

POLICY BRIEF



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NATIONAL OWNERSHIP AND PRIORITIZATION OF SGBV SERVICES - ENSURING SUSTAINABILITY.





The backdrop to this policy brief is the **National Budget Analysis to Determine Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Related Support for Liberia**, commissioned in 2024 by Members of the **Feminist Alliance to End SGBV in the Mano River Region /Liberian Chapter** in parallel to a similar study in Sierra Leone.

It analyzes trends in budget allocations for SGBV over five years, assessing the effectiveness and impact of these budgets on the ground, and Liberia's compliance with international SGBV-related laws¹.

The Feminist Alliance serves as a collaborative initiative for joint advocacy to address women's and girls' issues and promote gender justice in the MRU region. The goal of the Feminist Alliance is to increase accountability from decision-makers for a violence-free region where women and girls are secure and protected from sexual and gender-based violence.

¹ Short Introduction Partner Organisations and objective of Feminist Alliance.



Brief Background

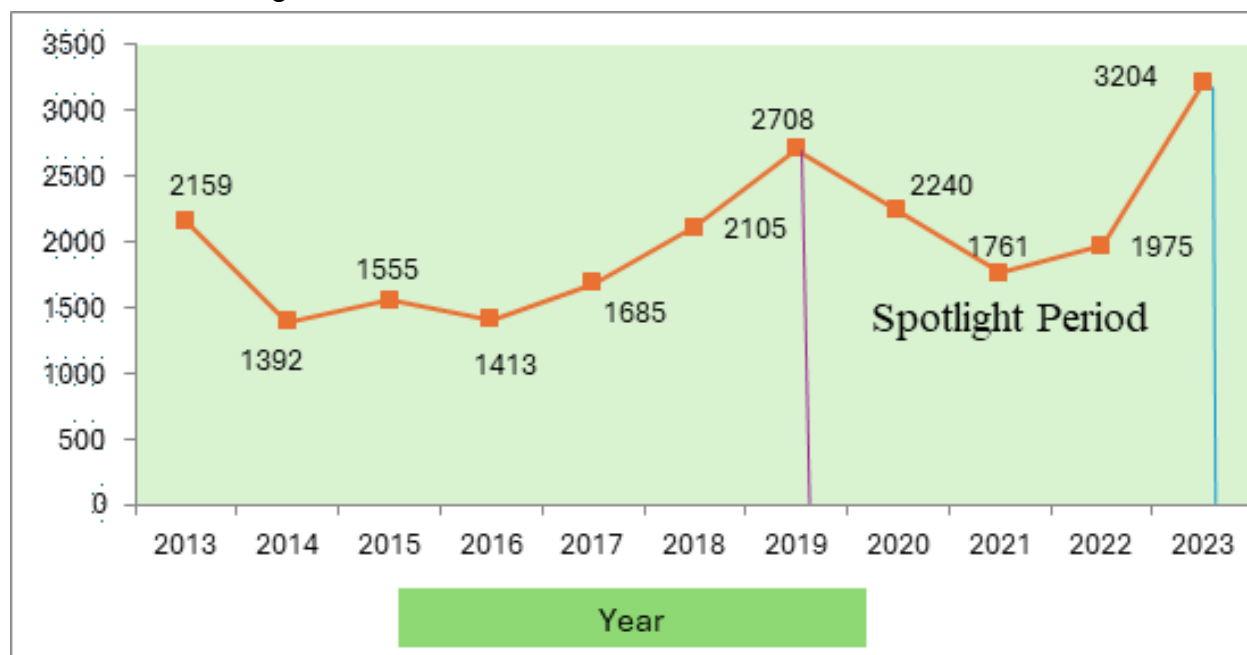
Liberia has made progress in combating Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) through legal reforms, gender-responsive budgeting, and the establishment of survivor services. However, SGBV remains a major challenge, especially post-war, despite efforts to strengthen public structures over the last 15 years.

However, until this day, the lack of access to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) services exacerbate the physical and psychological consequences experienced by survivors, hindering their recovery and reintegration into society. This gap in services also perpetuates a cycle of violence and impunity, as survivors are unable to seek justice and receive the necessary support. SGBV remains a critical issue in Liberia, undermining human rights and development. Despite significant progress made over the years, the sustainability of SGBV services is precarious due to several factors, one of which is reliance on external funding.

The government of Liberia has developed several policies to address SGBV, including the Gender Policy and Action Plan, the National Action Plan for the Prevention and Management of GBV, and the Gender-Responsive Planning and Budgeting Policy. The Anti-SGBV Road Map (2020-2022) was hailed as a key initiative. However, this roadmap did not receive any budget for realization from 2021-2022, highlighting a significant gap between political promises and actual investments. Liberia is also a signatory to regional frameworks such as the African Union's Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa and the ECOWAS Regional Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence. These frameworks support the country's commitment to combating SGBV at both national and regional levels.

Key institutions like the Women and Children Protection Sections (WACPS), the Ministry of Justice, SGBV One-Stop Centers, and safe homes form part of the National Referral Pathway. However, limited resources and politics have and will hinder effective implementation. Safe homes, vital to these services, are largely donor-dependent, and many have closed due to lack of government support and donor fatigue.

According to a report by the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection, cases of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV), particularly rape, have surged over the past decade, reaching 3,204 in 2023. Despite the implementation of legal reforms and policy initiatives, this rising trend demands immediate and sustained action.



A renewed commitment to national ownership and funding for SGBV services is essential for ensuring the protection of the rights of women and children.

for Liberia Identified Several Key Gaps.

- Funding Gaps:** Despite the high relevance of Women's Rights Issues for the country's development and progress, key framework laws and strategies, such as the SGBV Road Map did not receive adequate budget allocations, demonstrating a lack of financial commitment by the government of Liberia.
- Implementation Gaps:** There is a discrepancy between gender-sensitive policy statements and the actual mobilization and spending of government funds on SGBV activities and services.
- Infrastructure Gaps:** Women and girls still face significant challenges in accessing SGBV services, particularly in rural areas. Limited availability of safe homes, inadequately equipped one-stop centers, and insufficient legal support exacerbate these difficulties, leaving many without the necessary resources, protection and trained personnel.

These gaps further exacerbate SGBV and its harmful consequences in Liberia, leaving the rights and dignity of women and girls unprotected and unaddressed. For instance, many survivors are forced to live with untreated physical injuries and psychological trauma, which severely impacts their ability to participate in daily life and pursue personal and professional goals. The lack of support means they are often left isolated, without access to justice, healthcare, or safe spaces, further entrenching the cycle of violence and vulnerability. This reality underscores the urgent need for concrete actions, national ownership and prioritization of SGBV services, and effective implementation of policies to protect and empower SGBV survivors.

PROGRESS AND GAPS IN SGBV PREVENTION AND RESPONSE SERVICE PROVISION BY STATE ACTORS IN LIBERIA

Existing facilities and services to combat SGBV and its harmful consequences, including safe homes, one-stop centres, and legal support, are often limited, under-resourced and unable to meet the needs of survivors, especially in the rural areas. There are a limited number of functional one-stop centres, safe homes and legal support.

ONE-STOP CENTER:

Current Status

There are only 15 one-stop centres in the country (Montserrado county has six one-stop centres, Bong has two and Margibi, Sinoe, Bomi Bassa, RiverGee, Sinoe and Grand Gedeh **each** have one (1)).

The remaining counties (Grand Cape Mount, Nimba, Rivercess, Gbarpolu, Lofa, Grand Gedeh, River Gee, and Grandkru, Maryland) do not have designated space for one-stop centres but referral hospitals provide services for SGBV survivors.

Gaps

Most of the centers are situated in urban areas and most are often under-equipped, lacking essential commodities needed to provide care for survivors, training for health workers at these centers is often scarce and irregular.

Safe homes:

Safe Homes provide temporary protective shelters for abused women and children as well as psychosocial counselling, recreation, and follow-up treatment for Survivors of rape.

There are twelve (12) Safe Homes” for SGBV survivors in ten (10) counties (Montserrado, Bong, Bomi, Lofa, Margibi, River Gee, Grand Cape Mount, Grand Bassa, Sinoe and Nimba. Montserrado and Nimba have two safe homes each.

GAPS

- The two safe homes in Montserrado are owned and operated by NGOs and need additional support to continue operations.
- Safe homes in Nimba (2) need additional funding to continue providing services as well as Bong County
- Four are non-functional (running on low capacity) in Lofa, Margibi , Sinoe and Grand Bassa.
- Four of those 12 safe homes in Grand Gedeh, Rivergee, Sinoe and Grand Cape Mount are not currently operational.

Criminal Court E

Criminal court e was established in 2008, in response to demands for better judicial remedies for sexual offences and has exclusive jurisdiction over all sexual offence cases,

There are four criminal courts E in Liberia, yet only three are operational (Montserrado, Nimba, Grand Gedeh, Bong), with the one recently renovated in Lofa by UNDP not being functional due to a judge not being appointed.

GAPS

The absence of these services in rural areas has significantly affected the resolution of SGBV cases. Backlogs at operational Criminal Courts E and limited space in the courtroom make it impossible for two judges to hold court sessions simultaneously, resulting in few SGBV cases being heard per court term and other criminal courts are not equipped to handle SGBV cases, leading to lack of justice which further heightens a culture of silence around SGBV, particularly rape.

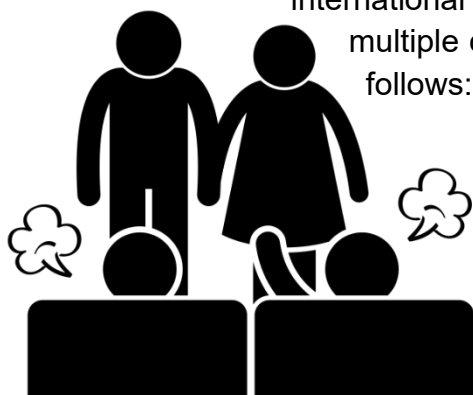
Moreover, the **survivor support fund**, which is used to transport survivors to and from court and other logistical needs needed to seek justice is not funded by the government rather it's solely dependent on donor funding. (3).

SGBV Data Collection and Case Management:

Underreporting and Data Collection Challenge: Accurate data collection remains a major issue due to a lack of resources, and weak monitoring frameworks. This makes it difficult to measure the true impact of SGBV interventions or make data-driven policy decisions.

Summary of Technical Findings

The National budget analysis which consisted of both a literature review and stakeholder discussions showed that although much effort has been made by the government, and international and local partners in SGBV prevention and response, multiple challenges remain at all levels. These are the findings as follows:



1. Limited National Allotment for SGBV services:

The analysis showed that the government allocated limited funding for SGBV services and had no benchmark for allotment towards SGBV services. Funding toward SGBV services was low and disbursement of funds that were allotted was a serious

challenge for line Ministries (Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Protection, Ministry of Justice, and Ministry of Health) there are instances where SGBV services are not listed as line items on the budget which further hampers visibility and advocacy for increased funding in the national budget. The data indicates a sparing and inconsistent stream of finance. In most of the budgets, there had been no allotment towards implementing SGBV activities.

The Ministry of Gender, Children and Protection which is the lead line ministry for SGBV, its national budget allotment over the five years have been less than 1%, except in 2023 where allocations accounted for 3.8% of the national budget. However, these allotments have not been geared towards SGBV services, most of the budget is fixed around administrative costs and what is left is spread amongst competing priorities, with SGBV services getting the least most times. In addition, disbursements of allotted funds

for SGBV services have been a challenge with line ministries not getting the full amount allocated.

In the 2018/19 budget, US\$500,000 allocated in the budget was to finance a government project for a highly vulnerable population (which includes women and girls). The actual budget implemented for the same period shows that the support of the highly vulnerable population as a project was not indicated in the actual budget, fight against rape was indicated as a project but with no money allocated to either non-financial asset component or budget. In 2019/20, the amount of US\$60,000 was budgeted on the non-financial assets line but no money was placed on the line for project execution. From 2019 to 2021, no funding was allotted for the SGBV roadmap implementation. Also in the 2020/21 budget, US\$1,000,000 was budgeted towards the fight against rape but actual disbursement was made towards a safe home for girl's project. In the 2021 special budget, US\$200,000 was budgeted for the fight against rape; the actual budget allotment however shows that that amount was not placed on that line for project implementation. In 2022 and 2023, US\$250,000 and US\$629, 987 were budgeted, but the actual implementation of budgets report for the two period are not yet available to compare actual allocation. While SGBV-specific budget allocations are critical, the unavailability of funding for these specific items is an indication that government budgetary allocation do not appear to be prioritising SGBV issues.

Ministry of Health, which leads the government response to the health consequences of SGBV national budget allotment is geared towards health services and due to its vast functions, between 70-80% of the health budget is allocated to health facilities and workers. MOH allocated budget for SGBV focuses on training health personnel and emergency responders to recognise signs of GBV and its treatment as well as the provision of SGBV-related health services to victims. It is vital that MOH explicitly allocates budget items to SGBV services, such as one-stop centres, provision of essential drugs and supplies to one-stop center and training of one-stop centre staff rather than subsuming it in under health services, where it often takes the back seat to other priorities. If this were to be done, the MOH budget would be in a better position to implement these activities effectively and respond to the harmful consequences of SGBV.



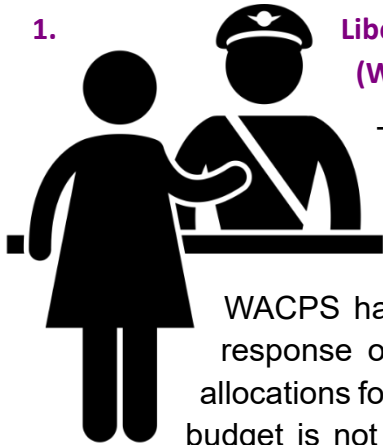
Ministry of Justice

The Judiciary

The Judiciary, specifically Criminal Court E plays a key role in ensuring that the state's response to SGBV incidents is survivor/victim-centered. The Judiciary through the courts ensures that victims/survivors of SGBV get justice while perpetrators are punished. The Judiciary hand receives approximately 3% of the national budgetary

allotment. From that amount, about 80-90% is spent on payment of employees' salaries. Allotments for courts from the Judiciary budget swing between less than 1% to as high as 17% in Montserrado and as high as 37% for other courts in the country to as low as less than 1%. The budget shows no line item specifically dedicated to Criminal Court E, SGBV project or activity nor does it specify under which lines they provide survivor support.

1. Liberia National Police- Women and Children Protection Section (WACPS)



The police are a major component receiving about 50% of the Ministry of Justice budgetary allotment. Within the police, the Women and Children Protection Section (WACPS)/SGBV Crimes unit was specially established to handle SGBV cases.

WACPS has offices in the 15 counties that spearhead investigation and response of SGBV cases at the county level, yet there are no specific allocations for this unit, and it is difficult to assess expenditure since the police budget is not disaggregated per unit or activity to reflect national allotment within the police towards SGBV interventions and activities. The LNP supports the WACPS on the availability of operational funds and their support is mainly on a case-by-case basis. This leaves the section underfunded and heavily reliant on donor funding, while also posing a challenge, as there is no way to track expenditure for SGBV services.

In conclusion, the limited national allotment has led to heavy reliance on international funding, making SGBV services vulnerable to shifts in donor priorities and economic downturns. This dependency undermines the stability and predictability of service provision, leading to uncertainty in funding continuity, consequently affecting the care, justice and services survivors crucially need.



2. Fragmented Coordination and Poor oversight of funds

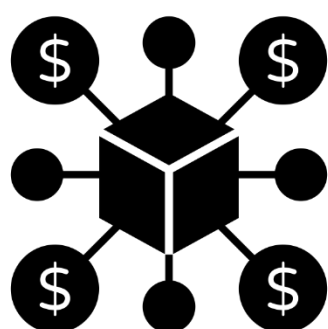
Lack of cohesive strategies and coordination among various stakeholders hampers the effectiveness of SGBV interventions. While institutions were created by the policies to work in synergy to effectively respond to SGBV issues, they are yet to be fully equipped to perform their roles and responsibilities, as coordination on SGBV remains a challenge.

The SGBV task force is an inter-ministerial taskforce, which includes line ministries that respond to SGBV in Liberia, non-governmental actors as well as civil society also participate

in task force meetings, their function is to develop and implement strategies to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence, however, over the last five years, meetings have been infrequent which has affected the coordination and caused it to be fragmented.

3. Disbursement of allotted funds

This continues to be an issue for all line ministries, which signifies that little or no oversight is done by the National Legislature to ensure line ministries get their allotment on time and in full to efficiently provide quality services for SGBV survivors. Moreover, tracking of allotments is difficult as it is not clearly stated in the ministry budget which activity the funds are allocated to, this makes it difficult to gather data on SGBV expenditure in Liberia



4. Inadequate Infrastructure and decentralization of funding for County Governments

Vital facilities and services remain limited and centralized, and survivors across the country struggle to access the necessary support survivors need. Centralization of resources means that those who are not near urban centres or major cities are at a significant disadvantage. This lack of accessibility can lead to prolonged periods of vulnerability and hardship for survivors, who may have to travel long distances or forego essential services altogether.

For meaningful progress to be made, there must be a concerted effort to decentralize and adequately fund these critical services. By expanding the reach and capacity of safe homes, healthcare providers, and legal support networks, we can ensure that all survivors, regardless of their location, can receive the help and protection they deserve. Addressing the infrastructural inadequacies is a pivotal step toward creating a more equitable and supportive system for survivors everywhere.



Recommendations on Strengthening SGBV Prevention and Response in Liberia

1. Recommendations for the Legislature

Increase Funding for SGBV Services:



- **Establish a Dedicated SGBV Budget Line:** Allocate a specific budget for SGBV services across relevant ministries to ensure sustainable funding and implementation of programs. This will lead to an increase in national ownership and funding allocation to SGBV Activities. and reduce reliance on external donors.



- Plan for incremental increases in budget allocation for SGBV services over the next five years to realize international binding commitments and expand services, especially in rural areas.

- Establish mandatory, progressive budget increase of 1.5% yearly for SGBV services such as safe homes, one-stop centers, and survivor support funds.
- **Alignment:** *CEDAW (Article 2)* requires states to use the maximum of available resources to eliminate gender-based violence as a form of discrimination, and *UNSCR 1325 (Pillar 3: Relief and Recovery)* calls for improved support for survivors of violence in conflict-affected settings.

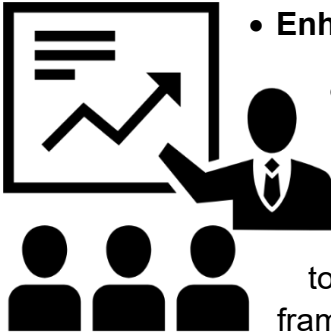
- **Strengthen Oversight Functions:**



Implement stringent financial accountability measures, including regular audits and transparent multi-level reporting mechanisms for all ministries, to ensure funds are utilized effectively and that the impact of SGBV interventions can be measured and realized.

- Enforce accountability mechanisms to ensure allocated funds are fully disbursed to line ministries for effective service delivery and line ministries report on budget utilization for SGBV services.

- **Alignment:** *SDG 16 (Target 16.6)* emphasizes the development of effective, accountable institutions at all levels.



- **Enhance Gender Analysis Expertise:**

- Build the capacity of legislative staff to assess budgets and plans from a gender perspective and link these assessments to national and sectoral development goals.
- **Alignment:** *CEDAW (Article 3)* requires state parties to take all appropriate measures to develop women's rights frameworks, and *Beijing Platform for Action (Strategic Objective A.2)* highlights integrating gender perspectives into all policymaking.

2. Recommendations for Line Ministries

Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection (MoGCSP):



Establish an explicit budget line for safe homes per county and provide incremental financial allotment.

- **Alignment:** *CEDAW (General Recommendation 19, Para 24)* emphasizes adequate budget allocations for gender-specific interventions, while *UNSCR 1325 (Pillar 2: Prevention)* underlines addressing structural causes of violence through sustainable policies.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E):** Implement a comprehensive M&E framework to assess program effectiveness, identify gaps, and ensure compliance with policy commitments.
- **Data Collection and Analysis:** Government and implementing agencies should strengthen data collection and analysis capabilities to track SGBV incidents, service utilization, and outcomes and use this data to inform policy and programmatic decisions.
 - **Alignment:** *Beijing Platform for Action (Strategic Objective E.4)* calls for improving data collection and analysis to monitor violence against women.
- **Safe Homes Expansion:** Advocate for and secure funding to operationalize additional safe homes, including essential medical supplies, trained personnel, and maintenance of infrastructure. especially in rural regions.
 - **Alignment:** *UNSCR 1325 (Pillar 3: Relief and Recovery)* encourages establishing support mechanisms for survivors, and *Maputo Protocol*

(Article 23) mandates the creation of shelters and resources for women in distress.

Ministry of Health (MoH):

Establish an explicit budget line for a one-stop centre per country and provide incremental financial allotment.



- **Alignment:** *CEDAW (General Recommendation 19, Para 24)* emphasizes adequate budget allocations for gender-specific interventions, while *UNSCR 1325 (Pillar 2: Prevention)* underlines addressing structural causes of violence through sustainable policies.
- **Resource Allocation for One-Stop Centers:** Provide dedicated funding for essential medical supplies, training of health personnel, and regular facility maintenance.
 - **Alignment:** *CEDAW (General Recommendation 24)* underscores the obligation of states to ensure women's access to adequate healthcare, including specialized services for survivors of violence.

- **Decentralized Services:** Strengthen rural healthcare infrastructure by establishing one-stop centres or building the capacity of referral hospitals to provide care for SGBV survivors to ensure access to SGBV-related health services in underserved areas.
 - **Alignment:** *SDG 3 (Target 3.8)* promotes universal health coverage, and *Maputo Protocol (Article 14)* mandates equitable access to health services.



Ministry of Justice (MoJ):

- Establish explicit budget line for criminal court E per county and survivor support fund and provide incremental financial allotment
- Liberia National Police should establish an explicit budget line for WACPS per county.
 - **Alignment:** *CEDAW (General Recommendation 19, Para 24)* emphasizes adequate budget allocations for gender-specific interventions, while *UNSCR 1325 (Pillar 2: Prevention)* underlines addressing structural causes of violence through sustainable policies.

- **Specialized Courts:** Establish and operationalize additional Criminal Courts E in rural regions and allocate resources for judiciary training.
 - **Alignment:** *SDG 16 (Target 16.3)* emphasizes access to justice for all, and *UNSCR 1325 (Pillar 4: Justice)* calls for addressing impunity for sexual violence.
- **Survivor Support Fund:** Establish and sustain a survivor support fund to cover transportation and logistical needs for survivors seeking justice.
 - **Alignment:** *Beijing Platform for Action (Strategic Objective D.2)* recommends comprehensive support services, including financial aid for survivors.



Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MoFDP):

- **Gender-Responsive Budgeting:** Institutionalize practices for gender-responsive budgeting across all sectors.
 - **Alignment:** *CEDAW (Article 7)* requires states to integrate gender equality in public administration.
- **Oversight Mechanisms:** Develop systems to track budget execution specific to SGBV services and provide regular audits to ensure transparency.
 - **Alignment:** *SDG 16 (Target 16.6)* advocates for transparent and accountable governance.

3. Recommendations for County Governments



- **Budget Allocations for SGBV Services:**
 - Dedicate resources to safe homes, one-stop centres, and survivor support funds within county budgets to address local needs.
 - **Alignment:** *Maputo Protocol (Article 22)* calls for the decentralization of resources to ensure women's access to justice and essential services.
- **Strengthen Local Coordination:** Establish decentralized accountability mechanisms to monitor the use of allocated funds effectively.
 - **Alignment:** *UNSCR 1325 (Pillar 1: Participation)* encourages local-level engagement in governance for gender-sensitive outcomes.

4. Recommendations for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)



- **Advocacy for Budgetary Reform:** Mobilize public and political support for mandatory SGBV-specific budget lines in national and local governance.
 - **Alignment:** *Beijing Platform for Action (Strategic Objective 1.2)* encourages partnerships with civil society to promote gender-sensitive governance.
- **Transparency and Reporting:** Partner with government actors to track and report on SGBV-related budget allocations and expenditures.
 - **Alignment:** *CEDAW (Article 6)* emphasizes accountability mechanisms to prevent gender-based violence.

5. Recommendations for International Actors

- **Technical and Financial Support:**
 - Provide sector-specific funding and technical assistance for Liberia to meet its international obligations under CEDAW and UNSCR 1325.
 - **Alignment:** *UNSCR 1325 (Pillar 4: Justice)* and *CEDAW (Article 11)* call for international cooperation in supporting gender-sensitive policies.



- **Capacity Building:** Offer training to improve Liberia's ability to develop, monitor, and execute SGBV-specific budgets and programs.
 - **Alignment:** *Beijing Platform for Action (Strategic Objective A.4)* calls for strengthening institutional capacities to implement gender equality.
 - **Support to sustainable Funding Strategies:** It is necessary to create long-term funding plans that outline specific financial goals and strategies for sustaining SGBV services over the next decade.



PRODUCED BY

The Members of the Feminist Alliance to End SGBV in the Mano River Region /Liberian Chapter. The Zero Tolerance on SGBV consortium, including; Medica Mondiale Liberia, Adwanga and RYMI.

For more information:

Contact Medica Mondiale Liberia

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