WOMEN TRANSFORMING MONROVIA

An Urban Assessment from a Gender Perspective in Liberia

This report is part of the Cities for Women Global Programme and helps cities develop urban areas that are more gender-sensitive, inclusive, and responsive to everyone's needs, create frameworks of opportunities for the active participation of all.

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CITIES FOR WOMEN

Cities Alliance
Cities Without Slums

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"Women's issues are not prioritized. Usually, women have to take the streets and protest to make their voices heard."

Participant at Cities Alliance's workshop

The Cities for Women Programme

Cities Alliance envisions a world where all women and girls can live in inclusive and equitable cities and communities. The Cities for Women Global Programme works towards this goal, aiming to increase women's and girls' engagement in urban development and governance. Cities Alliance adopts a city-wide approach to women engagement and participation, focusing simultaneously on political participation, urban governance, spatial planning and public spaces, and economic equality. The Programme helps cities develop urban areas that are more gender-sensitive, inclusive, and responsive to everyone's needs, create frameworks of opportunities for the active participation of all, and include results frameworks and indicators to monitor gender equality. Cities Alliance aims to encourage a holistic, positive social transformation to improve the quality of life for marginalized and vulnerable populations in Greater Monrovia, Liberia, and to do this, it collaborated with Habitat for Humanity International, Women in Informal Employment Globalizing and Organizing, UN-Habitat and Shack/Slum Dweller International, and the Government of Liberia (GoL) on incorporating women's needs within the new City Development Strategy (CDS).
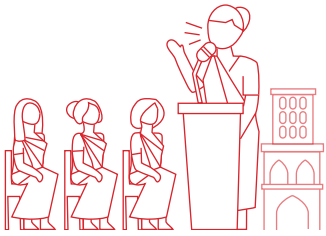

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Street view in Monrovia, Liberia
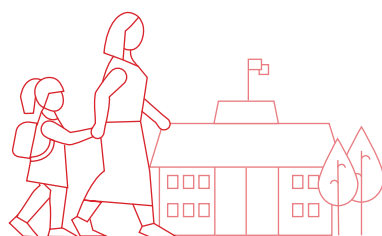
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CITY DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (CDS) PROCESS

At the invitation of Greater Monrovia Local Government Authorities (LGAs), Cities Alliance instituted the CDS in 2019 as a coherent strategy to articulate an overarching vision of urban development. The CDS outlines how people in Greater Monrovia can collaborate to strengthen the economy, build infrastructures, improve service delivery, promote equality, and engender an inclusive and resilient society that benefits most urban poor. The CDS assesses the region's status and determines where the region wants to be in 20 years, and then it devises a strategy consistent with how it will get there. For Greater Monrovia to adequately transition to relevant urbanization, the CDS' strategic planning focused on the five thematic areas: governance, citizenship, economy, service, and the environment. Subsequently, Cities Alliance actively engaged stakeholders for each thematic area to guide the strategic plan development.

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NEED TO ENGAGE WOMEN AND GIRLS

The CDS action-oriented process was sustained through a rigorous participation approach; however, to promote equitable growth and quality of life for all citizens in Greater Monrovia and the surrounding communities, there was a strong need to engage more women and girls in the process. Engaging women and girls aids in defining a CDS with a gender lens and will, in turn, strengthen sustainability. Historically, the role of women in most participatory processes has been limited. More pointedly, more women have experienced socio-cultural discrimination and low awareness about their rights because of low literacy.[1] Far beyond enhancing diversity, actively engaging women will help Greater Monrovia harness the potential of urbanization.

To strengthen women's voices and promote their relevant participation in the CDS process, Cities Alliance undertook a city-wide approach to engage women that included quantitative data collection coupled with a participatory qualitative dialogue in the form of a workshop. First, Cities Alliance conducted the Cities for Women Survey, an online survey targeting women and men between 18 and 65 years old who live in Greater Monrovia. The short survey did not consider cultural groups, religion, political beliefs or other cultural related practices. The survey's overarching objective was to understand women's liveability and how gender inclusive Greater Monrovia and its surrounding communities are. The survey results showed that most of the respondents were male, and close to half of the survey respondents were between 35 and 44 years old.

1   UNOG, Republic of Liberia, 'Women's Role in History', http://liberia-unog.ch/news_7.html

On 8 September 2020, Cities Alliance held a one-day workshop that was a participatory qualitative dialogue to underscore the quantitative survey results. During the workshop, 30 women from different organizations and institutions shared their views on a range of issues that women face in the city. The workshop was designed to encourage discussion and debate amongst the women, who then arrive at a general consensus on a rating for different characteristics of the situation women face in the city. Participants were asked to evaluate various aspects of women's lives in their cities, on a scale from 1 (critical) through 5 (almost satisfactory), to 9 (full), looking at questions relating to the preconditions, economic, political-institutional, and human and social capital aspects of their lives.

After conducting the survey and holding the workshop, the next step in this process is for Cities Alliance to coordinate the construction of 15 water kiosks in two informal communities throughout Greater Monrovia. This construction will be conducted in the next three months. The goal of the construction is to have women manage these water kiosks, which would be a shift to a more gender-strengthened management model. In conjunction with the design and construction of the water kiosks, Cities Alliance will hold direct involvement settlements forums and women's focus groups. These forums and focus groups seek to make gender the critical component of the initiative and to empower young women to take on leading roles in the water committees so that water gathering no longer is a time drain and burden to them, thereby freeing up their time for more constructive activities.

Seventy-four percent of all female workers in Liberia are informal laborers

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WOMEN IN LIBERIA: LOST IN TRANSITION

"Community members, especially men, should be educated on the zero tolerance of abuse of women and girls."

Participant at Cities Alliance's workshop

The influence of women in Liberia led Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to become elected as President of Liberia, gaining notoriety as Africa's first female President. Women also influenced the establishment of such organizations as the Women Development Association of Liberia (WODAL) to foster women's leadership. Despite these advances in women in leadership, Liberia's historical and socio-cultural context has still limited women's perceived role to reproductive and domestic capacities.[2] In addition to women's limited decision-making power, their multiple domestic roles constrain their participation in more profitable sectors and hamper their economic empowerment opportunities. These situations are the catalysts for increased poverty amongst women in informal settlements in Greater Monrovia.

2   Ministry of Gender and Development, *Liberia Gender Policy,* Liberia, 2009. http://extwprlegs1.fao.org/docs/ pdf/lbr167565.pdf

Gender Timeline and Specific Milestones

HISTORICAL MOMENTS	EMPHASIS ON GENDER	KEY ACTORS
1989 – 1996 and 1999 – 2003 Liberia suffered two devastating civil wars that led to thousands dead.	On the Gender Inequality Index, Liberia ranked 154 out of 159 countries	Numerous warring factions
2005 Liberia's Ellen Johnson Sirleaf became the first elected female head of state in Africa.	Women leadership displayed on the international stage	Voters
2016 The Affirmative Action Bill was a step in the right direction towards guaranteeing the participation of women and other marginalized members of the population in shaping the country's progress.[3]	Signalled a boost for gender equality	Liberian House of Representatives
2017 To reduce gender bias and limitations to women's inclusion at all levels, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)/Liberia regarded gender as a crosscutting theme and integrated gender issues across its entire portfolio.	Reduction in gender bias	USAID

GREATER MONROVIA: FAST URBAN GROWTH AND SHRINKING RESOURCES

In the last decade, Greater Monrovia and its surrounding communities have experienced enormous challenges related to infrastructure, space, resources, service delivery, and gender equality. A major contributing factor perpetuating these constraints is the rural-to-urban migration during Liberia's civil unrest and displaced citizens' failure to return to rural areas once peace was restored. It is projected that in the next ten years, the current 2.1 million citizens living in Greater Monrovia will double.[4] Today, rapid urbanization in Greater Monrovia and surrounding communities are visible in informal settlements and slums, where more than 70 per cent of the 2.1 million citizens live. This overwhelming population growth in Greater Monrovia has introduced various unintended consequences. Scarcity of resources, poor health, environmental degradation, poor education, limited space, the high unemployment rate for youth and women, and poor infrastructure are all pervasive issues in Greater Monrovia.[5]

3   United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 'Signaling a boost for gender equality, Liberia passes the 'Affirmative Action Bill'', UN Women, 4th October 2016, https://www.bignewsnetwork.com/news/248220153/signaling-a-boost-for-gender-equality-liberia-passes-the-affirmative-action-bill

4   Cities Alliance, 'The Liberia Country Programmes' https://www.citiesalliance.org/sites/default/files/12.%20Liberia%20Country%20Programme_ENG.pdf

5   Ngafuan, Fatorma, Richard, 'The Overcrowding of Monrovia and its link to Rural-Urban Migration in Liberia: Causes, Consequences, and Solutions', The Perspective, Atlanta, Georgia, June 14, 2010, http://www.theperspective.org/2010/0614201001.html

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Approximately 500,000 girls and women make a living as marketers in Liberia

For Greater Monrovia and its surrounding communities, lack of access to finance, the absence of formal education, and other structural issues have led to 90 per cent of women engaging in vulnerable employment.[6] Other deplorable conditions that are part of the urban fabric in Greater Monrovia are the absence of adequate sanitation facilities and unmanaged garbage dump sites prevalent in most slum communities. Given the overcrowding of the urban areas, these two conditions are slowing down development, posing problems for municipal authorities to manage solid waste properly, and providing breeding grounds for mosquitoes and other parasites that are the source of malaria and other diseases.

"Men have more access to land rights as compared to us. In cases of family inheritance, men also dominate women. There is a new women's land right law, but it has not been implemented, there is no awareness of this law."

Participant at Cities Alliance's workshop

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6   The World Bank, 'Liberia Gov Constraints to Service Delivery – Solid Waste Management' , Report No: AUS0000991, The World Bank, Washington DC, 21 June 2019, http://documents1.worldbank. org/curated/ pt/300041561448634609/pdf/Liberia-Gov-Constraints-to-Service-Delivery-Solid-Waste- Management.pdf

WHOSE CITY? SURVEY AND WORKSHOP RESULTS

The overall consensus from Cities Alliances' survey and workshop was that the Greater Monrovia area is intolerant to women. Factors necessary to improve their living conditions and empower them (such as trust and transparency, economic independence, physical security, financial safety, health safety, and ethnic tolerance) are at a critical level. A critical issue confronting women in Greater Monrovia is their inability to adequately improve their living conditions related to the high cost of living and providing basic meals for themselves. However, participants agreed there is a favourable trend in terms of access and availability to technology for women in Greater Monrovia. Despite the high cost of the internet, most women can browse freely and gain access to the internet.

Another concern is the unsatisfactory mobility in the metropolitan area for women, given that there are no cycling infrastructures, quality sidewalks, transport infrastructure, and a lack of car ownership. According to the majority of the survey respondents, lack of trust and confidence in public authorities is critical, given the unprecedented level of corruption and lack of transparency in transitional justice mechanisms.

In Greater Monrovia, abject poverty is one of the significant issues that has exacerbated women's plight, as was revealed in the stakeholder's workshop. For example, the stakeholder's workshop's analysis showed that over 80 per cent of women living in Greater Monrovia earn below the average national income compared to their male counterparts. A startling unintended consequence of women's limited opportunity is the unprecedented high rate of out-of-school children in Greater Monrovia. Given that most women are self-employed within informal sectors, this situation significantly translates into sending their school-aged children to serve as "street vendors" to augment their economic viability.

The discussions at the workshop revealed that most Greater Monrovia women single-handedly manage their children's future without financial assistance from the fathers or the national government. What is needed is a rigorous and comprehensive plan

"Abuse within a family is often not reported because women are afraid to ruin their family's reputation. The protective services are available, but they are expensive and difficult to access. Sometimes police officers don't have transportation means to travel and arrest the culprit or just a pen and sheet to register the complaint. We lack the basic means."

Participant at Cities Alliance's workshop

Cities Alliance's participatory workshop

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designed to promote universal public education, in addition to incentivizing Greater Monrovia's women's efforts in sending their children to school.

Generally, it is harder for women to pursue business opportunities than men for various reasons. The first being cultural expectations. Women are expected to prioritize taking care of the home and the family before anything else, which makes it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to seek formal employment or business opportunities. The only way to do this is to start changing minds, attitudes, and behaviours around these ideologies. The group recommended behaviour change through active engagement, dialogue and interpersonal communication activities.

Participants also noted that the city limits women in terms of business developments, such as the following: the city is unsatisfactorily positioned to accommodate women with their businesses; there is substantial time duration to access finance; and there is a lack of business incubation services, support, and incentives. Access to capital is a key challenge for women. Usually, to gain significant capital, one must present collateral, which is most commonly real property. Typically, women do not own real property in their name or have any other tangible assets that they can use to obtain financing. Without capital starting a formal business is difficult, so most women engage in businesses in the informal sector. The groups recommended that financing programmes are created that allow women equitable access to financing.

An overwhelming majority of the survey respondents noted the unsatisfactory access to training opportunities and the training system for women, which contributes to women's inferior education opportunities in Greater Monrovia. Some people stressed the importance of having women's employment and entrepreneurship policies, direct involvement of women in the political decision-making process and engagement mechanisms, and public policy to enhance women's participation.

Women's participation is low across the government, local leaderships, private sector and civil society. According to the survey results, the assessment of gender-related policies directed towards women was also considered a critical issue reported by most of the study participants. In the group discussions, the lack of good advocacy was identified as one of the key reasons. Women's groups were described as reactive and not proactive, which means that the requisite groundwork is not being done to champion women's causes. The group recommended that the capacity of women's groups is strengthened so that the groups are more effective.

RECLAIMING URBAN PLANNING

Recommendation: An enabling and transparent policy-making area, one that is inclusive of gender perspectives, is the necessary first step towards building an inclusive society where women can be empowered.

One of the significant contributing factors limiting the effectiveness of most poverty reduction strategies and empowering approaches for women in Greater Monrovia is the city's intolerant nature, as discovered in the survey and workshop findings. Indeed, the civil unrest's untended consequences over the last two decades hinder women's mobility. An enabling and transparent policy-making area, one that is inclusive of gender perspectives, is the necessary first step towards building an inclusive society where women can be empowered. Embracing gender analysis and gender mainstreaming to promote all policies and programmes ensures that all women benefit from increased economic opportunities. It is equally essential to develop accelerated incentive frameworks to improve poor women's and men's earning potential for enhanced productivity and output in Greater Monrovia.

Recommendation: Slums and informal settlements must be upgraded and rehabilitated, ensuring women's effective participation.

The CDS can efficiently empower women and address gender inequalities in Greater Monrovia Metropolitan areas in the long-run through a vision consistent with how people in Greater Monrovia can collaborate to strengthen the economy, build infrastructures, improve service delivery, promote equality, and engender an inclusive and resilient society. For Greater Monrovia to adequately transition to urbanization where women have equal rights compared to their male counterparts, providing security of tenure to women and their families living in slums must be a priority. Slums and informal settlements must be upgraded and rehabilitated, ensuring women's effective participation. However, a key constraint to development, as identified by stakeholders, is the urban and territorial disparities within and amongst the LGAs. In most instances, this orientation has hindered investment and municipal cooperation, along with threatening governance. The CDS guiding principles must solicit interactions and collaborations with the public and private sector and women groups for a more equitable acquisition and ownership of land. Moreover, training in various skills, sharing information, creating employment and raising incomes for women should be discussed directly with the stakeholders in Greater Monrovia, particularly the cities of Monrovia, Paynesville and the surrounding LGAs.

Priorities for a more gender-inclusive Greater Monrovia Area[7]

ACCESS

- ✔ Acknowledge the right to secure tenure and adequate housing
- ✔ Joint tenure for urban men and women in civil, customary and consensual unions
- ✔ Participatory slums upgrading
- ✔ Gender-sensitive registration/titling of property
- ✔ Gendered assessments of land registration

- ✔ Supply of well-located and affordable serviced plots
- ✔ Support to home owners' associations/cooperatives, titling in women's names, collective titling, support for appropriate savings mechanisms
- ✔ Protect and regulate the use of public spaces

Spatial Inclusion:
improve access to land, properties, and basic services for women

Social Inclusion:
improve women's ability to make decisions in a collective manner towards the improvement of people's quality of life

Economic Inclusion:
enhance equal access to and control over productive resources and access to decent work

RIGHTS AND LAWS

- ✔ Support civil society organisations, especially women's and grass roots organisations, to raise women's awareness of their rights
- ✔ Awareness raising forums and local media campaigns targeting also men
- ✔ Trainings and capacity building on gender-equality for community leaders
- ✔ Engage regularly women's groups in negotiations, city planning
- ✔ Gender-based violence prevention: awareness, services and support
- ✔ Affordable or free legal aid to poor women

OPPORTUNITIES

- ✔ Social protection and legal protection to the informal workforce
- ✔ Create more (formal) jobs through labour-intensive growth
- ✔ Investment in human capital - health and education
- ✔ Identifying women's needs during periods of crisis (community-based data, qualitative)
- ✔ Targeted advocacy for equal allocation of employment opportunities for men and women
- ✔ Support women's saving groups as platforms for table banking, increase savings and provide access to cheap credit

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7   The infographics was inspired by the following World Bank paper: The World Bank, 'Inclusive Cities Approach Paper', Report No: AUS8539, The World Bank, Washington DC, May 2015, http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/pt/402451468169453117/pdf/AUS8539-REVISED-WP-P148654-PUBLIC-Box393236B-Inclusive-Cities-Approach-Paper-w-Annexes-final.pdf

Women Engagement in City Profile

SAFETY (SCALE OF ENGAGEMENT 1: CRITICAL)   **1** 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Q: How does one assess safety issues for women in this city?

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT
(SCALE OF ENGAGEMENT 4: UNSATISFACTORY)   1 2 3 **4** 5 6 7 8 9

Q: How is the city as a place for women to have their own business assessed?

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES
(SCALE OF ENGAGEMENT 3: HIGHLY UNSATISFACTORY)   1 2 **3** 4 5 6 7 8 9

Q: How are funding opportunities for women assessed?

TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES (SCALE OF ENGAGEMENT 2: BAD)   1 **2** 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Q: How are the training opportunities or the training system for women assessed?

EMPLOYMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP POLICIES
(SCALE OF ENGAGEMENT 1: CRITICAL)   **1** 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Q: How are women's employment and entrepreneurship policies assessed in this city?

POLITICAL DECISION-MAKING PROCESS
(SCALE OF ENGAGEMENT 1: CRITICAL)   **1** 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Q: How is women's direct involvement in the political decision-making process assessed in this city?

DEMOCRATIC VITALITY
(SCALE OF ENGAGEMENT 4: UNSATISFACTORY)   1 2 3 **4** 5 6 7 8 9

Q: How is the democratic vitality in this urban area assessed?

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES (SCALE OF ENGAGEMENT 2: BAD)   1 **2** 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Q: How are the permeability of governance structures to women and their needs and ideas assessed?

CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT (SCALE OF ENGAGEMENT 1: CRITICAL)   **1** 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Q: How are citizen engagement mechanisms or public policy aimed at enhancing women's participation assessed in this city?

SCALE OF ENGAGEMENT

1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**
Critical	Bad	Highly Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Almost Satisfactory	Satisfactory	More Than Satisfactory	Highly Satisfactory	Full

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