



## *Civil Society and Media Leadership Program*



# ADVANCING WOMEN IN THE MEDIA STRATEGY

*April 2011*



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# 1. FOREWORD

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For many years, media development initiatives neglected to adequately integrate gender responsive mechanisms to mainstream gender in the sector. Many donors and partners supporting media development efforts seemed unprepared to direct energy with matching resources to empower women in the media to take charge of their own affairs.

While it is important to recognize that some attempts were made, it is also necessary to note that the different needs and issues undermining women's advancement in leadership and performance in the newsroom demand special treatment, which most interventions in the past failed to acknowledge.

For the most part, women benefited less from investments made towards developing the media sector, which was devastated like the rest of Liberian society by the civil war. The low representation of women's voices, as well as the limitation of most women to effectively engage as stakeholders, undercut the potential to inform programs targeting journalists and the media generally. Consequently, gender disparities and awareness in the media sector remain mounting challenges, with women absent from media leadership and lacking resources and, in many cases, the relevant experience to advance in the profession.

A gender approach to media development is critical to reversing the status of women on the different levels of Liberian society. This is established on the basis that the media transmits values and has the power to influence perceptions, opinions and attitudes of people. Also, as the watchdog of democracy, the media has a responsibility to uphold democratic tenants and, as such, must ensure equal opportunity for women as professional colleagues and news makers.

This Strategy attempts to directly engage and empower women as change agents. It is built on the value and respect for women's rights to fairness, access to information, free speech and equal participation. Women media practitioners, as well as ordinary women citizens, are targeted to benefit from this framework during and beyond the life of the Civil Society and Media Leadership (CSML) Program implemented by the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) and funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

The Liberia Women Media Action Committee (LIWOMAC) is glad to work with IREX on the implementation of the Women's Media Initiative (WMI) of the CSML program, under which the Advancing Women in the Media Strategy is developed. LIWOMAC also expresses thanks to Action Aid-Liberia (AA-L) and the Liberia Media Center (LMC) for the level of support and energy exerted to develop this strategy. Special thanks also go to our partners on the WMI Steering Committee, the Press Union of Liberia (PUL), Female Journalists Association of Liberia (FeJAL) and the Media Women Center for Development and Democracy (MEWOCEDE). Without these and other new partners that we hope to collaborate with, the translation of this document to significantly impact women in the media sector and the Liberian society at large will be impossible.

T. Estella Nelson  
Executive Director, LIWOMAC  
March 24, 2011

## 2. INTRODUCTION

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IREX, with funding from USAID, is implementing the Civil Society and Media Leadership Program. CSML is a five year program with the goal *“to sustain peace in Liberia through greater inclusion, giving a voice to, informing and engaging Liberian citizens”*. This goal contributes fully to Liberia’s Strategic Objective of *“enhancing citizen participation in and ownership of government policy formulation and implementation”*.

To meet the CSML goal, IREX works to build the capacity, professionalism and sustainability of civil society organizations (CSOs), media organizations and outlets, and community radio stations in seven counties (Montserrado, Bong, Lofa, Nimba, Grand Gedeh, Grand Bassa and River Gee) through training, mentoring and grants. CSML has a strong focus on youth, gender and women’s issues and IREX, as an organization, strongly believes that gender equity and equality are cornerstones of sustainable development, thus our Women’s Media Initiative. The Initiative aims to increase the number of female journalists, prepare women for media leadership roles, build their capacity to become quoted sources in the media and ensure that women become more active participants in media audiences. To meet this aim, IREX began the process of developing a comprehensive Advancing Women in the Media Strategy.

The LMC is IREX’s main implementing partner for CSML media initiatives, and the Liberia Women Media Action Committee (LIWOMAC), which runs the Liberia Women Democracy Radio (LWDR), the only women’s radio station in the country, is IREX’s partner for the Women’s Media Initiative. LIWOMAC works to ensure that gender and women’s issues are brought to the forefront, are adequately and responsibly covered and that women are in an equal position to advance in the media as their male colleagues.

In CSML’s first year, LIWOMAC, with support from IREX and the LMC, took the lead in planning activities leading up to the development of the Advancing Women in the Media Strategy. From the onset, LIWOMAC argued that the Advancing Women in the Media Strategy must have national ownership, that the process must be inclusive and that consensus must be reached in its development and the ensuing Action Plan. It is against this background that we held consultations with leading national and international organizations on what should form the Advancing Women in the Media Strategy. The next step was the formation of a Steering Committee, led by LIWOMAC and comprising various women’s media development groups and the PUL. With support from IREX and AA-L, the Committee planned and hosted the first National Conference on Advancing Women in the Media. The Steering Committee, under the leadership of LIWOMAC and with the support of IREX and the LMC, will be responsible for implementing the Strategy.

## 3. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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Women have played a major role throughout the history of Liberia. They comprise 54% of the labor force in both the formal and informal sectors. Yet women remain among the most disadvantaged. They are disproportionately clustered in the least productive sectors, with 90% employed in the informal sector or agriculture. Their predominance in the informal economy translates into low productivity, meager earnings and exposure to exploitation. Forty-two percent (42%) of Liberian

women have never attended school, as compared to 18% of Liberian men. The female illiteracy rate is staggeringly high with various studies putting it between 60 to 78%, and only 8% of women have completed secondary school or higher. The Liberian Maternal Mortality Rate is one of the highest in the world, as is the teenage pregnancy rate with 48% of Liberian girls having children before the age of 18. Women are also exposed to gender based violence, sexual exploitation and disproportionately to HIV/AIDS, especially among young girls. The National AIDS Control Program (NACP) says 64% of those living with HIV/AIDS in Liberia are women and girls. Vicious and systematic acts of sexual violence were perpetrated against a significant number of Liberian girls and women throughout the years of the conflict, and these did not cease with the end of the war.<sup>1</sup> In an interview on CNN in late 2010, Liberia's Justice Minister, Christiana Tah named rape as the number one reported crime in the country, surpassing armed robbery.

Women were crucial in bringing peace to Liberia and are also a critical part of the rebuilding process. President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, the first elected female Head of State in Africa, has made it a priority to include women in Liberia's reconstruction, but still more must be done to increase the capacity of women to take part in Liberia's peacebuilding and reconstruction efforts.<sup>2</sup> Liberia has made great strides towards democracy since the end of the civil war that left the country's infrastructure in shambles, the education system destroyed and social systems in turmoil. In today's Liberia there is a government that is responsive to the needs of its citizens; that is working to rebuild the infrastructure; that has re-opened schools and placed great emphasis on education that is inclusive of all Liberians regardless of sex, ethnicity or religion[ and that has passed laws and signed agreements that protect the rights of its citizens.

The government of President Johnson-Sirleaf is committed to achieving gender equality and women's rights as a means to maintain peace, reduce poverty, enhance justice and promote sustainable development. The National Gender Policy and the National Action Plan on Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 are examples of this commitment.

However, it takes time for governments to put systems in place that enforce laws and policies and that monitor their enforcement and implementation. In the meantime, Liberian women continue to struggle for their rights, are frequently the victims of sexual and gender based violence and harassment, experience inequity and inequality in the job market and in the organizations/institutions/companies in which they work, and are victims of social and cultural customs that often hold them back from achieving their personal and professional goals.

While girls and young women are now attending schools and universities in record numbers, the years of war left a segment of the female population with limited education and lack of experience, both of which are necessary to advance in a professional occupation. The traditions and cultural barriers of a paternalistic society like Liberia's also limit women's ability to compete equally with men for job opportunities and promotions.

Women in the media are not excluded from the challenges mentioned above as the media operates within the Liberian societal, economic and political context. Within the Liberian media sector,

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<sup>1</sup> Empowering Women in Liberia: Joint Programme on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. The Government of Liberia and the United Nations

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.usip.org/publications/women-s-role-liberia-s-reconstruction>. May 2007 Peace Brief by Dorina Bekoe and Christina Parajon

various studies show that women account for a mere 13 to 16% of the total number of journalists in the country, and hold between one to five percent of positions of clout. In fact, there are only four women managers at the nearly 40 newspapers and more than 20 radio stations in Monrovia.

IREX's Start-up Assessment, in which 51 media outlets were assessed, revealed that many outlets have three to five women performing editorial roles out of an average staff of 25. At the community radio level, the statistics are even more dismal. Of the 20 radio stations assessed in the seven target counties, not one had a woman in a senior management position. Complicating things is the demeaning perception some male journalists have of their female colleagues, a perception formed through cultural socialization.

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

The Advancing Women in the Media Strategy proposes an Action Plan to correct the gender based imbalances. However, we are under no illusion that the problems outlined above, many of which have been propped up by centuries of tradition and generally accepted societal norms, will be solved overnight as a result of this Strategy. Instead, this is a guide on how various stakeholders can work together to address the issues.

## **4. RATIONALE**

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The media, which serves as a tool to hold government accountable for its action or inaction, needs to be equally accountable and reflect the values of inclusivity, diversity and equal opportunity irrespective of sex. The media in Liberia is expanding in size; however, its growth is not reflected in women's representation in newsrooms or in key leadership and management positions.

To address these issues, there must be a collective effort and response given the complexity of the problem. The values that underpin socialization and that influence the relationship between men and women need to be questioned. Within the media there needs to be a shift in the way male professionals view and relate to their female colleagues, as well as a shift in the way the media reports on issues relating to women. The media must also recognize the importance of using women as quoted sources in the news.

At the same time, this change agenda needs to be institutionalized and perceived as a human rights issue. The media workplace and leadership should reflect the society in which it operates and its output should also reflect this diversity. Unfortunately, this is not the case in Liberia, and therefore the media needs to bring about some fundamental changes in its operational philosophy.

A gender sensitive media will perceive women interviewees as members of the wider society with social, economic and political interests. As such, their participation in media interviews should not be limited to issues affecting women. To address gender issues within the media requires a

comprehensive strategy that is responsive to the complex challenges undermining women's representation in media development.

As a result of the societal and structural conditions that have contributed to the marginalization of women in the media sector, the development of a strategy aimed at advancing women in the media is necessary. This Strategy will serve as the framework around which diverse stakeholders can leverage their resources, both human and financial, to advocate for a media that is more inclusive of women and more sensitive and responsive to their needs.

## **5. METHODOLOGY**

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To develop this strategy, IREX, LIWOMAC and partners embarked upon an extensive, comprehensive and inclusive process, beginning with a series of consultations in mid-2010. Eight international and national organizations that work on issues related to women were consulted to get their views on what should form the Advancing Women in the Media Strategy.

The series of consultations led to a decision to hold the first National Conference on Advancing Women in the Media. After months of planning, the conference convened on November 26 and 27 in Monrovia. It was organized through the collaborative efforts of IREX, LIWOMAC, the PUL, FeJAL, MEWOCEDE and AA-L. The goal of the Conference was to bring women and other media experts and practitioners from across the country together to discuss the current situation of women in the media, to identify the challenges they face and to strategize on how to overcome the challenges. More than 45 persons attended the Conference.

We also conducted desk research to gather information on the current status of women in Liberia in general and of women in the media in particular. The information gathered from the consultations, conference participants, and the desk research serve as the basis for the development of this Strategy. Documents from a variety of sources were used in the desk research including IREX's Media Start-up Assessment Report. We reviewed several articles: Empowering Women in Liberia: Joint Programme on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment; and Women's Role in Liberia's Reconstruction recalled from the United States Institute of Peace website, [www.usip.org](http://www.usip.org). Several newspaper articles and stories were also used, as well as a report from a gender audit of major sectors of the Liberian society conducted by the Christian Media Center.

## **6. STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE MEDIA**

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### **6.1 GENERAL PICTURE**

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The status of women in the Liberian media is tenuous. As deliberations at the first National Conference on Advancing Women in the Media revealed, they are grossly under-represented, accounting for only a tiny fraction of the total number of journalists, and seldom find themselves playing leadership roles. Even within the umbrella organization of media practitioners, the PUL, male dominance remains an issue. Since its founding 46 years ago, the PUL has had only one female president. Conference participants argued that the under-representation of women in

newsrooms and in editorial leadership roles creates a situation where women's issues are under covered and where men dominate the pages of newspapers and the airwaves as quoted sources of news. Other participants contended that even when women's issues are covered, they often lack depth, showcasing the lack of understanding of the complexities of the issues.

At the institutional or organizational level, women's media organizations are short lived, primarily because they lack a clear vision or mission and are usually personality focused or driven. The male dominated media landscape is reinforced by the perception of men that women cannot respond to the task of being an editor or a manager. This perception is formed by the male/female socialization process and is supported by societal values. These values invariably contribute to the attitudes and behaviors of individuals and communities, which then become institutionalized as is currently experienced in media institutions.

During two days of deliberations, participants of the first National Conference on Advancing Women in the Media highlighted a number of key issues and targeted them for action. They included salary structures, skill levels, leadership, and sexual harassment. The findings of the conference are summarized below.

## 6.2 SALARY STRUCTURES

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The earning potential of media women is very low, with wages ranging from less than US\$50.00 to US\$800.00 per month. According to the ActionAid/LMC Study, Mapping the Absent Voices, only 0.7% of media women are paid on the higher end of the scale. But as conference participants noted, the issue of low wages cuts across gender. The average salary of a journalist (male or female) is US\$50.00 per month. A bag of rice, the country's food staple, costs about US\$25.00, meaning many reporters do not make enough to provide basic necessities for the survival of their families.

## 6.3 SKILL LEVELS

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A relatively small percentage of women working in the profession have an advanced education in media or other related fields. While the issue of deficient expertise spans the entire sector, some media managers contend that the lack of trained female journalists causes the under-representation of women in newsrooms and in editorial leadership positions and is reflected in the imbalanced coverage of issues that are relative to both women and men. One of the underlying causes of the skill level gap is the quality of education offered by training institutions. Another major factor is that many journalists, including women, enter the profession directly out of high school with no formal training.

## 6.4 SEXUAL HARASSMENT

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Sexual harassment is one of the most serious problems faced by female media practitioners in Liberia. While the number of reported incidents does not seem alarming – 12% according to the AAL/LMC study – participants at the National Conference on Advancing Women in the Media believe the incidents are more frequent and widespread. This hinders women's advancement in the media and discourages many young women from entering and/or remaining in the profession.

Participants also argued that sexual harassment is difficult to prove because of unequal power relations between the accused, usually a senior staff member, and the accuser or victim. At most media outlets and organizations, there are no policies to guard against sexual harassment.

## 6.5 LEADERSHIP

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Since the end of the civil war, a number of women's media organizations has emerged on the landscape in Liberia<sup>3</sup>. Their role has largely been that of support to strengthen media women. While they have made modest strides in bringing women media issues to the fore, very little progress has been made in ensuring that media women assume leadership positions.

## 7. ACTION PLAN

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The approach in this section reflects the recommendations of the first National Conference on Advancing Women in the Media, the results of the consultations and the findings of the desk research. It is a plan to correct some of the imbalances, inequities and inequalities outlined in this Strategy.

The overall objective of the Action Plan is to create an enabling environment for women to advance in the media. It addresses key issues such as women's under-representation in newsrooms and in editorial leadership, low wages, low capacity, sexual harassment, etc. The various interventions have been categorized under three strategic pillars:

- 1) Strengthening Women's Media Organizations
- 2) Strengthening Women in Media
- 3) Increasing Women's Access to Information

### 7.1 STRENGTHENING WOMEN'S MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS

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Women's media organizations will be targeted to strengthen their existing capacities. Interventions will be focused on helping them identify and clearly articulate their strategic vision.

#### 1) Outcome

Media women's organizations have the institutional capacity to operate and advocate for the rights of women in the media.

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<sup>3</sup> Liberia Women Media Action Committee focuses on helping mainstream gender in media development while it organizes specialized training for women in the media. UNDEF has given it a grant to establish a Women Democracy Radio to provide a voice for marginalized women across the country.

Female Journalists Association is the umbrella association of media women but has been dormant in the last few years. However, there has been renewed effort to resuscitate FeJAL.

Media Women Center for Democracy and Development has a mandate that incorporates broader gender areas including the mainstreaming of gender in community communication.

- 2) Actions and Targets
  - a) Support the institutional reorganization of FeJAL and provide assistance in designing its strategic vision and plan.
  - b) Support female media development organizations to each designate one or more individuals for each of the next three years to undergo training and mentoring in organizational development, financial management, sourcing grants and proposal writing.
  - c) Provide direct support to women's media organizations for internal capacity building in finance, project cycle management, monitoring and evaluation and management training.
  - d) Organize and support study tours and exposure to best practices in other countries and regions.
- 3) Means of Verification
  - a) FeJAL's written strategic vision and plan.
  - b) At least four well written proposals and one funded proposal per year.
  - c) Institutional reports on system improvement, policies and strategic plans approved by the different boards and efficient management team in place at targeted institutions.
  - d) At least 20 female journalists from media outlets and organizations participating in study tours and exposure to best practices in other countries over the next three years

## 7.2 STRENGTHENING WOMEN IN THE MEDIA

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Support must be provided to train female journalists as a way to increasing the number of women in newsrooms across the country. Emphasis must be placed on preparing women to assume media leadership positions to increase their roles in editorial decision making, which will lead to more women focused issues being covered by news outlets.

Additionally, to strengthen women in the media, actions must be taken to address low wages, sexual harassment, lack of gender sensitive policies, etc.

- 1) Outcome

Women journalists have the skills and incentive to compete on an equal basis with their male colleagues and to assume leadership roles in newsrooms across the country.
- 2) Actions and Targets
  - a) Conduct an audit of previous training initiatives that targeted female journalists. This will serve as a baseline by which skill levels can be measured and will inform the process of developing training and mentoring initiatives to build the capacity of female journalists.
  - b) Establish a scholarship fund for deserving female journalism students at post-secondary institutions in Liberia.
  - c) Develop a mentoring plan that will be run through FeJAL to help motivate young female journalists. The plan will involve well established, successful and experienced women journalists working with younger or less experienced practitioners.
  - d) Design a plan to recruit and train women as community radio journalists and deliver training in gender sensitive reporting/production for community radio partners.

- e) Bring together women media organizations and the PUL to develop gender sensitive policies for media outlets, taking into account the government's national gender policy, Liberia's National Action Plan on Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, and the AU Protocol on the African Women's Decade. The policies will ensure that:
    - i. Both genders receive equal pay for equal job responsibilities.
    - ii. Wage structures are included in employment contracts.
    - iii. Every outlet or media institution has policies that ensure that victims of sexual harassment and exploitation have adequate, safe and appropriate channels through which to seek redress. The policies protect victims and whistle blowers and encourage victims to speak out.
    - iv. Human Resources policies and procedures are gender sensitized and include policies against sexual harassment.
  - f) Bring together LIWOMAC, FeJAL, MEWOCEDE and the PUL to organize internal gender awareness trainings for media organizations and outlets
  - g) Bring partner NGOs, LIWOMAC, FeJAL and MEWOCEDE together with each of the four universities offering Journalism or Mass Communications to develop and include as part of their curriculum a course in gender sensitive reporting.
  - h) Develop a media tracking system for regular and effective monitoring of media coverage of gender and issues related to women.
  - i) Support the building of LWDR into a training and mentoring facility for female broadcast practitioners.
  - j) Develop LIWOMAC/LWDR into a gender and women's media leadership training facility.
  - k) Engage and sign memoranda of understanding with fifteen media outlets to host trained media women in different capacities for at least one year through an internship program.
- 3) Means of Verification
- a) Number of women in newsrooms increases to 30% during the life of CSML.
  - b) Number of female journalists that receive scholarships; source documents obtained from universities.
  - c) Gender sensitive policies are in place.
  - d) At least five women are serving as community radio producers and presenters at each CSML member station by the third year of the CSML program.
  - e) Universities have a gender sensitive reporting course as a requirement for journalism/communications majors.
  - f) Gender and leadership institutes are established at LIWOMAC/LWDR.
  - g) 100 female journalists benefit from internship program over a three year period.

### 7.3 INCREASING WOMEN'S ACCESS TO INFORMATION

As we have already established, in some communities women's political awareness and capacity to engage decision makers are limited. Women therefore need civic empowerment to mobilize and utilize public spaces, including the media, through which leaders can be held accountable. Women also need to be given an opportunity to have more access to programs on radio and to become quoted sources in the news.

#### 1) Outcomes

Improved listening culture among community women by working through existing women's listening clubs.

Women are listening to and participating in radio programs and newspapers, and media outlets have more women as quoted sources.

## 2) Actions and Targets

- a) Identify ten existing women's listening clubs, organize a network and provide training.
- b) Empower women's listening clubs with resources for subsidiary activities as defined by the women in their various communities.
- c) Purchase and distribute radios to club members.
- d) Pilot talk shows in Liberian English on LWDR on civic and women's rights issues.
- e) Hire and train two female program presenters/producers at LWDR to conduct talk shows in Liberian English.
- f) Provide training to begin or, in some cases, to enhance production of radio talk shows in local languages.
- g) Build partnerships and provide media literacy trainings and tools for women NGO leaders at the local and national levels.

## 3) Means of Verification

- a) Established network of women's listening clubs.
- b) Ten (10) women's listening clubs are trained and engaged in subsidiary activities by the third year of CSMSL.
- c) Thirty (30) local and national women NGO leaders have media literacy training by the fourth year of CSML.
- d) Seventy five (75) journalists (male and female) are trained in gender sensitive reporting within three years.
- e) Two female radio producers/presenters are hired and trained, and talk shows in Liberian English are started before the end of CSML's year 2.
- f) Network of radio clubs has radio receivers.

## ADVANCING WOMEN IN THE MEDIA STRATEGY LOG FRAME

### **Pillar 1: Strengthening Women's Media Organizations**

**Issues:** *Low capacity of women's media organizations.*

*Poor networking and mobilization skills to influence and sustain advocacy around policy and decision making processes at different levels.*

**Objective:** *Women's Media organizations have the institutional capacity to operate and advocate for the rights of women in the media.*

ACTIVITY	INTENDED OUTCOME	MEANS OF VERIFICATION	RISK ASSUMPTION	TIMEFRAME
<p>Support women journalists in reorganizing FeJAL.</p> <p>Support design of FeJAL's strategic vision and plan.</p>	<p>FeJAL reorganized and recognized as a vibrant organization.</p> <p>FeJAL's strategic vision in place.</p>	<p>FeJAL's written strategic vision and plan.</p>	<p>Weak collaboration, competition for resources and recognition may impede functions of the national steering committee.</p>	<p>May, 2011 – April, 2013</p>
<p>Provide operational funds to women's media organizations to design strategic plans and management policies and institute systems.</p>	<p>Women's media organizations developed to attract funding and grant opportunities for implementation of programs and activities.</p>	<p>Institutional reports on system improvement, policies and strategic plans approved by the different boards and efficient management team in place at targeted institutions.</p>	<p>Management teams set in place may lack commitment and willingness to enhance skills in sustaining women's media organizations.</p>	<p>April 2011 – March 2013</p>

<p>Provide support to train and mentor employees or representatives of female media organizations in organizational development, financial management, project cycle management, monitoring and evaluation, sourcing grants, and proposal writing.</p>	<p>Women's media organizations have trained manpower and staff to write proposals and seek funding.</p>	<p>At least four well written and one funded proposal per year.</p>	<p>Trained personnel not devoting time and resources to their respective organizations.</p>	<p>April 2011 – March 2013</p>
<p>Organize and support study tours and exposure to best practices in other countries and regions.</p>	<p>Create international exposure for female journalists.</p>	<p>At least 20 female journalists participate in study tours and exposure to best practices in other countries.</p>	<p>Lack of funds.</p>	<p>January, 2012 – December, 2013</p>

**Pillar 2: Strengthening Women in the Media**

**ISSUES:** *Women's under-representation in newsrooms.  
Low representation of women in editorial leadership.  
Absence of policies and codes to promote gender equity in media.*

**OBJECTIVES:** *Women journalists have the skills and incentive to compete on an equal basis with their male colleagues and to assume leadership roles in newsrooms across the country.  
Number of women in newsrooms increased to 30% during life of CSML.*

ACTIVITY	INTENDED OUTCOME	MEANS OF VERIFICATION	RISK/ASSUMPTION	TIMEFRAME
Conduct training audit to determine skills and leadership gaps.	A comprehensive analysis of training needs and gaps is made.	A baseline report on the training audit.	Lack of cooperation from media outlets and organizations.	April 2011 – March 2013
Develop scholarship management plan and provide scholarships for deserving female mass communication and journalism students.	Increased enrollment and retention of female students studying and practicing mass communication or journalism.	Profiles of students and scholarship records; Source documents obtained from universities.	Limited funds to support scholarship program.	May, 2011 – December, 2011

<p>Develop a mentoring plan to be run through FeJAL to help motivate young female journalists.</p>	<p>Young female journalists benefit from the experience and expertise of older, more experienced, and better educated women journalists.</p>	<p>Mentoring program in place.</p>	<p>Fear and lack of support from media outlets to promote upward mobility for trained female journalists.</p>	<p>August, 2011 – June, 2012</p>
<p>Develop special program to recruit and train women as community radio journalists.</p>	<p>Increased number of women working in community radio.</p>	<p>At least five women serving as community radio producers/presenters at each CSML member station by the third year of CSML, leading to an overall 30% increase in the number of women in newsrooms across the country.</p>	<p>Reluctance on the part of young females to see community radio as a career path. Lack of cooperation from authorities at stations.</p>	<p>June, 2011 – May, 2015</p>

<p>Work with PUL and media outlets to develop gender sensitive policies.</p> <p>Conduct gender awareness trainings for media outlets and media development organizations.</p>	<p>Gender sensitive policies in place at various media outlets.</p>	<p>Written gender sensitive policies in place.</p>	<p>Entrenchment of gender insensitive practices, and lack of cooperation from media managers and media development organizations.</p>	<p>May, 2011 – April, 2013</p>
<p>Develop a system for regular and effective monitoring of gender and issues related to women as covered in the media through a media tracking program.</p>	<p>Documented evidence of gender mainstreaming in the media or lack thereof.</p>	<p>Report of each media tracking or monitoring exercise.</p>	<p>Lack of resources to conduct this exercise on a regular basis.</p>	<p>July 2011 – June, 2013</p>
<p>Engage and sign memoranda of understanding with fifteen media outlets to host trained media women in different capacities for at least one year through an internship program.</p>	<p>Female journalists with the relevant skills benefit from in-service training and other initiatives that help improve the quality of media practice.</p>	<p>100 female journalists benefit from internship program over a three year period.</p>	<p>Lack of cooperation from media outlets.</p>	<p>May, 2011 – April, 2014</p>

Develop LIWOMAC/LWDR into a gender and women's media leadership training facility.	An established institute that specializes in preparing journalists for a gender sensitive media.	Gender and leadership institutes established at LIWOMAC/LWDR.	Lack of cooperation from other women's media organizations.	July, 2011 – June, 2014
Together with partner NGOs, engage the four universities offering mass communications or journalism to develop and include gender sensitive reporting as part of their curricula.	Expose university journalism or mass communications students to gender sensitive reporting.	Gender sensitive reporting is part of curriculum of each university.	Lack of cooperation from the authorities of the partner universities to implement the suggested curriculum revision.	July, 2011 – May, 2013

**Pillar 3: Increasing Women's Access to Information**

**ISSUES:** *Limited use of women as quoted sources in the news.  
Women's limited access to information.  
Low participation of women in radio programs across the country*

**OBJECTIVES:** *To promote media accountability and women as prime news sources; To increase women's voices in public debates;*

ACTIVITY	INTENDED OUTCOME	MEANS OF VERIFICATION	RISK/ASSUMPTION	TIMEFRAME
<p>Identify ten existing women's listening clubs to organize network, train and empower club members.</p> <p>Provide radios and design relevant subsidiary activities to sustain women's listening club network.</p>	<p>Network created to promote and sustain women's access to information through listening clubs.</p>	<p>One listening club network created, supported and self-managed by women.</p>	<p>Domestic responsibilities will prevent many community women from active involvement in the network.</p>	<p>May, 2011 – April, 2013</p>
<p>Build partnership and provide media literacy trainings and tools for women NGO leaders at local and national levels.</p>	<p>Level of women participating in public debates in the media increased.</p>	<p>30 local and national women NGO leaders have media literacy training by the fourth year of CSML.</p>	<p>Lack of cooperation from NGOs; failure on the part of media outlets to make change and begin using women as quoted sources.</p>	<p>August, 2011 – July, 2013</p>
<p>Design simple Liberian English radio talk show/program on women's</p>	<p>Draw women's attention to issues that concern them in a language that many</p>	<p>Talk show started.</p>	<p>Lack of interest in programs from men.</p>	<p>January, 2011 – July, 2011</p>

rights on LWDR.	understand.			
Hire and train two producers/presenters to run talk shows in simple Liberian English.	Have trained personnel to produce and present programs.	Two trained personnel.	Possibility of the trained personnel leaving LWDR.	January, 2011 – July, 2011
Design radio talk shows in local language at five community radio stations.	Educate rural women on their rights.	Pilot programs in place.	Difficulty in finding people to produce programs.	August, 2011 – July, 2012
Train radio producers/reporters and newspaper journalists to report on gender sensitive issues.	Better understanding of gender issues leads to better coverage.	75 journalists given gender sensitive reporting training in three years.	Difficulty in changing entrenched beliefs.	September, 2011 – August, 2014

## **8. RESPONSIBILITIES**

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Responsibility for the implementation of the Action Plan of the Advancing Women in the Media Strategy rests with the Women's Media Initiative Steering Committee set up under the Women's Media Initiative of IREX's CSML program.

- 1) During the life of CSML, IREX and LIWOMAC through the Steering Committee will be responsible to develop implementation plans and a system for regular and effective monitoring of the strategy implementation.
- 2) The Women's Media Steering Committee will seek additional funding as it sees fit for the implementation of this strategy.
- 3) The Steering Committee will convene an annual review session beginning a year after the launch of the Advancing Women in the Media Strategy. The purpose of the session is to assess progress in achieving the activities outlined in this document and in attaining gender mainstreaming in the media. The review session will involve media institutions, stakeholders and relevant government institutions.

## 9. ANNEX

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This section highlights the results of the two major undertakings on which this document is based: consultations with stakeholders and the first National Conference on Advancing Women in the Media. It contains recommendations, some of which formed a part of the Action Plan outlined previously.

### 9.1 CONSULTATIONS

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Prior to the first National Conference on Advancing Women in the Media, IREX and LIWOMAC held consultations with eight national and international organizations, seeking their input on what should be the areas of focus of the Advancing Women in the Media Strategy. A summary of the recommendations and points raised during these discussions follows.

- There is a need for a multi-dimensional approach in advancing women in the media, to include developing the capacity of female journalists by providing opportunities for educational advancement and training.
- Complacency and lack of assertiveness, which are hampering the advancement of women in the media, must be addressed.
- To increase women's access to information, radio stations should have dedicated lines for women to encourage them to participate in call-in programs.

#### **Female Journalists Association of Liberia**

Proposes training for women's organizations in basic management skills to enhance organizational and institutional capacities.

- Trainings should include information technology, leadership and fundraising.
- Training is needed for all journalists (male and female) in reporting on issues affecting women.
- FeJAL acknowledges that a major challenge among women's media organizations is poor leadership and management skills and calls for collaboration between female media groups and other well-known organizations to address the issue.
- Career days should be held to encourage young high school and college women to pursue journalism as a profession.

#### **International Alert (IA)**

IA suggests that grants should be provided to women's media groups to strengthen their organizational and institutional capacities.

- Female media groups should join together to address the issue of conflicting interests. Rather than competing against each other, female media groups should work together to seek the common interests of women media practitioners.
- FeJAL should play an umbrella role like the PUL. The roles should be spelt out with FeJAL being the mother organization and LIWOMAC and MEWOCEDE working as implementing partners.

- Incentives for women should be created at the community radio level to encourage more women in rural areas to take up roles as journalists, managers and producers.
- Affirmative action should be adopted as a way of recruiting women to work in the media.
- Scholarships should be provided for women to study journalism.
- More programs should be produced by women and more gender sensitive programming should be on the airwaves as a way of increasing women's access to information.

### **Christian Media Center (CMC)**

CMC suggests that the process of formulating a comprehensive Advancing Women in the Media Strategy must be inclusive to enable women to take ownership.

- Women in the media should be given more training, particularly in basic skills and grammar.
- Female media organizations should be supported with grants and management training.

### **West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP)**

Women's organizations need to be strengthened independently beyond donor funding.

- Female media organizations must work towards raising funds locally to help sustain them.
- In order to improve service delivery, female media groups must be trained in leadership and management.
- There should be more long term planning for educating women in media with a focus on quality higher education.

### **Women of Liberia Peacebuilding Network (WOLPNET)**

WOLPNET proposes the establishment of career counselors at universities to guide young women who may be suited for journalism.

- Women's media organizations should develop a plan to ensure their sustainability and address the needs of their organizations.

### **ActionAid-Liberia**

Enhancing the technical capacities of women in the media will bring about development within the media sector.

- More emphasis should be placed on formal education for women in the media.
- Education must include practical specialized training. New Narratives, a program that is training young women in investigative journalism, could be a model.

### **UNIFEM**

UNIFEM expressed the need to make media outlets more sensitive to gender issues. Journalists (women and men) must go through gender sensitivity training to guide them in their reporting. Media professionals must be trained to profile successful women in society to serve as an inspiration to young women.

- The issue of low wages in the media must also be addressed. The problem must be studied and ways of alleviating it must be sought to encourage women.
- The PUL and female media groups must work to ensure that outlets develop sexual harassment policies that are adhered to.
- Female journalists must be given international exposure, through an exchange program, to experience international best practices.
- The strategy must focus on empowering women to use the media.
- Must consider distributing radio receivers to women.
- Must create or enhance female radio or listening clubs.

## 9.2 CONFERENCE ON ADVANCING WOMEN IN THE MEDIA

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The Advancing Women in the Media Conference had three facilitated sessions led by prominent Liberian women.

**Session One – Mapping the Absent Voices: Impact on shaping a strategy.** Korto Williams, ActionAid – Liberia Country Director.

**Session Two – Women’s Media Organizations: Roles in advancing women in the media.** Professor Weade Kobbah Wureh, University of Liberia.

**Session Three – Gender Accountability, Development and the Role of Media.** Estella Nelson, LIWOMAC Executive Director.

Each session started with a presentation and was followed by open discussion, questions and answers.

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### 9.2.1 SESSION ONE

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Ms. Korto Williams gave a presentation on the AA-L/LMC September 2010 report, *Mapping the Absent Voices, A Study on Women’s Access to the Media and the Media’s Role in Promoting Women Voices.*

Mapping the Absent Voices was a research project sponsored by AA-L and conducted in collaboration with the LMC in 2009. The study sought to determine the extent to which women are involved with and included in the media.

More than one hundred (100) women were interviewed for the study.

**Areas of research:**

*Salary versus work duty*

The report shows that women in the media are underpaid. Of the more than 100 women interviewed 41.3% earn less than \$50 per month, 23.9% earn between \$75 and \$149 per month, 15.9% earn between \$150 and \$349 per month, 2.2% earn between \$500 and \$800 per month and 0.7% earn more than \$800 per month.

The issue of low wages is not unique to female journalists, a point made by several conference participants. In its report, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission noted that Liberian journalists, both male and female, are among the lowest paid in West Africa.

#### *Leadership Roles*

Of the more than 100 women interviewed, only 0.7% are in leadership roles.

#### *Sexual Harassment*

Twelve percent (12%) of the women interviewed reported having been physically, emotionally and/or psychologically sexually harassed by their employers or male colleagues and 10.9% claimed to know female colleagues who have been harassed. Those responding that they had suffered sexual harassment in the workplace fell between the ages of 18 and 29.

#### *Gender/Protection Policies*

More than 65% of the women interviewed said there is no gender policy, code of conduct or standard operating procedures at their institutions.

#### *Content of Programming*

The media seldom use women as sources on issues not related to gender or women.

Four radio stations (ELBC, Star Radio, UNMIL and Truth FM) were monitored randomly in 2009. Forty five (45) news stories were evaluated for content. Of the 45 news stories Star Radio ranked highest on stories related to women with 33.3%, followed by ELBC at 31%, UNMIL at 26.7% and Truth FM at 8.9%.

In a random count of 16 editions of The Inquirer, The Daily Observer, The New Democrat and The News, the mention of female sources were mainly on issues related to women. Collectively, the newspapers allotted a total of 4.9% of the total space to gender and women related issues. Of the four newspapers, The Daily Observer was highest with 32% of stories relating to women and The New Democrat was lowest with a mere 16%.

*General Perspective of Women's Access to Phone-in Programs.* Very few women call to participate in radio talk shows. There are a number of reasons associated with this:

- Females are less likely to possess a mobile phone.
- Those that do have phones are less likely to have money to recharge their credits.
- Women are busy during the morning hours when most call-in shows are on the air and therefore find it difficult to listen to and participate in radio talk shows.

#### **Recommendations from the Study:**

- Mainstream gender in programming.
- Reserve a studio phone number specifically for the female listening audience.
- Women's media organizations should conduct a comprehensive capacity audit of women working in the media to identify and design appropriate programs to build their capacity.

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### 9.2.2 SESSION TWO

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Professor Wureh spoke about women's organizations and their role in advancing women in the media. Her presentation looked at the history of efforts by female media practitioners to organize and advocate for their rights. She noted that FeJAL is not the first umbrella organization of women media practitioners. Media women formed another organization back in the 80s that was short lived. In fact, she listed the failure of women's media organizations to survive as the number one challenge to advocating for the rights of women in the media. (See Attachment One)

#### Challenges

- Women media organizations are short lived because they are built around their leaders.
- Organizations have unclear visions.
- Male media managers feel women cannot meet the demands of the job.
- Media women face harassment from news sources<sup>4</sup> and have no means of redress. The legal system addresses this situation, but cultural norms and work structures make it difficult for victims of sexual harassment to seek redress. In most institutions there are no policies on addressing harassment. Additionally, young female journalists often hesitate to report harassment for fear of losing their jobs or suffering other forms of reprisal.

#### Recommendations

- Women must organize for information sharing, because knowledge is power.
- Encourage formal education to build skills and increase knowledge.
- Provide scholarships for women in the media to motivate more females to take up journalism as a profession.
- Organize or facilitate gender sensitive training for male colleagues to make them knowledgeable about gender related issues.
- Women's media organizations must set key objectives that are clear and achievable.
- Media women's organizations must extend their activities to the various counties by establishing local chapters.
- Women's organizations need to examine their roles and formulate action plans for women's advancement.
- Rural female journalists must be given the chance to assume leadership roles in women's media organizations.
- Examine radio programming to include and ensure a gender perspective.
- Women's media organizations should network among themselves and establish partnership with international media organizations.
- Media groups should examine their platforms and develop gender perspectives.

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### 9.2.3 SESSION THREE

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Estella Nelson spoke about Gender Accountability, Development and the Role of Media. (See Attachment Two)

Ms. Nelson began by highlighting some of the challenges facing women in today's Liberia.

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<sup>4</sup> News sources: Journalism term meaning people who make the news or who are interviewed for news.

## Challenges

- Gender Based Violence: The National Gender-Based Violence Task Force reported 677 cases of rape between January and June 2008. One hundred and eleven (111) of the victims were girls aged 17 and below.
- Awareness:
  - A survey led by the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) in 2007 revealed that about 79% of women and girls had no knowledge of basic policy-making and other relevant governance processes.
  - The majority of Liberian women lack basic knowledge of human and civil rights, let alone their gender rights.
- Representation: In the Legislature women represent a mere 14% and 25% of cabinet positions. In the media women in leadership roles represent between 1 and 5%.
  - Since its formation in 1964, the PUL has had only one female president.
- Sexual exploitation: Young women entering the media profession are sexually abused and exploited by male supervisors as a condition for getting on the air or maintaining their jobs.
- Education: Illiteracy is far higher amongst women than men.
  - In rural Liberia, only 6% of school aged girls are enrolled.
- Access to loans: Women can access loans in various banks. However, those loans have short term payments, which are unrealistic. Women have to provide collateral that may not be within their reach.

The Government of Liberia’s Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) should help address some of the issues outlined above.

## Recommendations

- More women need to be actively involved in decision-making at all levels and to participate in the formulation of national policies.
- To move forward and strengthen women, the media must change their attitude towards women and the issues that most affect their lives.
- Women must also take charge of their own issues and insist on having a say in what concerns them.
- Media must play a role in providing women adequate access to information and a platform that will strengthen the dissemination of their opinions and strengthen their leadership. To do so, the media must change its position and begin to focus on women specific issues as under-reporting further marginalizes women.

## 9.3 CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATIONS

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Following the presentations and discussions in Sessions One, Two and Three, Lawrence Randall and Marie Kolenky of the LMC and AA-L harmonized the findings. This led to group discussions that resulted in the following recommendations:

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### 9.3.1 ADVANCING MEDIA WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING

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1) Advocacy

Media women should launch a campaign to spur women's participation in local and national decision making processes. The campaign should include dramas, fliers, spot messages and jingles produced in Liberian English and local languages.

2) Policy

To impact policies that affect their wellbeing, media women must work with NGOs to organize gender sensitive trainings for the staff of legislators, politicians, local and community government leaders, etc.

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### 9.3.2 LOW SALARIES

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1) Official wage structures should be included in the organization's/outlet's Human Resources Manual, code of conduct and employment contract.

2) This conference mandates the PUL to have legitimate authority over media institutions in ensuring a set minimum wage for media personnel. People should be paid according to their qualifications and performance.

a) Both genders should receive equal salaries for equal job responsibilities.

b) Employment in the media must be based on competence and qualifications and not biases, gender or favoritism.

c) Employment contracts should be signed by all media employees.

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### 9.3.3 SKILL LEVEL

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1) Provide scholarships for females interested in pursuing a career in journalism and for those already in the field. Ensure that women journalists receive specialized media trainings.

2) A mentoring system must be developed to help female reporters grow in the profession and address the lack of assertiveness that seems to hold some of them back.

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### 9.3.4 SEXUAL HARASSMENT

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1) Women's media development organizations should work with the PUL to set up a committee on sexual harassment and abuse. The committee should strategize how to encourage and protect victims and whistle blowers, and provide a safe environment in which victims can speak out.

2) The PUL and media outlets must develop a code of conduct to address sexual harassment and abuse.

3) Media institutions should put in place policies on dress codes that are fair and equitable.

- 4) PUL and women's media organizations should hold more forums to create awareness on sexual harassment and abuse.

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### 9.3.5 UNDER-REPRESENTATION IN THE MEDIA

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- 1) There should be regular staff meetings at media entities to address matters affecting employees. There should also be suggestion boxes at every entity so employees can express their views. This gives female and male reporters a space to bring forth their grievances and have them addressed. These two activities could prevent some women from leaving the profession, because they feel that they are not listened to and their views are not respected.
- 2) Media houses should adopt internal gender sensitive policies and codes of conduct with respect to employees' welfare. Many women feel the lack of gender sensitive policies contribute to unfair practices in the workplace and this may be discouraging women from entering the profession.
- 3) Management should adopt flexible employment strategies that are gender sensitive, with a support committee set up to monitor them. These strategies should include ways to recruit more female staff.

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### 9.3.6 LACK OF ENCOURAGEMENT

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- 1) Media entities and support organizations should develop career development programs to boost the passion of female journalists.
- 2) Media entities should develop and adopt gender sensitive performance appraisal policies and create a reward scheme for employees.
- 3) Female journalists must see themselves as equal to their male counterparts.

## 10. ATTACHMENTS

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### Attachment 1:

*'Women's Media Organizations & their Role in the Advancement of Women in the Media.'*

Weade Kobbah-Wureh

ADVANCING WOMEN IN THE MEDIA CONFERENCE

November 26, 2010

Greetings:

I continue to be humbled by the invitations I receive from organizations to share my views and experiences on issues relating to the media in Liberia. I believe this is in furtherance of my quest to help develop and improve in the media in Liberia. The issue of promoting women in all areas of life is not a new one. For many years there have been efforts to change the status of women in all professions. It was recognized at the first Beijing conference long years ago that women have been marginalized, and there is a serious need to reverse this trend if the world is to progress holistically. The Beijing Conference adopted several measures to facilitate the advancement of women which all member states of the United Nations ascribed to. Liberia fully participated in this and all subsequent conferences for the advancement of women. However to a large extent, advancement for women has only been articulated in politics and economic empowerment.

A 1985 Liberian conference on women's economic empowerment was held in Gbarnga, Bong County and several others held on political advancement of women, including the most recent 2009 International Women Colloquium on women leadership held in Liberia. Issues of gender mainstreaming in Liberia have dealt with everything else except women in the media. Aside from a few workshops held on women in the media by The University of Liberia Mass Communication Department, CEMESP and the LMC, this is the first national conference to address the issues of advancement for women in the media. This is a venture worthy of commendation.

We have long recognized the marginalization of women in Liberia and the need for gender equality and equity. This means equal and fair access to opportunities available for all, men and women alike. This need for an even approach to societal development gave rise to the establishment of a national institution, the Ministry of Gender and Development, charged with the responsibility to promote and implement all international bilateral, multilateral treaties and agreement geared towards improving the statuses of the marginalized members of our society, who have been identified to include mostly women and girls. The United Nations fourth world conference on women in 1995 in Beijing, China in its session on Women and the Media included the following in its plan of action as strategic objectives:

1. Increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication.
2. Promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media.

15 years later a review of the Beijing conference on women in the media revealed that more women are involved in careers in the communications sector, but few have attained positions at the decision-making level or serve on governing boards and bodies that influence media policy. The lack of gender sensitivity in the media is evidenced by the failure to eliminate the gender-based stereotyping that can be found in public and private local, national and international media organizations. The review acknowledged that women should be empowered by enhancing their skills, knowledge and access to information technology. This will strengthen their ability to combat negative portrayals of women and to challenge instances of abuse of the power of an increasingly important industry.

Additionally, most women, especially in developing countries, are not able to access effectively the expanding electronic information highways and therefore cannot establish networks that will provide them with alternative sources of information. Women therefore need to be involved in decision-making regarding the development of the new technologies in order to participate fully in their growth and impact.

I cited this analysis to show that women in the media in Liberia are no different from others lagging behind male counterparts in world. Our difference lies in not realizing that once we have identified our shortcomings we have to develop strategies to improve them. The constant complaints of invisible barriers that keep women marginalized and dominated in the newsrooms and board rooms of media institutions do not help our situation. How then do we promote the advancement of women in the media through women's media organizations? An assessment of the women media institutions in Liberia shows they are short-lived and individual focused. This has been true since the inception of the first media women organization, the Association of Liberia Media Women (ALIMEWO) in 1983 to present. Their membership lacks commitment and the goals and objectives of these institutions are not clearly defined and articulated to attract and retain members. The organizations flourish or die depending on the leadership.

This is compounded by the fact that national media bodies have shown no intention of playing an active role in ameliorating situations discriminatory to women. The leadership structures have few women and where they are found the jobs they occupied are normally of lower rank. The employment policies of media institutions, if they exist at all, are not gender sensitive. The LMC reports that of all the media institutions in Liberia, there is one woman who is a radio station manager and another newspaper editor. Every other station manager of the over 46 radio stations in Liberia is a man. This is because fewer women enter the profession with qualifications to ascend to management positions. The few with the qualification and zeal have no or very little access to finance to start or own their own newspapers or radio stations. They are not as aggressive as their male counterparts when it comes to competing for a job or getting a promotion. They are also not inclined to slug out the long hours and meet the challenges the job demands. In some instances reports of fighting off sexual harassment and abuse have hindered opportunities for advancement. Moreover the structures of these media institutions, like most of our other institutions, do not allow for the articulation of abuses or provide avenues where women can seek redress.

This clearly shows that women need organizations in which they can adequately discuss and share experience about issues which confront them individually and collectively in the media industry. Women's media organizations have the responsibility to ensure the advancement of women in the media by promoting professionalism, awarding excellence and encouraging education in all areas of

communication. They should promote leadership and help position their members for positions in the ever evolving field of communications. This can be done by stating a vision of where the organization is and where it wants to go and setting up key objectives that are achievable. These can include organizing gender sensitive training for media professionals, managers and editors to encourage gender mainstreaming in the work place. I suggest that existing media organizations such as LIWOMAC and MEWOCEDE examine their platforms to include some of the suggestions we are advancing. These are not limited to creating awareness of the need for balanced and diverse reporting of women's issues in the media and developing gender perspectives on such issues which are of concern to communities and the society.

To cooperate and work with all local and international NGO's involved with the advancement of women, especially women in the media;

To design programs to support and encourage the training of women in the media and expand such training to the use of new media technology;

To encourage more women to enter the field of communications and where appropriate assist in the provision of scholarships for women in the media. We commend Mewocede for spearheading this encouragement of women in the media by their Excellence in Journalism award provided the Press Union of Liberia for deserving women. I am humbled that they even deemed it fit to have the award named in my honour.

There is a need to expand membership in existing media women organizations in Monrovia to women in the media in other counties in Liberia by establishing county chapters.

Most women's media organizations realize the need for women networking to strengthen and support shared objectives. We would encourage this networking locally and nationally and recommend that they transcend national boundaries to other professional women's media groups such as the International Media Women Foundation.

To discourage the negative portrayal of women in the media which tends to stereotype women as objects of exploitation and abuse.

While this list is not exhaustive on the roles that women's media organizations can play in the advancement of women, this forum presents ample opportunities to examine these roles and help formulate action plans for women's advancement. We are proud to be a part of this conference and look forward to actively participating in the deliberations that will ensue. I trust that my involvement will be as a professional colleague and not the relic labeled "Veteran" a nomenclature used to exclude some of us more experienced colleagues from active participation in matters that concern all of us. I am not considering early retirement.

Thank you

## **Attachment 2:**

### ***GENDER ACCOUNTABILITY, DEVELOPMENT AND THE MEDIA***

Estella Nelson/Executive Director, LIWOMAC

November 27, 2010

#### **Introduction/Situation Analysis**

I will be speaking on Gender Accountability, Development and the Media. To begin, I would first like to give a background to the situation of women in the country, since our focus is on women.

According to a study conducted in 10 counties by the World Health Organization between 2005 and 2006, of a total of 1,600 women, 90.8% of them said they experienced sexual violence. This means that in those ten counties, 1,452 women experienced sexual violence which was widespread during the war and is still happening. The perpetrators are reported to be males in the family and community, and the victims are females as tender as 11 months old.

The National Gender-Based Violence Task Force reported 677 cases of rape between January and June 2008. One hundred and eleven (111) of the victims were girls aged 17 and below.

In terms of leadership and political participation, a survey led by the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) in 2007 revealed that about 79% of 100 women and girls interviewed had no knowledge about basic policy-making and other relevant governance processes. In addition, the survey shows they lack basic knowledge of human and civil rights – let alone their gender rights. In the legislature women represent a mere 14% and 25% of cabinet positions. In the media we are less than 5% percent when it comes to leadership and between 13 and 16% of the total number of journalists in newsrooms across the country.

Another study conducted by the Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services (LISGIS) in December 2007 shows that girls' access to education is only 34% compared to that of 61% for boys; the illiteracy rate for women is 54% compared with 24% for men.

In addition to fulfilling household responsibilities, it is estimated that women produce approximately 60% of agricultural products and carry out more than 80% of trading activities in the rural areas. Yet women are the majority of poor and most disadvantaged people in society.

#### **Environmental Scan for Interventions**

Now I would like to do an environmental scan to consider interventions that have or are being made to tackle the problems mentioned.

Different actors working around SGBV issues throughout Liberia, including the Ministry of Gender and Development (MoGD), UN, local and international NGOs, have advocated for policies and laws that address the protection of women.

In 2003 a law giving property rights to women was passed, and in 2008 the government printed a handbill on the law; the AU Protocol on the Rights of Women; the National Action Plan on UN

Security Resolution 1325 was developed in 2009 by the government; and we have a new policy on gender-based violence, a new rape law and the equity bill is currently before the legislature.

These laws and policies are important for the advancement of women on all levels. There has also been huge donor funding for women development-focused programs, but I am sorry that I cannot put cents and dollars to the amount of financial aid for women. I also cannot determine the impact on women, including those at the grassroots level or women in the media.

### **Gender Accountability, Development and the Media**

However, with the premise laid, I would like us to now speak to the topic: Gender Accountability, Development and Media.

First and foremost, I want to state that there is a strong link between gender and development. The next thing I want to note is that the media is not just a professional body or an information source. It is a key architect of democracy and equality, so the role of the media goes beyond mere gathering and reporting news.

The Liberian Constitution provides for the right of freedom of speech and expression, with the understanding that the media, including individuals, are fully accountable. But for the purpose of this meeting, we are not looking at accountability in the context of media law and ethics; rather we are drawing into our discussion the role of the media in enhancing development through promoting women's rights and gender equity.

As I mentioned before, women make up half of the country's population of 3.5 million, yet we are underrepresented at all levels, more vulnerable to HIV and account for the highest percentage of illiterate people in Liberia. In rural areas, women's literacy rate is as low as 26%, while the gender gap in secondary school attendance is high with only 6% of females and 19% of males attending school.

Maternal mortality in Liberia is one of the highest in the world. According to the 2007 Liberia Demographic and Health Survey, 48% of Liberian women become pregnant by the age of 18, and there is inadequate health care for citizens.

The issues have damaging consequences, but over the years the media sector has ignored or failed to adequately cover crimes against women and other social ills that affect their livelihood and security. In addition to the failure by the media to recognize women and their concerns, the sector has been dominated and controlled by males who generally regard female colleagues either as intruders, timid, or less intelligent.

The Press Union of Liberia, which is the national umbrella organization for journalists, has had one female president and Assistant Secretary General after so many years of existence. There are in total (commercial and non-commercial combined) one hundred or more radio, television and newspaper outlets spread across the landscape of Liberia, but women constitute less than 5% of leadership and not more than 16% of the editorial staff.

It is also reported that young women entering the journalism profession are sexually abused and exploited by male bosses or supervisors as a condition to getting on the air, to maintain their positions, or to advance in the workplace. Such discrimination and violations go on with impunity.

The government has designed the Liberian Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) as a road map to development. The government is also carrying out reforms in different sectors, and there are new policies and programs that directly target women and girls. Media, as part of their responsibilities, are required to give visibility and voice to citizens, and empower them with information about governance processes. The PRS aligns with the first priority of the Millennium Development Goal, which is to eradicate extreme poverty among women by 2015. Up to the minute statistics show that the poverty level among young and adult females in Liberia is still very high, making many susceptible to HIV, sexual violence and abuse.

Under-reporting on women's issues and failing to recognize gaps in relation to the specific needs of males and females in the Liberian society put women at a greater disadvantage. The current situation clearly depicts an environment in which women's voices are few in national debates while men dominate most news and information events, programs and talk shows. Women are not able to present and discuss their own lives in meaningful ways.

### **Women's Access to Information**

Talking about other ways that women are excluded, a study conducted by the Liberia Media Center for LIWOMAC and the YWCA shows that many women lack access and control over radio, which is a major information source in this country. Interestingly too, women who can access radio say major networks broadcasts are too difficult for them to understand, so they depend on community radios and mainly listen to programs in their local languages.

This means that radio stations have to look at content and timing of their broadcasts in order to meet the information needs of women. During the 2005 electoral process (general and presidential elections) women cast most of the ballots that were disqualified due to erroneous markings. This is the consequence of the high level of illiteracy among the women of Liberia coupled with their very limited access to information (in this particular case, information on the electoral process).

### **Conclusion**

In Liberia, although much progress has been made over the past couple of years on obtaining equal rights for women, there remains a need to strengthen the political participation of women and empower them. Indeed, more women need to be actively involved in decision-making at all levels and to participate in the formulation of national policies. In addition to the political sector, the voices of women need to be heard throughout all sectors of society.

As such, there is a need to provide women with adequate access to information and a platform that will not only strengthen the dissemination of their opinions and strengthen their leadership, but will also disseminate information to a large audience of women throughout the nation and thus build their knowledge in general and raise their awareness of national and local issues of importance.

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