community who can better care for the child. These children are then often exploited for domestic servitude and forced labor. In addition, the cultural practice of early and forced marriage contributes to internal trafficking of children in Liberia for the purpose of sexual exploitation.⁹⁰

Legislation was passed in 2005 by the Transitional Legislative Assembly of the National Transitional Government that banned and criminalized human trafficking in Liberia.⁹¹ The legislation defines trafficking as "the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of a person by means of the threat or use of force or other means of coercion, or by abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability, or by the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation."⁹² The law criminalizes engaging in; conspiring or attempting to engage in; or assisting, organizing, or directing another to engage in human trafficking.⁹³ The Penal Law was also amended in April 2013 to include migrant smuggling, a crime that often accompanies human trafficking.⁹⁴

Human trafficking convictions in Liberia carry a sentence from a minimum of one to a maximum of 20 years, with various aggravating factors adding years to the sentence.⁹⁵ The law also orders restitution for the victims of convicted offenders, but this has yet to be enforced due to

⁸⁶ Embassy of the United States. (2012). *Trafficking in Persons Report*. Monrovia, Liberia. Retrieved from <http://monrovia.usembassy.gov/reports/tips/2012.html>

⁸⁷ Interview with Christopher Ngwerume, Social Protection Specialist, UNICEF, May 28, 2014

⁸⁸ UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre & Innocenti Insight. (2003, September). *Trafficking in Human Beings, Especially Women and Children, in Africa*. Retrieved from <http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/trafficking-gb2ed-2005.pdf>

⁸⁹ Republic of Liberia & International Organization for Migration. (2014). *Five-Year National Action Plan in the Fight Against the Trafficking of Human Beings 2013-2018* [Brochure]. Monrovia, Liberia: Author.

⁹⁰ Republic of Liberia & International Organization for Migration. (2014). *Five-Year National Action Plan in the Fight Against the Trafficking of Human Beings 2013-2018* [Brochure]. Monrovia, Liberia: Author.

⁹¹ Republic of Liberia & International Organization for Migration. (2014). *Five-Year National Action Plan in the Fight Against the Trafficking of Human Beings 2013-2018* [Brochure]. Monrovia, Liberia: Author.

⁹² An Act to Ban Trafficking in Persons Within the Republic of Liberia. (2005, July 5). Art. I, §1. Retrieved from [http://www.liberlii.org/cgi-](http://www.liberlii.org/cgi-bin/disp.pl/lr/legis/acts/tipa234/tipa234.html?stem=0&synonyms=0&query=trafficking)

[bin/disp.pl/lr/legis/acts/tipa234/tipa234.html?stem=0&synonyms=0&query=trafficking](http://www.liberlii.org/cgi-bin/disp.pl/lr/legis/acts/tipa234/tipa234.html?stem=0&synonyms=0&query=trafficking)

⁹³ An Act to Ban Trafficking in Persons Within the Republic of Liberia. (2005, July 5). Art. I, §2, 5.

Retrieved from [http://www.liberlii.org/cgi-](http://www.liberlii.org/cgi-bin/disp.pl/lr/legis/acts/tipa234/tipa234.html?stem=0&synonyms=0&query=trafficking)

[bin/disp.pl/lr/legis/acts/tipa234/tipa234.html?stem=0&synonyms=0&query=trafficking](http://www.liberlii.org/cgi-bin/disp.pl/lr/legis/acts/tipa234/tipa234.html?stem=0&synonyms=0&query=trafficking)

⁹⁴ Republic of Liberia & International Organization for Migration. (2014). *Five-Year National Action Plan in the Fight Against the Trafficking of Human Beings 2013-2018* [Brochure]. Monrovia, Liberia: Author.

⁹⁵ An Act to Ban Trafficking in Persons Within the Republic of Liberia. (2005, July 5). Art. I, §§6, 7.

Retrieved from [http://www.liberlii.org/cgi-](http://www.liberlii.org/cgi-bin/disp.pl/lr/legis/acts/tipa234/tipa234.html?stem=0&synonyms=0&query=trafficking)

[bin/disp.pl/lr/legis/acts/tipa234/tipa234.html?stem=0&synonyms=0&query=trafficking](http://www.liberlii.org/cgi-bin/disp.pl/lr/legis/acts/tipa234/tipa234.html?stem=0&synonyms=0&query=trafficking)

the lack of binding human trafficking convictions to date.⁹⁶ The first human trafficking conviction under this law was secured on December 31, 2013 in the case of *Republic of Liberia v. Kassabli*.⁹⁷ Unfortunately, however, the presiding judge granted the defense's motion for new trial, and the retrial is presently ongoing.⁹⁸

Shortly after the 2005 passage of anti-trafficking legislation, a National Task Force was established to address the human trafficking issue. A Secretariat was established as well as Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). The SOPs provide guidelines for assistance to victims and outline roles and responsibilities of the Task Force Secretariat and members.

The Task Force was created under the mandate of Article II, Section I of the Act to Ban Trafficking in Persons Within the Republic of Liberia, which calls for the creation of an inter-agency task force to draft a National Action Plan on trafficking. The National Task Force on trafficking is headed by the Ministry of Labor, which possesses a statutory mandate to lead anti-human trafficking efforts, and is co-chaired by the MoJ. Other participants include the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Interior, and representatives of law enforcement. The Task Force is tasked with the following: (1) Developing a National Action Plan (NAP) on human trafficking; (2) Coordinating implementation of a NAP; (3) Coordinating collection and dissemination among government agencies of trafficking data; (4) Coordinating information sharing in order to detect human trafficking; (5) Facilitating cooperation with foreign governments to combat trafficking; and (6) Establishing policies allowing the government to partner with NGOs and civil society to combat trafficking and assist victims.⁹⁹

Specialized enforcement mechanisms for combating human trafficking include the Liberian Transnational Crime Unit, which unites law enforcement and security personnel from the LNP, National Security Agency, Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization (BIN), and other law enforcement agencies. In addition, an Anti-Trafficking Bureau was established within the WACPS of the LNP. Four Liberian police officers compose this unit and were trained by Swedish UNPOL advisors.¹⁰⁰

In April 2013, in response to a U.S. State Department Trafficking in Persons report that highlighted Liberia's failure to appropriately grapple with the trafficking issue, the Government of Liberia through the office of the Attorney General released a "Statement of Commitment" reaffirming its pledge to combatting human trafficking.¹⁰¹ On March 25, 2014, the Government of Liberia hosted an official launch of its Five-Year National Action Plan (NAP) in the Fight Against the Trafficking of Human Beings at Monrovia City Hall.¹⁰² The NAP was launched to announce

⁹⁶ An Act to Ban Trafficking in Persons Within the Republic of Liberia. (2005, July 5). Art. I, §3. Retrieved from <http://www.liberlii.org/cgi-bin/disp.pl/lr/legis/acts/tipa234/tipa234.html?stem=0&synonyms=0&query=trafficking>

⁹⁷ 2 Guilty for Rape, Human Trafficking. (2014, January 3). *The Inquirer*. Retrieved from <http://monroviainquirer.com/2014/01/03/2-guilty-for-rape-human-trafficking/>

⁹⁸ Davis, Abednego. (2014, January 9). 2 Lebanese Rapists Get New Trial. *The Daily Observer*. Retrieved from <http://www.liberianobserver.com/legal/2-lebanese-rapists-get-new-trial>

⁹⁹ "Republic of Liberia Five-Year National Action Plan in the Fight Against the Trafficking of Human Beings 2013-2018," pamphlet from launch event, p. 11, March 25, 2014

¹⁰⁰ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of International Labor Affairs. (2012). *2012 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor*. Retrieved from <http://www.dol.gov/ilab/reports/child-labor/liberia.htm>

¹⁰¹ Republic of Liberia & International Organization for Migration. (2014). *Five-Year National Action Plan in the Fight Against the Trafficking of Human Beings 2013-2018* [Brochure]. Monrovia, Liberia: Author.

¹⁰² Liberia: Ellen Launches Five-Year National Action Plan Against Human Trafficking Today. (2014, March 25). *AllAfrica.com*. Retrieved from <http://allafrica.com/stories/201403251030.html>

Liberia's zero tolerance policy on human trafficking and to establish a coordinated and sustained strategy in the fight against human trafficking in Liberia. To ensure its long-term effectiveness and budgetary support, the NAP provides for incorporation into the Government of Liberia's (GoL) five-year national development program, known as the Agenda for Transformation (AfT).

The NAP outlines major challenges in the fight against human trafficking in Liberia and the government's plans to address them. Challenges include, first of all, weak border control and lack of technical knowledge among state security forces, particularly border security, leaving the country open to international trafficking in persons. Corruption aggravates this issue, with underpaid immigration officials susceptible to manipulation by traffickers. The government will address this by strengthening the BIN Airport Visa Scheme in Liberia and the visa system in foreign missions. It also plans to train and equip the criminal intelligence network to conduct surveillance of TIP perpetrators.

A second challenge is that the WACPS of the LNP is understaffed and undertrained. WACPS was established in 2005, and it received its first training in March 2013. Since then, there have been no additional trainings. WACPS also has a serious retention problem; in 2013 alone, nine trained WACPS investigators requested reassignment to other LNP units that offered higher salaries and better incentives.

A third challenge is issues surrounding the Anti-Human Trafficking National Task Force, which lacks effective enforcement mechanisms, a clearly defined set of roles and responsibilities, and budgetary support. Due to these structural and administrative challenges facing the Task Force, the GoL's work in the area of human trafficking to date has been primarily reactive, not proactive.

A fourth challenge is lack of public awareness regarding human trafficking, which allows this plague on Liberian society to continue. As such, the Secretariat of the Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force will be drafting a public awareness strategy.

A fifth, and major, challenge is a lack of services and programs for victims of human trafficking. In particular, there are no shelters dedicated specifically to human trafficking victims. Anecdotally, in the *RoL v. Kassabli* human trafficking case currently ongoing in Criminal Court E, the government has been scrambling to provide care for the victims. The victims are currently being housed in an institution that is not a safe home (the general public is aware of its location). The MoJ provides minimal financial support to the victims for food and clothing, and, while the MoJ has promised to send support to the victims' families in Morocco, there have been gaps in this provision, resulting in lack of support for months at a time.

The greatest challenge, however, is lack of budgetary support to human trafficking programs. For this reason, the NAP on human trafficking indicates it will be incorporated into the Government of Liberia's five-year national development plan, known as the AfT, which will provide for budgetary allocations.

The NAP program strategy is anchored in the Four Pillars Program: Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, and Partnership. Under the Prevention pillar, the GoL plans to coordinate a public awareness campaign using all local languages and community radio stations. The GoL will also strengthen monitoring and evaluation by the Secretariat of the Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force, which will involve integrated assessment surveys and regular reporting on human trafficking. The Prevention pillar will also include regular training for the LNP, including special

training for the BIN, the Transnational Crimes Unit, and other border security bodies. The government will be reviewing its child adoption policies through MoHSW to prevent the use of child care institutions as conduits for human trafficking. Lastly, under this pillar, the government will provide training to sensitize institutions that process birth certificates, passports, visas, work permits, and residence permits to be aware of signs of human trafficking.

Under the Protection pillar, the government will aim to provide safe homes to protect trafficking victims from reprisal during their cases' investigation and trial. The safe homes are to be staffed with trained supervisors and counsellors such that trafficking survivors are provided with appropriate services. There will also be a website created on the anti-trafficking awareness program.

Under the Prosecution pillar, the government plans to provide training to prosecutors on human trafficking and will establish an office in the MoJ dedicated solely to the prosecution of human trafficking cases. The government will also establish a legal desk within the WACPS of the LNP in order to ensure fast-tracking of investigation of human human trafficking cases.

Finally, under the Partnership pillar, the Government of Liberia will cooperate with international institutions in human trafficking investigation and prosecution and will support CSOs in anti-trafficking initiatives.¹⁰³

Orphanages and Child Trafficking

Liberian orphanages in particular have been implicated in engaging in child trafficking. The situation was particularly dire immediately after the war, with reports of children starving because food donated by aid agencies was being sold for profit by orphanage owners. Most of these children were not actually orphans; for example, after an orphanage closed down in 2005, 89 of the 102 "orphans" were returned to their families.

After the end of the civil war, the number of private orphanages in Liberia tripled from 40 to 120.¹⁰⁴ One third of the orphanages are in Montserrado County, with the rest mainly in Bassa, Nimba, and Bong counties.¹⁰⁵ Data from other countries has shown that a spike in adoption numbers may signal illegal activity, and in 2005-2006, adoptions to the U.S. from Liberia doubled from 183 to 353.¹⁰⁶ In 2006, UNMIL reports surfaced that unaccredited orphanages were continuing to operate. In addition, the National Child Rights Observation Group (NACROG) had issued findings that "most of the adoption homes are agents [and/or] facilitators of child trafficking."¹⁰⁷ In response to these findings, the Liberian government closed down

¹⁰³ Republic of Liberia & International Organization for Migration. (2014). *Five-Year National Action Plan in the Fight Against the Trafficking of Human Beings 2013-2018* [Brochure]. Monrovia, Liberia: Author.

¹⁰⁴ Markel, Lindsay. (2011). Adoption: Liberia. *Schuster Institute*. Retrieved from <http://www.brandeis.edu/investigate/adoption/liberia.html#2>

¹⁰⁵ Republic of Liberia & International Organization for Migration. (2014). *Five-Year National Action Plan in the Fight Against the Trafficking of Human Beings 2013-2018* [Brochure]. Monrovia, Liberia: Author.

¹⁰⁶ Markel, Lindsay. (2011). Adoption: Liberia. *Schuster Institute*. Retrieved from <http://www.brandeis.edu/investigate/adoption/liberia.html#2>

¹⁰⁷ Liberia: Orphanages Accused of Child Trafficking. (2006, February 24). *IRIN*. Retrieved from <http://www.irinnews.org/report/58262/liberia-orphanages-accused-of-child-trafficking>; Markel, Lindsay. (2011). Adoption: Liberia. *Schuster Institute*. Retrieved from <http://www.brandeis.edu/investigate/adoption/liberia.html#2>

several orphanages. The number of orphanage homes has continued to decline to 82 presently, and the MoHSW maintains its policy of closure for substandard orphanages.

Under condition of anonymity, several child protection actors reported that sham orphanages in Liberia continue to traffic children from the rural areas, most of whom are not actually orphans, in order to collect donations, state subsidies, and grant money. The traffickers tell the parent(s) or guardian(s) they will take the child to Monrovia to go to school. These sources also reported that some orphanages are engaged in international child trafficking, possibly for illegal international adoption, or for labor or sex. According to sources at the MoJ, there has recently been an official complaint lodged against a particular child care institution, and the issue is being handled by the MoJ in partnership with MoGD and MoHSW. Additionally, the owners of two closed down orphanage homes are currently under investigation by WACPS in two separate TIP cases. These owners are accused of recruiting 13 and 18 children, respectively, from Bong County in early 2013.¹⁰⁸

As a result of issues surrounding human trafficking and orphanages, and CPN advocacy efforts, there has been a moratorium imposed on inter-country adoption in Liberia as of January 2009.¹⁰⁹ The moratorium was enacted by presidential order, and a Presidential Ad Hoc Adoption Authority chaired by the MoHSW was established shortly thereafter. This Authority is tasked with reviewing all adoptions that preceded the moratorium.¹¹⁰ The moratorium is intended to remain in place until the government takes action to comply with the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption (“Convention”). The Convention’s central aim is “to prevent the abduction, sale of, or trafficking in children.”¹¹¹ Current Liberian law on adoption addresses only domestic, not international, adoptions, which would need to be remedied in order to comply with the Convention.¹¹² Save the Children is working on ratification of the child adoption treaty.¹¹³

Under the moratorium, a person leaving Liberia must have clearance from the MoJ in order to leave the country with a child that is not his or her biological child. In addition, the Vital Statistics Section of the MoHSW, which issues birth certificates and other necessary documents for inter-country adoption, has been temporarily closed down. The MoHSW has submitted to the 53rd National Legislature of Liberia a draft Child Adoption Act which would strengthen standards used in investigations and court proceedings that accompany adoptions; increase regulation of adoption agencies; ensure that parents provide informed consent to adoptions; and in the case of international adoptions would require adoptive parents to reside in Liberia for a minimum of 120 days.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸ Republic of Liberia & International Organization for Migration. (2014). *Five-Year National Action Plan in the Fight Against the Trafficking of Human Beings 2013-2018* [Brochure]. Monrovia, Liberia: Author.

¹⁰⁹ Monica Tulchinsky. (2014, May 6). Notes taken at the public meeting of the Ministry of Gender and Development Child Protection Network. Monrovia, Liberia; Embassy of the United States. *Adoptions*. Monrovia, Liberia. Retrieved from <http://monrovia.usembassy.gov/adoptions.html>; Republic of Liberia & International Organization for Migration. (2014). *Five-Year National Action Plan in the Fight Against the Trafficking of Human Beings 2013-2018* [Brochure]. Monrovia, Liberia: Author.

¹¹⁰ Republic of Liberia & International Organization for Migration. (2014). *Five-Year National Action Plan in the Fight Against the Trafficking of Human Beings 2013-2018* [Brochure]. Monrovia, Liberia: Author.

¹¹¹ U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs. *Understanding the Hague Convention*. Retrieved from http://adoption.state.gov/hague_convention/overview.php

¹¹² Liberian Code of Laws Revised, Domestic Relations Law, Title 9, Parts I & II (April 10, 1973).

¹¹³ Interview with Laila Khondkar, Save the Children, May 28, 2014

¹¹⁴ Republic of Liberia & International Organization for Migration. (2014). *Five-Year National Action Plan in the Fight Against the Trafficking of Human Beings 2013-2018* [Brochure]. Monrovia, Liberia: Author.

Child Labor

Child labor is a pervasive problem in Liberia, with approximately 16.6% of children age 5-14 engaged solely in labor, and another 14% engaged in both labor and school studies. Liberian children suffer some of the worst forms of child labor globally, including participating in agriculture, mining, construction, selling, domestic work, and prostitution. Many of these work activities are considered dangerous, including using dangerous tools and working with harmful pesticides in the agriculture industry; clearing brush and carrying buckets in the rubber industry; digging trenches and washing gravel in the gold mining industry; transporting heavy loads in the construction industry; working long hours in the domestic service sector; cutting and crushing rock to sell; selling drugs; and engaging in prostitution.¹¹⁵ In 2012, distressing reports also surfaced that Liberian children age 14-17 were being recruited by Ivorian rebel fighters to fight in 'small boys units' across the border in Côte d'Ivoire.¹¹⁶

Structural conditions giving rise to child labor in Liberia include widespread poverty and lack of educational opportunities. With 47.9% of the Liberian population living in extreme poverty,¹¹⁷ families generate income by any means necessary, and this often includes engaging children in the workforce. While primary education is intended to be free, in practice schools charge fees. School supplies, including books and uniforms, are often too expensive for families to afford. As a result, the net primary enrolment rate¹¹⁸ stands at only 34%, and the grade six completion rate for children age 15-19 is only 35%. This leaves large numbers of children out of school and thus susceptible to child labor. Unfortunately, many schools were destroyed or damaged during the 14-year Liberian civil conflict, which further contributes to the already low enrolment rates. However, between 2008 and 2012, over 220 schools were built or rehabilitated. In addition to the issues of school fees and lack of educational institutions, the education sector suffers from a shortage of trained teachers, and sexual exploitation and abuse in schools causes a high drop-out rate amongst girl children.¹¹⁹

At its heart, child labor deprives children of their childhoods. It hinders their development and can cause both physical and psychological harm. Children's bodies may be distorted permanently by the effects of strenuous physical labor, and evidence indicates they are more vulnerable to workplace chemical hazards than adults. Psychologically, children are more susceptible to long-term harm than adults are from abuse and neglect by employers. As a result of such ill-treatment, they may have difficulty forming emotional attachments as adults and may suffer from low self-esteem. Child labor may deprive children of their education and/or impede their ability to take full advantage of educational opportunities due to the need to balance work

¹¹⁵ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of International Labor Affairs. (2012). *2012 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor*. Retrieved from <http://www.dol.gov/ilab/reports/child-labor/liberia.htm>

¹¹⁶ The Guardian. (2012, June 11). *Cote d'Ivoire recruits child soldiers from Liberia*. London. Retrieved from <http://mg.co.za/article/2012-06-11-cote-divoire-child-soldiers>

¹¹⁷ United Nations in Liberia. (2013). *United Nations Development Assistance Framework, 2013-2017*. Retrieved from

<http://www.undg.org/unct.cfm?module=CoordinationProfile&page=Country&CountryID=LIR>

¹¹⁸ The net primary enrollment rate is the ratio of official school-age children enrolled in primary school to the total population of children of official primary school age. It demonstrates the proportion of children of official primary school age who are enrolled in school.

¹¹⁹ United Nations in Liberia. (2013). *United Nations Development Assistance Framework, 2013-2017*. Retrieved from

<http://www.undg.org/unct.cfm?module=CoordinationProfile&page=Country&CountryID=LIR>

with school. On a societal level, this perpetual lack of education allows the cycle of poverty to continue.¹²⁰

Under the Liberian Labor Law, children under the age of 16 are barred from work. In the industrial sector, labor is limited to those over the age of 18. Even those children between ages 16-18 who are permitted to work must provide their employers with documentation that they are attending school. However, the Labor Law provides no penalties for violating child labor laws and thus enforcement of these laws is scarce. The only way for child labor to potentially be prosecuted is under the child endangerment provision of the Liberian Penal Law. However, these prosecutions are essentially non-existent.

The 2011 Children's Law also prohibits the worst forms of child labor, including prostitution, pornography, armed conflict, and military service.¹²¹ The government has conducted awareness raising surrounding this law. The 2011 Education Reform Act set the compulsory age of education at 15; previously, education was compulsory only until age 12. The 2011 law served to fill the gap that previously existed between the compulsory education age (12) and the minimum age for work (16).¹²² The Decent Work Bill, which would delineate hazardous labor conditions for children, unfortunately has yet to be passed after years of debate.¹²³

Policy frameworks addressing child labor include the Country Program Action Plan (2008-2012) that the GoL has formulated in partnership with UNICEF. The Action Plan aims to decrease children's vulnerability in Liberia to various forms of exploitation, including child labor. Under the plan, the government is to undertake collection and analysis of child labor data and conduct capacity building of Liberian institutions combating child labor. Due to budgetary and resource constraints, the government has yet to undertake these measures. As a result, there is a lack of reliable child labor data, hindering enforcement of laws and policies seeking to combat the practice.

The National Commission on Child Labor (NACOMAL) is responsible for monitoring child labor and formulating policies to combat it. The Ministry of Labor heads this commission, which includes 16 other member organizations, including NGOs and CSOs. Its objectives are to reform child labor laws and create a national child labor database. However, there are no indications that the GoL has begun collection or dissemination of this information. NACOMAL does conduct preliminary investigations on child labor cases and refers cases in need of further investigation to WACPS police officers. WACPS reportedly handled 54 child endangerment cases in 2012, including some child labor cases, but none of the child labor cases were forwarded along for prosecution.

Challenges facing the child labor fight include persistent budgetary constraints and lack of sufficient resources. Reportedly, these challenges particularly affect NACOMAL and WACPS, preventing these institutions from effectively intervening in situations of child labor.

¹²⁰ Winrock International. (2008). *Best Practices in Preventing and Eliminating Child Labor through Education*. Retrieved from www.crin.org/docs/BestPracticesWinrock.pdf

¹²¹ An Act to Establish the Children's Law of Liberia, 2011. (2011, September). Retrieved from [http://www.sabin.org/sites/sabin.org/files/Children%20Law%20Liberia%20\(September%202011\).pdf](http://www.sabin.org/sites/sabin.org/files/Children%20Law%20Liberia%20(September%202011).pdf)

¹²² U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of International Labor Affairs. (2012). *2012 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor*. Retrieved from <http://www.dol.gov/ilab/reports/child-labor/liberia.htm>

¹²³ Brooks, Calvin. (2014, June 11). LISGIS Wants Decent Work Bill Enacted. *Liberia News Agency*. Retrieved from <http://www.liberianewsagency.org/pagesnews.php?nid=1532>

Best practices in combating child labor include a combination of awareness raising, advocacy, education, vocational skills training, peer education, and child labor monitoring and data collection. Awareness-raising is important to ensure communities know and understand the harmful effects of child labor and the difference between acceptable children's work and harmful child labor practices. Communities may be resistant to this information and see it as an attempt to impose outside values upon them, so it is often important to utilize approaches that allow communities to define child labor themselves.

Advocacy should be used to influence political decision-makers to reform education policy so that education can become accessible to working children and those at risk of child labor. Often, parents remove their children from formal schooling in order to generate income, so integrating vocational training into formal education can effectively keep children in school. Peer education, where individuals educate others of similar age and background, may be utilized to encourage children and young adults to actively combat child labor. By providing children and young people with information and training, they can become powerful tools in the fight against child labor.

Finally, monitoring and data collection are essential in the fight against child labor. Data collection can be extremely challenging, particularly because most children work in the informal sector, which lacks government monitoring and regulation. Due to the correlation between children not attending school and child labor, data collection should include a focus on access to education and reasons children drop out of school. In particular, it is important to discover the most effective ways in which working children learn in order to inform education policy and curriculum development. Data collection should also consider culture and societal beliefs to identify attitudes toward child labor and utilize this information in awareness raising and advocacy efforts.¹²⁴

Domestic Violence/Corporal Punishment

Violence against children in the home is a widespread problem in Liberia. Beating with a rattan switch or belt is a common form of discipline, and leaving marks is not considered excessive. Grinding hot peppers and applying the resulting powder or paste to sensitive orifices is another common form of discipline. Sometimes, the child is placed in the sun to increase the level of pain.¹²⁵ In some cases, punishment takes even more severe forms; child protection actors have observed dripping burnt plastic onto children's skin, beating a child and drawing blood, and tying a child's thumbs together in plastic and setting them on fire as instances of child abuse. Despite government prohibition, corporal punishment is also still practiced in Liberian schools. The main perpetrators of these forms of violence against children, both in the home and at school, are women.

Violence against children in the home and at school is caused primarily by Liberian societal attitudes. Whipping of children is seen as a form of correction, not violence. In addition, due to the 14-year civil conflict in Liberia, there has been a disruption in the transfer of parenting knowledge. As a result, many parents do not possess parenting skills and do not know how to

¹²⁴ Winrock International. (2008). *Best Practices in Preventing and Eliminating Child Labor through Education*. Retrieved from www.crin.org/docs/BestPracticesWinrock.pdf

¹²⁵ Schmidt, Susan. (June 2011). *Liberian Refugees: Cultural Considerations for Social Service Providers. Bridging Refugee Youth & Children's Services*. Retrieved from www.brycs.org/documents/upload/Liberian_Cultural_Considerations.pdf

talk to children. If the child does something wrong, the orientation is automatically to beat the child.

One of the consequences of domestic violence is that children turn to life on the street in order to avoid the abuse they suffer at home. This phenomenon affects society at large in that these children engage in criminal activities in order to survive. They also become re-victimized when they are taken advantage of on the street and are forced to engage in labor, including prostitution. Other negative societal effects include increased drug abuse, which these children may engage in due to the negative psychological effects of living on the street.¹²⁶

THINK has a program working with street children, particularly girls age 6-18, who are selling in the market. The program has two centers, one in Paynesville and one in New Kru Town in central Monrovia. The centers target three categories of girls: 1) girls living with their parents, not attending school, and selling; 2) girls living on the streets; and 3) teenage mothers without support who are engaging in selling or other activities to support their children. These centers provide daily counselling, life skills activities, and alternative basic education (literacy and numeracy). The girls are later referred to public schools to complete their education. THINK provides funding for uniforms, underwrites their school fees, and conducts follow-up.¹²⁷

A major challenge in addressing the issue of domestic violence against children is the attitude of parents and guardians. Adults are resistant to the concept that they should not beat their children as a form of corrective behaviour. For example, in one meeting conducted by UNICEF in Grand Geddeh County, the facilitators were almost beaten by participants who were angered that UNICEF workers were telling children that their parents cannot beat them. UNICEF was able to diffuse the situation by discussing different severities of punishment and proposing eliminating the use of the cane, which can be harmful to the child.

In general, there is an issue with parents accusing UNICEF and other child protection actors of giving too much power to their children to report parents and guardians to the police. At meetings on children's rights, parents will become angry and claim that the principles discussed go against their culture or tradition.¹²⁸ In some cases, in response to children reporting to the police, parents will simply give their children over to the police and say they can take care of the children. As a result, child protection actors have to intervene to mediate. Children also may not participate in awareness activities because their parents do not allow it.¹²⁹

Best practices in combating violence against children at home and at school include law reform. Currently, the 2011 Children's Law allows for "justifiable" corporal punishment, and there are no comprehensive, explicit legal prohibitions of corporal punishment in the home, school, or alternative care settings outside of the Children's Law. New legislation explicitly banning this practice would aid in the elimination of violent punishment of children, and this may be buttressed by public education and awareness-raising on corporal punishment. These programs should include information about positive, non-violent disciplinary methods for parents and teachers. Following law reform, there should also be a national action plan developed by government and partners to ensure progression from prohibition of corporal punishment to elimination of the practice on the ground. Faith-based groups should be integrated into efforts to

¹²⁶ Interview with Doris Geedeh, Program Manager, THINK, May 27, 2014

¹²⁷ Interview with Doris Geedeh, Program Manager, THINK, May 27, 2014

¹²⁸ Interview with Doris Geedeh, Program Manager, THINK, May 27, 2014

¹²⁹ Interview with Christopher Ngwerume, Social Protection Specialist, UNICEF, May 28, 2014

decrease corporal punishment; they have an important role to play in challenging entrenched cultural attitudes that perpetuate corporal punishment.¹³⁰

Children in Detention

Juvenile delinquency, while not a novel phenomenon in Liberia, has been exacerbated by years of civil conflict. Crimes committed by children range from petty theft of scratch cards and cell phones to prostitution. While Liberia does have a juvenile justice system, there are no separate detention facilities for juveniles. Thus, children in conflict with the law are placed in detention with adults. The conditions in Liberian prisons are horrendous, including lack of food, water, bathroom facilities and medical care. Children in detention are maltreated, exposed to violent adult offenders and exposed to violence in prison.¹³¹ The housing of children with adult offenders is particularly distressing considering the number of ex-rebel fighters who have become involved in criminal activities after the war.¹³²

The main cause of detention of juveniles is lack of knowledge of child rights by police. In addition, due to cultural attitudes toward children in Liberia, police are likely to take the word of an adult accusing a child of a crime without question. The child will be detained, and the police will only listen to the child's version of events once the case has gone to juvenile court.¹³³

AFELL and UNICEF are partnering to combat detention of juveniles in adult facilities by conducting workshops with social workers, community leaders, and parents regarding juveniles in the justice system. These workshops have focused on educating actors on juvenile justice legislation and creating awareness surrounding children's rights, including alternatives to detention for juveniles. Workshops also focused on sensitization of key stakeholders to child trauma and reintegration of juvenile delinquents back into society.¹³⁴

In a related project, AFELL and UNICEF are jointly establishing a referral system such that police and prison wardens may refer juvenile delinquents to organizations that will provide temporary shelter and reunify juveniles with their families. A referral system is also being established to refer juvenile delinquents to vocational training programs that keep them off the streets and gainfully employed. UNICEF and USAID are building vocational training sites specifically for war-affected youth as well. The Support to War Affected Youth Project is one

¹³⁰ Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, Save the Children & Plan International. (2012). *Prohibiting Corporal Punishment of Children in West Africa: Progress Report 2012*. Retrieved from

<http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org/pages/pdfs/reports/West%20Africa%20Report%202012%20EN.pdf>

¹³¹ Rivollet, Marie. (2012, May 16). Children of Liberia: Realizing Children's Rights in Liberia. *Humanium*. Retrieved by <http://www.humanium.org/en/liberia/>

¹³² Wesley, Juanita K. & Tall, Abou. Children Involved with the System of Juvenile Justice: An Overview. *Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia (AFELL) & UNICEF Liberia*. Retrieved from http://www.unicef-irc.org/portfolios/documents/484_liberia.htm

¹³³ Interview with Mr. Hinneh, Director of Juvenile Division, Department of Social Welfare, MoHSW, June 3, 2014

¹³⁴ Wesley, Juanita K. & Tall, Abou. Children Involved with the System of Juvenile Justice: An Overview. *Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia (AFELL) & UNICEF Liberia*. Retrieved from http://www.unicef-irc.org/portfolios/documents/484_liberia.htm

such program offering vocational training, literacy and numeracy, and counselling for former child soldiers.¹³⁵

The Juvenile Division of the Department of Social Welfare at MoHSW is the government department responsible for rerouting juveniles placed in detention. As part of the Juvenile Division's awareness campaign, its contact information is available at all police depots on posters that advertise the unit, its services for juveniles, and instructions for handling children in contact or in conflict with the law (child victims and offenders). Police are instructed to contact the Juvenile Division when juveniles are detained, and the Juvenile Division in turn notifies social workers to intervene.

Once MoHSW social workers are notified that a juvenile is being held at a police depot, they will travel to the depot, intervene on the child's behalf and, if possible, relocate the child to a safe home. The distribution of social workers in Monrovia includes two at the MoGD, two at the juvenile court, one at the NGO ChildFund, two at the WACPS Central office, four involved in the diversion program at various police depots, and the remaining social workers are stationed among the 32 police depots in Montserrado County. The two social workers from MoHSW stationed at the MoGD offer counselling for children, tracing and family reunification services, and work with staff at the NGO THINK to provide children with access to safe homes and other services. Save the Children also partners with the MoHSW in reunifying children with their families.¹³⁶

The MoHSW Juvenile Division's diversion program is aimed at monitoring police depots to ensure children are not detained with adults and to divert children from the justice system. The diversion program was organized to ensure cases involving children are settled out of court and that children are given skills to alleviate the reasons they were offending. Initially, the diversion program was a pilot project but is now being fully integrated into MoHSW. In addition to the diversion program, Reverend James Cooper of the Children's Division of the MoGD engages in monitoring of children in detention. He visits detention cells to locate minors in detention and interviews them to find out why they are being detained, what entity sent them to jail, and how long they have been detained. Reverend Cooper works in close partnership with the MoJ Child Justice Unit and is currently developing a tailored questionnaire for children in detention monitoring.¹³⁷

The MoHSW Juvenile Division also travels to rural police depots to create awareness on handling child offenders. While there are a total of 16 social workers in the Juvenile Division spread throughout the 32 police depots in Montserrado County, in the rural areas, there are only 1-3 social workers per county. The MoHSW Juvenile Division also works closely with the Women and Children Protection Section (WACPS) of the LNP. At each police depot where MoHSW social workers are stationed, they work directly with the WACPS officers also stationed at that depot.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Wesley, Juanita K. & Tall, Abou. Children Involved with the System of Juvenile Justice: An Overview. *Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia (AFELL) & UNICEF Liberia*. Retrieved from http://www.unicef-irc.org/portfolios/documents/484_liberia.htm

¹³⁶ Interview with Laila Khondkar, Save the Children, May 28, 2014

¹³⁷ Interview with Reverend James Cooper, Children's Division, Ministry of Gender and Development, June 2, 2014

¹³⁸ Interview with Mr. Hinneh, Director of Juvenile Division, Department of Social Welfare, MoHSW, June 3, 2014

In partnership with the MoHSW, the NGO ChildFund runs a juvenile rehabilitation center. ChildFund's center has one social worker, supplied by MoHSW, who completes intake of new arrivals. The title of the center is a misnomer, however, as it does not actually provide rehabilitation services. Due to funding constraints, the center simply provides food and shelter for the children and locates their parents for the purpose of reunification. The children have many psychosocial issues which are not addressed, and there is no follow-up with the child after he or she is reunified with family members. The MoHSW plans to eventually take over the operation of the center when fiscally feasible.¹³⁹

Challenges facing the MoHSW Juvenile Division in combating the issue of juvenile detention include a severe shortage in social workers, with only 1-3 social workers per county in those counties outside of Montserrado. In addition, many social workers do not have proper training. While some of the social workers hold a bachelor's degree in social work from either University College at Mother Pattern or United Methodist University, many only hold a sociology degree. Save the Children has engaged in capacity building of social workers at the county level. This project has been ongoing for four years and will be ending in August 2014. Thus, Save the Children is advocating with the government to place its trained social welfare assistants on the government payroll before the project end date. In addition, Save the Children is supporting the MoHSW Department of Social Welfare in developing a capacity development plan so that they can establish a case management system. This would involve a multidisciplinary approach to child welfare case management. At present, social welfare is severely underfunded, receiving only 3% of the Ministry's budget (most funding is directed toward the health sector).¹⁴⁰

Another major challenge faced by the MoHSW is that the magisterial courts often send children straight to Monrovia Central Prison instead of sending them to juvenile court which can then refer them to the Juvenile Division of MoHSW. The Juvenile Division is addressing this problem in partnership with the prison fellowship program. Each Thursday, a representative from the prison fellowship goes to the various magistrate courts, educating magistrates about child cases and that they must call the number for the diversion hotline or the Juvenile Division when they intercept cases involving children.

The MoHSW Juvenile Division does not have a vehicle to transport children from police depots to safe homes and juvenile courts, and it is not permissible to put children on motorbikes, so this becomes very challenging. Getting rerouted children into safe homes is also challenging. There are no government sponsored transit/safe homes for children; all the homes are private and thus may reject children at any time. When this occurs, the MoHSW Juvenile Division is left with very few options for safely diverting children from detention. While children are awaiting rerouting to a safe home or other organization, the police face challenges in adequately providing them with food, water, and clothing.

Best practices in combating the detention of children include respecting the rights of all children, whether victims or offenders; conducting juvenile justice advocacy and training; raising awareness surrounding child rights; and building trust in the police, particularly among child offenders. Child friendly environments should be available where feasible, and police, social workers, prosecutors, and other key actors should be trained in child questioning techniques. Multi-sectoral trainings are important to ensure coordination among key actors, and more

¹³⁹ Interview with Henrietta Tolbert, Program and Advocacy Manager, ChildFund Liberia, May 30, 2014

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Laila Khondkar, Save the Children, May 28, 2014

targeted trainings should be conducted for specific actors, like social workers, prosecutors, and law enforcement.¹⁴¹

Meaning of Violence to Children and Youth

Interviews with child protection actors indicate that children in Liberia see violence particularly as things that negatively affect themselves or their parents. Children will identify physical violence including rape, murder (including ritualistic killing), beating/corporal punishment, and fighting. They will also identify nonphysical violence, such as cussing, not being fed, and not being sent to school. Children may also identify “cash violence,” which is when money is used to coerce others into performing particular actions. Children are acutely unaware of human trafficking and emotional abuse as forms of violence that may affect them.

Recommendations

SfCG should utilize existing child protection networks in organizing conversations with children and youth for the purpose of its field research. SfCG may contact the Ministry of Gender and Development (MoGD) and its partner organizations DCI-Liberia and UNICEF to incorporate children and youth from Liberia’s child welfare committees into its peer discussion groups, and representatives of the Children’s Parliament may be contacted through the MoGD’s Division of Children Protection and Development. SfCG may also wish to utilize the existing networks of NGOs working directly with children, including HOPE, THINK, WomenAid, IRC, Save the Children, ActionAid, ChildFund, Plan Liberia, Samaritan’s Purse, Street Child, and Right to Play, in constructing its peer conversations to ensure a wide range of children and youth are represented.

SfCG’s dialogue with children and youth should center on the seven forms of violence discussed: 1) sexual violence, 2) female genital mutilation, 3) early and forced marriage, 4) domestic and international trafficking, 5) child labor, 6) domestic violence/corporal punishment, and 7) detention of juveniles. In particular, SfCG should draw out conversations surrounding human trafficking, as this is the form of violence least recognized by children and youth as harmful but simultaneously one of the most pervasive forms of violence affecting children and youth in Liberia today. Particular sensitivity should be employed in discussing the issue of FGM, taking into consideration the extreme secrecy surrounding the practice, lack of prohibition by law, and traditional attitudes and values that entrench it in Liberian society. SfCG may want to consider incorporating traditional leaders from the National Traditional Council to moderate FGM discussions to ensure cultural values are appropriately integrated into the discussion.

Conversations with children and youth should be prefaced with a discussion surrounding the protections already afforded to them by the Children’s Law and other legislation. Children should also be informed of government initiatives and actors involved in child protection. Children are unlikely to be aware of these legal protections and initiatives, and this background information will allow for more informed, in depth discussions of existing violations of child rights and policies that may be helpful in addressing them.

¹⁴¹ UNICEF. *Justice for Children: Detention as a Last Resort*. Retrieved from http://www.unicef.org/spanish/protection/files/Justice_for_Children_Detention.pdf

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Appendix 2: List of Persons Interviewed

Individual	Organization and Designation	Date
Sallimatu Kamara	Founder & Director, WomenAID	May 23, 2014
Katherine Redd	Holistic Education Advocating Leadership (HEAL)	May 24, 2014
Lindsey Gould	Women and Children Protection Section, Liberian National Police	May 26, 2014
Doris Geedeh	Program Manager, THINK	May 27, 2014
Christopher Ngwerume	Social Protection Specialist, UNICEF	May 28, 2014
Laila Khondkar	Save the Children	May 28, 2014
Leetor Williams	Sexual and Gender Based Violence Focal Person, Human Rights Unit, United Nations Mission in Liberia	May 29, 2014
Henrietta Tolbert	Program and Advocacy Manager, ChildFund Liberia	May 29 & 30, 2014
Beatrice Walker	Division of Children Protection and Development, Ministry of Gender and Development	June 2, 2014
Rev. James Cooper	Children's Division, Ministry of Gender and Development	June 2, 2014
Agnes Nushann	Acting Director, Adolescent Girls Unit, Ministry of Gender and Development	June 2, 2014
Mr. Hinneh	Director of Juvenile Division, Department of Social Welfare, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare	June 3, 2014