



# Raising Poor and Marginalised Women's Voices in Liberia

## Executive Summary



### Oxfam GB Citizen Voice Outcome Indicator

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## 1.0 Executive Summary

'Raising Poor and Marginalised Women Voices in Liberia' is a project that was developed as a part of the global project 'Raising Her Voice (RHV)'. This 17-country project aims at ***promoting rights and developing the capacity of grassroots women to engage effectively in governance***. The global theory of change is that this transformational change for women is possible when there is positive change in three spheres:

- Personal – women have confidence to act
- Political – The informal and formal structures that influence laws affecting women
- Social – The organisational potential for women to unite to promote their causes

Oxfam Liberia is working with two local partners: Women of Liberia Peace Network (WOLPNET) and Women NGO Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL) to implement and monitor the activities according to their specific assignments.

The activities designed for Liberia programming can be grouped into four clusters:

- Networking, lobbying and advocacy with poor women activists (WOLPNET)
- Working with public institutions and decision-making forums including traditional structures (WONGOSOL)
- Empowering and building the capacity of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to achieve rights of poor women citizens through campaigns and policy work (WOLPNET)
- Learning lessons and disseminating best practices through innovative media and communications work. (WONGOSOL and WOLPNET)

In Liberia, the 5-year project has been implemented since 2009 in eight communities located in Bomi, Bong, Lofa, Cape Mount, Grand Bass, Montserrado and Margibi Counties.

The methodology used for this assessment is known as 'process tracing', a type of qualitative research that is designed to systematically measure the specific ways a particular cause produced (or contributed to producing) a particular effect. This involves selecting sites where the project has been ongoing/is relatively mature, and doing in-depth research surrounding the intended outcomes of the project, based on the outcomes the project was intending to achieve, based on its most recent theory of change.

Much of the programming was oriented around grassroots advocacy through workshops and production of sensitisation materials. The campaign rationale can ultimately be refined as developing advocacy and sensitisation campaigns designed to 'reach as many women as possible with the message inside the AU protocol'. Thus, the working theory of change is that women's private and public lives will improve through increased public awareness and advocacy that teaches as many people as possible the existence of women's rights as proscribed in the AU protocol.

The targeted outcomes based on this campaign rationale were, because of their adapted theory of change, relatively non-specific. Here I will outline two of the targeted and observed outcomes: 1) that grassroots women can raise their voices towards national politics and politicians so that their demands are heard; 2) that communities perceive there to be a decrease in the incidence of GBV and rape.

## 1.1 Key Findings

1) The first targeted and observed outcome is that grassroots women can raise their voices towards national politics and politicians so that their demands are heard. Evidence of this outcome is found in the story of a coalition of women who mobilised a group of between 200 and 500 women (reports vary) from around the country to march to the Ministry of Gender headquarters and hold a sit-in until the Minister came to speak with them regarding their grievances. The Minister listened to their statement and assured them that their concerns would be addressed, and that future meetings would be arranged. After this, representatives were invited to a retreat where President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf acknowledged their grievances, and encouraged the Minister of Gender to apologise to the women for their perception that their needs were not being addressed. The Minister apologised, suggested to the women that they 'start from square one' in their dealings, and the women accepted this apology and 'new beginning'. Since then, however, the Ministry has done nothing and the two groups remain in tense relationship, thus indicating an unintended consequence of their targeted outcome.

2) The second targeted and observed outcome is that communities perceive there to be a decrease in the incidence of GBV and rape. The exact causal mechanism for the decrease in these crimes is difficult to pinpoint, and indeed there are a number of causes at play that can result in this outcome. Four stories elucidate the different causes that can be attributed to contributing to this outcome: these stories describe police intervention through counselling, police intervention through arrests, one-on-one counselling with peers, and sensitisation workshops. In many of the program areas, RHV programming was quite weak, yet we still found indications of intended outcomes in these stories. Therefore, assessments of the types of programs implemented in these areas can help inform future RHV programming.

## 1.2 Recommendations

With respect to project activities, it can be recommended that there be increased attention to the development of technical skills like media outreach, writing policy briefs and bills, and lobbying as effective means of voicing concerns against government could benefit the stakeholders. If such training is not possible, then partner organisations would benefit from further sensitization on the scenarios in which to use mobilization and sit-in activity, and the possible negative affects that can result from these. It can also be recommended that more systematic records are taken surrounding specific activities that have occurred through RHV, and more research conducted on other organizations in the area that have had similar interventions in the past, or are planning similar interventions in the future.

It can also be recommended that there be more attention given to monitoring and evaluation of project implementation from all project partners involved. Lack of oversight has inhibited the ability to learn what programs are effective and whether certain outcomes can be attributed to RHV programming.