

I. Introduction

Throughout history civil wars and regional conflicts due to factors like racial, religious, and/ or ethnic tensions have left communities devastated. The result is that the civilian populations are victimized on a massive scale. Although more men than women continue to die due to the conflicts, woman and girls suffer innumerable consequences of war, “according to a 2002 report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, women and children are disproportionately targets and constitute the majority of all victims of contemporary armed conflicts” (as cited in Marsh & Ward, 2006, p.3). The war in Liberia unleashed child soldiers and inflicted horrific violence on the civilian population. During the many years of war and civil strife rebel groups and government soldiers terrorized the region of Liberia. Women and girls were subjected to physical and sexual violence, including rape, gang rape, attempted rape, sexual coercion, domestic violence, and torture. The Liberia Demographic Health Survey (2007) states that 44% of women have experienced physical violence since they were 15 years old, also 10% of Liberian women aged 15-49 who have ever had sexual intercourse say that their first sexual experience was forced against them (as cited in Piah, 2009). This essay explains how women were victimized in war, and how sexual violence was used as a weapon of war. The essay also seeks to explain the consequences of sexual violence against women, and how it impacts their daily lives. This paper aims to give women the right to be heard.

II. Justification

I chose the interdisciplinary approach because this problem is an unresolved societal issue and because it negatively impacts the economic and social development of women and the

society. I also chose this approach because in order to explain this problem broadly the use of more than one discipline will create a deeper understanding of the problem. In Liberia as well as other war zones sexual acts of violence, as well as other forms of violence were used to violate a person's mental, physical, emotional, economic, and psychological state. Disciplines most focused in this essay are: health; to highlight the psychical consequences of sexual violence, psychology; to explain the mental side effects of war, politics; addressing how the government and those in position of power handle the issue of sexual violence, gender studies; addressing the issues of gender inequality, discrimination, masculinity, and male dominance, also economics; showing how a woman's economic status was impacted negatively. These disciplines will include their own perspectives, insights, and methods to add to a more meaningful understanding of the issue.

III. Context: definition, women, war, sexual violence

Definition

Sexual violence is a common form of war torture practiced in nearly all the war affected communities. The occurrence of sexual violence among women varies among the African countries. According to The Isis- Women's International (2011), South Sudan has the lowest rate with only 2.2% of women having suffered from sexual violence and Liberia has the highest rate with 65.5% having suffered from sexual violence. The use of sexual violence and how it harms the individual varies and can be defined with different approaches including the physical explanation and health effects, sexual violence as a tool of war, and the use of sexual violence to obtain power and resources.

The Isis- Women's International (2011), defines sexual violence by looking at the physical definition and health concern especially the aftermath of sexual violence. It is stated that the nature of sexual violence takes on many forms including: "single episodes of rape, gang rape, attempted rape, forced rape, forced marriage, abduction with sex, defilement, incest, and forceful insertion of objects into the vagina, sexual comforting and witnessing the rape of others" (Isis-Women's International, 2011, p.2). Sexual violence can also be described as violence against the organs, and physical sexual assaults. The definition goes on to explain sexual violence as subjecting the victim involuntary to sexual acts that lead to psychological pain, whether or not these acts were committed with psychical harm. It is stated that victims because of war related sexual violence can be subjected to long term reproductive health and psychological consequences.

The use of sexual violence

Arieff (2009) claims sexual violence involves "breakdown in the rule of law, social systems, and discipline within combat groups" (p. 7). She also states that sexual violence can be referred to as the "collateral damage" of fighting; it is the result to an increase in internal conflicts acted out in whole or in part by irregular forces. She expresses that sexual violence may be random in some cases, but it is most likely used to advance the strategic aims of the perpetrator, this means that it is "systematically employed for a variety of purposes, including intimidation, humiliation, political terror, extracting information, rewarding soldiers, and ethnic cleanings" (Arieff, 2009, p.7). Research by Arieff (2009) and The Isis-Women's International, (2011) affirms that mental sexual assault also includes humiliation and intimidation by using sexual threats and witnessing others being sexually tortured. Also according Arieff (2009) and

The Isis-Women's International (2011), sexual violence has allegedly been used by one or more conflict contributors as a tool of war. As a Congolese social worker from The Isis- Women's International (2011) explained, "rape is a cheap simple weapon for all parties in the war, more easily obtainable than bullets and bombs. This violence is designed to exterminate the population" (p. 1)

Sexual violence can also be used as a way of gaining power, and being sexually coerced into these relationships because of the conditions of war. Munula (2007) explains that the rape of women in war can be seen as an act of aggression committed against a nation or a community, this type of sexual violence continues to be practiced in post conflict communities as a way for the perpetrator to reinforce or reassert the lost power or glory he once had. Swiss et al. (1998), states that there are several types of sexual coercive relationships that people were forced into because of war. Sexual coercion can be defined as "being forced into a sexual relationship with a soldier or fighter because of wartime conditions to feed oneself or ones family, to get shelter or clothing, or for protection and safety" (Swiss et al. 1998, p.625).

Aning (1998) agrees with all these different approaches on sexual violence and concludes,

"women were more systematically exploited and their rights violated, rape was specifically elevated to a central position in its intimidation tactics, and exercised as a tool of coercion and terrorism, the formalized use of rape as a weapon of control and abuse by the Soldiers" (p.50).

A woman's war.

In every modern war women and children are the civilians who suffer and are most brutalized during war. Jones (2008) explains that today civilians make up most of the casualties

of war. Many conflicts in Africa have noted a great amount of civilians being “displaced, exiled, assaulted, tortured, wounded, maimed, killed, or disappeared” (para.10). In many West African wars civilians have become the targets.

Foday Sankoh Warlord in Sierra Leone, and President Charles Taylor of Liberia used their forces to destroy whole villages, killing most of the residents, taking away the children to serve as soldiers, and taking the women to serve as cooks or wives. Jones reports that, women and children were the ones mostly likely to be killed or abducted. Jones also states that “the war against women in west Africa and elsewhere is different from other wars; whether driven by ideology, politics, greed, or personal ambition, in that every faction, every side, makes war on women” (para.30). Arieff (2009) agrees by stating that active conflicts in Africa have been mentioned by human rights organizations, humanitarian groups, U.N. agencies, U.S. government agencies, and other trustworthy sources that have all stated sexual violence in Africa is widespread or systematic.

Research by (Arieff, 2009; Jones 2008; The Isis-Women’s International, 2011) agree that sexual violence has been reported as a major feature of several active conflicts in Africa and it is of enormous proportions. The countries they mentioned that suffer from war related sexual violence are, Democratic Republic of Congo with an estimated 200,00 women being survivors of rape, Rwanda, during the 1994 genocide with 500,000 who were victims of rape, also Somalia, Nigeria, Darfur region of Sudan, Chad, Uganda, and Liberia. Jones (2008) adds to this by saying women and girls in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Corte d’Ivoire have had many kinds of horrors inflicted on them because they are female. For example If a female is of a particular ethnic group or religion there is a kind of gender cleansing and mass femicide (the Killing of women) that takes place, also women are often raped and tortured due to their political affiliation which allies

them with the opposition. In addition, women would also be raped so brutally with materials like sticks, knives, burning coal that it ended their lives. Research by The Amnesty Report, reports that,

“The more recent and thorough ongoing report by Human Rights Watch records the rape of children as young as three years-old. During the civil war, women and girls were seized in their village homes or at military roadblocks, or were discovered hiding in the bush. Some were raped in public. Some were raped in front of their husbands and children. Some were forced to witness the murder of husbands or parents. Then they were taken away to soldiers' camps to be held along with many other women. They were forced to cook for the soldiers during the day and every night they were gang-raped, in some cases by 30 to 40 men. They were also beaten and tortured. They saw women who resisted being beaten or killed by a simple slicing of the throat” (as cited in Jones, 2008, para.15)

War on Liberian women

Liberia has gone through a 14 year civil war in which people were subjected to the most debased and malicious acts imaginable. Many different organizations according to their research and findings have reported different statistical percentages to the number of Liberian women who have suffered physical violence in the time of war. The percentage from the World Health Organization (WHO) study that took place in 2005 reported the finding of an estimated 90% of Liberian women had experienced physical or sexual violence; and that three out of four had been raped (as cited in Jones, 2008, para.19). The findings from a United Nations Development Programme/ World Vision Survey(2004), stated an estimated 40% of the countries women were subjected to sexual violence a number lower than the finding of WHO, they did indeed also state

that other estimates suggest the figure to be higher (as cited in Ford,2012, para.3). Munala's (2007) research drew from the interviews by community members who suggested that around two thirds or 66% of all women and girls experienced some form of sexual and gender based violence. According to the Human Rights Watch, "cases of sexual violence abuse may be significantly underreported by women, because of the possibility of reprisals by perpetrators, ostracism by families, and communities, and cultural taboos"(as cited in Jones, 2008, para.18). Jones (2008) has the same opinion as Human Rights Watch by stating that rape and child rape still occur nonstop, it is hard to tell exactly how high this number is because raped women and girls are too embarrassed by the crime to report it. Jones (2008) states "in war time it was somewhat easier to report because they had so clearly been forced by armed men; with the war over, rape once again becomes a women's own fault" (para.18).

IV. Effects

Consequence of sexual violence.

According to the World Bank gender based violence is the leading cause of death and bad health in women ages 15 to 44 years of age in Africa, the World Bank states that it is a bigger cause of bad health than malaria and traffic accidents combined (As cited in Isis Women's International, 2011, p.3).

The armed conflict in Liberia seriously destroyed the population's ability to rehabilitate their livelihoods. In addition to current conflicts, counties that are transitioning from conflicts in which sexual violence was so prevalent still experience a continuation of high levels of sexual violence. Arieff (2009) states, "this is potentially due to the shifts in social norms and the weakening of rule of law during conflicts, as well as the reintegration of former combats into society" (p.6). in Africa high levels of sexual violence are reported in post conflict situations not

only in Liberia but also in other African nations like Burundi, Cote d' Ivoire, and Sierra Leone among others. While the war in Liberia officially ended in 2003, the war on women continued.

Health consequences

Sexual violence against women can damage the health and wellbeing of women. (The World Health Organization [WHO], 2012), states that women who suffer from sexual violence have poorer health in the long term than women who have not been affected by such violence. According to WHO (2012) the physical health consequences include injuries, chronic pain syndrome, gastrointestinal disorders, and disabilities. It can also lead to unplanned pregnancies, gynecological problems, and induced abortions. According to Isis- Women's International (2011) health concerns also include urinary tract infection, Sexually transmitted diseases, Pelvic inflammatory disease, infertility, precancerous, and or cancerous tumors. The reproductive health consequences can include pain in the external and internal genitalia, menstrual disturbance, urination and defecation problems, sexual problems, and rectal and vaginal fistulae. Violence against women also increases the likelihood of being infected with HIV/AIDS. The Amnesty Report states, that "some women still find it hard to sit down, or stand up, even walk; Women still spit out blood, and have lost their eye sight and memory, no one knows how many of them died, or are dying, as a result" (as cited in Jones, 2008, para.17.)

Psychological consequences.

Isis- Women's International (2011) observed psychological complications as the most severe, long lasting, and invisible consequences of war sexual violence; "these can range from the immediate aftereffects of sexual violence which include acute stress reactions, and adjustment disorders to the longer lasting post-traumatic stress disorders" (Isis Women's

International, 2011. p.2). Psychological consequences can lead to depression, substance abuse, suicide, conversion dissociative disorders, and anxiety disorders. Women suffering from psychological consequences of war related sexual violence can also develop an altered self-image and view of the world.

Economic development

Violence against women seriously effects economic development. Isis- Women's International (2011) states that, "the long term implications of violations of women's bodily integrity increases their vulnerability and exposes them to social and economic hardships" (p.3). Some economic hardships women endure observed by the Isis Women's International were reported that their gynecological problems are interfering with their ability to work. In Liberia the study showed "69% of the women suffering from psychological distress reported that the psychological symptoms were hindering their ability to work" (Isis Women's International, 2011, p.3). Violence is not only a threat to a women's health and well-being, but also an obstacle to the economic development of families and communities. Economic cost of violence against women is significant, to survivors, to their family members, and to their communities. Survivors of sexual violence frequently struggle on the job due to trauma, ongoing fear, physical complications, depression and anxiety, also the need for time off for court dates, counseling, and health care. For many victims, it may be difficult to find or keep a job, which significantly increases their risk for poverty.

Gupta (2009) states, "economic empowerment, by economically empowering women, we can increase their status with the household and the community and decrease their chances of suffering violence" (p.4). These factors need to be examined along with implementing

preventative strategies will help with the process of reduction in violence. Economically empowering women means that you are giving them an opportunity where there is none and strengthening their contributions to their nation. Economically empowering women and giving her that independence gives her the strength to discuss about her protection or leave a violent relationship

Displacement

Liberian survivors of rape and sexual assault were also forced to flee their homes. Swiss et al. (1998) “states that almost half of Liberia’s 2.5 million population was forced to flee their homes at least once during the war” (p. 625). Liberia today has the largest percentage of refugees and internally displaced people of any country in the world. Jones (2008) states that by the time the war ended in 2002 1.4 million Liberians had been displaced within the country; nearly a million others had fled the country of three million people one in three citizens fled (par.21).

The process of return and reintegration of (internally Displaced Person [IDP]) began in November 2004 during the completion of the Disarmament and Demobilization process. Though improvement in security the IDPs were finally able to return to a normal life after 14 years of civil war. According to (United Nations Mission in Liberia [UNMIL]) “the return and resettlement process was completed within 18 months, faster than originally planned”. Returning IDPs still deal with the risk of human rights violations, “Particularly teenage mothers, children, and young girls” (as cited in Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre [IDMC], 2007). Gender based violence is still widespread, mainly due to a culture of impunity for sexual violence, and a judicial system that is still ineffective. Refugees that fled to neighboring counties were still not free from sexual violence; a study by the (International Criminal Court [ICC], 2003) found that

“among refugees in Sierra Leone 75% of women had been sexually violated before they fled their country; after they fled, 55% were sexually assaulted again (as cited in Jones, 2008, para.21.). Also for IDPs there is a lack of basic services and infrastructure in the key areas of return. According IDMC (2007), “Lofa County which was once home to many of Liberia’s IDPs, was almost entirely devastated in the war. Almost two thirds of communities in Liberia do not have adequate shelter”. Many homeless persons are on the street to escape previous sexual abuse, causing them to be vulnerable to further victimization. Victimization can prolong homelessness by creating further physical and psychological difficulties. Many other factors affect IDPs including the disruption of the agricultural systems due to the displacement of farming communities, no access to food because there is a lack of market mechanism, high unemployment, lack of economic opportunities, socio-economic dislocation, and the breakdown of family and community coping mechanisms (IDMC, 2007). To sustain peace and stability to ensure long term success of reintegration it will depend on the development of possible economic opportunities in the IDP communities.

V. Post war rape

War is not over when it's over

(Jones 2008) and (Munala 2007) agree on the reality that there still appears to be a high number of incidents of post war rape and domestic violence. When the conflict in Liberia ended violence against women continues and actually grew stronger. In west Africa and so many other places where rape was used a weapon of war; it now has become a consistent practice carried out effortlessly into the post conflict era. Jones expresses, “when men stop attacking one another, women continue to be convenient targets” (para.12). In Liberia where you once found a normal

structure of law enforcement and justice, it has now been destroyed by war. Male soldiers and civilians now have the opportunity to prey upon women and children with impunity and they do. Munala (2007) states, “this can be traced to the culture of impunity and acquiescence in a society which views rape of women as ‘no big deal’” (p.1.) Also in Liberian culture it can sometimes be considered normal for intimate partner relations to be characterized by violence.

For women in Liberia war is not over when it’s over. According to Jones (2008) , “ over half the women interviewed in two Liberian counties, including the capital city Monrovia, had survived at least one violent physical attack during an 18-month period in 2006-2007, years after the conflict had ended. Well over half the women reported at least one violent sexual assault in the same period” (para.22.). the (Center for Disease Control and Prevention[CDC]) and the (UN Fund for Population Activities [UNFPA]) Surveyed women in Lofa County, and reported that, “more than 98 % said that, during his war (1999-2003), they lost their homes; more than 90%, their livelihoods; more than 72%, at least one family member, nearly 90% survived one violent physical assault, more than half at least one violent sexual assault” (as cited in Jones, 2008, para 25.)

Sexual exploitation

It is not only ex combats and civilians committing these acts. Munala (2007) calls out the humanitarian workers, teacher, and others in positions of authority of being guilty of sexual exploitation. Arieff (2009) also condemns the security forces in post conflict situations for being perpetrators of sexual violence in several African counties including Liberia. An example of these human rights violation can be found in the Liberia education systems. Girls trade off their bodies to the teachers in replacement of high grade marks. This can be found in elementary

schools and university colleges. (Jones 2008) and (Munala 2007) both criticize some international peacekeepers that have joined in the war against women in this post conflict era. The large military peacekeeping operations according to Munala (2007) create an opening for sexual exploitation and harassment of women to take place. Human Rights Watch and other organizations have documented cases of rape by peacekeeping soldiers in West Africa, but none have been prosecuted. Perpetrators are just simply relocated to a new post; Human rights watch also reports the prevalent practice among peacekeepers of using young girls who have turned to prostitution to survive.

Masculinity

Munala's (2007) explanation for the return of violence in post conflict situations takes on a feminist point of view arguing that the armies of men are drilled into accepting the values of aggressive masculinity. She states that, "oppression and dominance over all, including women is implicitly or explicitly part of their training" (p.2) she goes on to say that only this can explain why forces who are supposed to be keeping the peace and protecting the population instead to the fullest extent sexually abuse women; "military misogyny has often taken precedence over the protection role that soldiers are supposed to perform" (Munala, 2007, p.2) Also ex combats, civilians, others in positions of authority may also follow the model of masculinity. The easiest way for them to gain back power they have lost during the war is through exerting control over their women through sexual and physical violence.

VI. Recommendations

Accountability and Justice

Some do not blame masculinity, dominance, or power as the reasons for a return to violence but Ackerman (2009) explains it is due to a lack of justice and accountability. No man responsible for the crimes listed above has ever been brought to justice. The Liberian government has made no attempt to prosecute suspected perpetrators of violence against women or any other human rights abuse. According to Ackerman (2009), “to move forward with actual prosecutions or provide reparations to victims would require a go-ahead from the government” (p.87), it is challenging for the Liberian government to move forward in addressing the issue of injustice because many of the members of Liberia’s Parliament are also suspected of perpetrating human rights violations themselves. Some of the members of the government also have ties to former president Charles Taylor. Some members of the government are not too thrilled to bring their colleagues to justice.

There is still the issue of gender inequality in the Liberian justice system; President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf attempted to act on this by changing the inscription on the front of Liberia’s Supreme Court from “Let justice be done to all men”, to Let justice be done to all”. This was a big step toward gender equality but, “the problem now is how to move from superficial change to a system that consistently and systematically addresses injustice” (Ackerman, 2009, p.88.)

The lack of resources and expertise is also hindering the Liberian Government from moving forward to addressing the issue of injustice. Many survivors of sexual violence find it impossible to access justice. The Judicial system has collapsed. The staffs in those courts are poorly trained, and there is a lack of detention facilities to hold convicted perpetrators leading to their immediate release back into the community. According to the Liberian national police, “780 rape and gender based sexual violence cases were reported to its special protection unit for

women and children in 2008, but fewer than a quarter were pursued in court”(Ackerman, 2009, p.88). The Liberian government has to bring reform to their justice system.

Every perpetrator of sexual war crimes needs to be held accountable even those perpetrators who are part of the government or hold high positions of power. Liberia needs to tackle the issue of gender inequality and work to bring substantial justice to women and men alike. There is also a need for sufficient resources, stable infrastructure, and highly trained professionals to combat this issue. There is also the issue of corruption. There is corruption in the government, corruption in the police force, and corruption in the justice system. Corruption goes along with the issues of fairness and accountability. Liberia needs to halt corruption first hand to ensure that justice is fair and free. Until Liberia tackles judicial reform, security for all will be a faraway dream.

Security

Liberia looks at security solely as the physical security of the state, and aids its army before providing to the people shelter, housing, food, and civil services. Liberia also faces the issue of getting communities to regain trust of the police and the military after a brutal war where those in power were the main perpetrators. Women and children do not report sexual crimes to the police in fear that the police man himself may have assaulted a woman during the war. Liberia needs to educate their police force, also holding those police men responsible for war crimes accountable. To change the way civilians view the security sector is only helpful if the government shift their focus from military development to ensure security; but focus on things like jobs, education, food, shelter, also the necessary resources and infrastructure for the police force to do their job.

Ex female combats

Girl soldiers are not recognized in their communities as combatants because they did not carry guns. But they did other things like serving their commanders as sex slaves, cooks, and messengers, and those who did carry guns were forced to hand them over to their commanders. Girl soldiers have a huge burden; they are discriminated against in society for being female and subjected to sexual violence. This in effects pushes the female ex- combatants to rejoin the fighting forces to escape the problems of poverty, discrimination, and violence. According to Ackerman (2009) Female ex- combatants are twice as likely to rejoin fighting then men. These women are willing to take up arms again to feed their families, and gain acceptance in their community or tribe. The ex- combatants will join forces for a variety of reasons for example to avenge rape, protect themselves, find ways to end poverty, and achieve greater equality with men. Liberia needs to give these women another way out instead of a return to violence. Access to money, counseling, and skills training should be provided just like their male counterparts received. Women need to also reap the benefits such as, access to resources, education, and shelter.

The Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) initiative was expanded to make it easier for female fighters to take part. Harsch (2005) states, “out of the total of 103,000 combatants who completed formal demobilization by the time it ended in December 2004, nearly 22,500- 22 per cent- were women (p.17). Women were eligible for reintegration benefits after completing the demobilization process. Harsch (2005) states, “10,000 women-ex combatants had signed up for various types of vocational training, while another 6,500 were going to school (p.17).

Liberia needs to tackle the prevailing subject of gender inequality that drives many women to violence to gain equal rights. According to Swiss et al. (1998), “violence against women is the extreme end of a sliding scale of discrimination and prejudice against women, and must be addressed as a priority by government if we are to receive a just world”(p.625).

Education

Education is key to a successful nation. Health education services are virtually nonexistent in the region; also there is a lack of training on how to respond to incidents of sexual violence in police stations that also lack specialized women and children units. Many women have expressed their interest in improving their communication and networking skills to better their livelihood as well as assisting in times of need. The country also needs trained psychologist, psychiatrist, and counselors to provide therapeutic assistance to survivors of violence. WHO (2012) suggests that school based programs can help to prevent violence against women. Programs like these can address gender norms and equality early in life, before stereotypes develop. School based programs not just for children but also for adult men and women, can help educate people on how to reduce violence, change social and cultural norms, and through education raise awareness and intervention on the issue of sexual violence. WHO (2012) also recommends programs that train people in healthy relationships and negotiation skills, which can also prevent violence against women.

As Munala (2007) states, “men should not be regarded as obstacles to women’s empowerment and gender equality” (p.2). More research should be done on understanding the causes of men’s violence as well as the changing gender roles in post conflict environments. Men should be involved in programs aimed on responding and preventing sexual violence. WHO

(2012) shows that engaging men and boys in preventing violence against women and promoting gender equality can have positive effects. Research by WHO (2012) shows that the “root causes of violence against women include harmful masculine norms and the acceptance of violence as a social norm”. WHO (2012) surveys also show that men and boys with more rigid views on masculinity are more likely to report using violence against women. Engaging men and boys to address the prevailing community norms that might encourage violence is a powerful strategy to reducing violence. Working with men and boys is important factor that leads to gender equality and is necessary to reduce violence against women. There are successful programs in Liberia that work with men and boys to reduce violence, Gupta (2009) states,

“The programs that dealt with questions of masculinity and what it means to be man were found to be most effective. Rather than defining masculinity as violent and aggressive, the messages promoted through these programs are that caretaking and compassion are traits of ‘real men’” (p.7)

Women as peace builders

The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 calls for women to be included in all the peace processes. But the reality is that they are rarely asked to the table. According to Ackerman (2009) “ the lack of women’s participation means that issues like internal displacement, sexual violence, government abuse, and the rebuilding of social services are not at all at the forefront of all discussion, or not discussed at all” (p.87). Women have to be empowered as peace builders. Women seated at the negotiation table examine security more broadly. They look deeper than seeing it as a military service, and pay more attention to education, jobs, and healthcare which to them is important in achieving peace and stability. Women in Liberia and

elsewhere need a leading role in the effort to finding solutions to conflict, and equality in their countries. Isis Women's International (2011) states, "addressing the reproductive health consequences of war sexual violence is important to ensure that women and girls are active and participate in peace building and post conflict reconstruction processes" (p.4). A demand for women's rights needs to be incorporated into the Liberian peace accords.

Two powerful influential forces setting an example for Women as peace builders in Liberia are Leymah Gbowee and President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. Leymah Gobowee is a Liberian peace and women's rights activist. As war waged on in Liberia, Gobowee came to the conclusion that women are the ones suffering the most in this conflict. She then set forth and started organizing Christian and Muslim women to demonstrate together. Through her actions and support of her team of women Gobowee lead a women's peace movement in Liberia that brought an end to the second civil war in Liberia, and helped to oust former president Charles Taylor out of power. Alongside Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Tawakkul Karman, Leymah was nominated for the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize "for their non-violent struggle for the safety of women and for women's rights to full participation in peace-building work." (The Nobel Prize, 2012). The women's peace movement also aided in the process of electing Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as Liberia's president. Today Leymah is the executive director of the Women peace and Security Network.

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is the 24th and current president of Liberia. She goes down in modern history as the world's first elected black female president and Africa's first elected female head of state. Sirleaf took office in 2006 with the ideals of reform and peacemaking as her standing ground. Known as the "iron lady" Sirleaf has worked to bring economic

development, and to bring an end to civil war, corruption. Sirleaf has had success in securing forgiveness for billions of dollars of Liberian debt, also success in efforts taking over a nation of 3.5 million people that are still struggling to recover from more than a decade of civil war that claimed more than 200,000 lives and displaced a third of the population.

Predictable and preventable.

Violence against women can be predictable and preventable. WHO (2012) states that “by identifying social, cultural, legal and economic factors that influence violence, it is possible to predict its occurrence and to understand how to prevent it”. More research supporting the understanding and prevention of sexual violence is a must. Sexual violence against women is a major public health and humans rights problem, but a lack of research on the problem and the great consequences of the problem slowly diminish the search for a solution. Research on sexual violence needs a variety of people, whether its researchers, activist, donors, law makers, or health care professionals they should be committed to one goal and that is to understand and prevent sexual violence.

VII. Organizations/programs

United Nations

(The United Nations Mission in Liberia [UNMIL], 2003) was established by Security Council resolution 1509 on September 19, 2003. The peacekeeping mission included, “supporting the ceasefire, observing disengagement of armed forces, protecting civilians, promoting human rights, supporting reform of the military and police, and promoting the peace process including the national elections” (UNMIL,2003). The mission also included improving

the status of women. Liberian women along with the president Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf work to lead the peace process in Liberia. UNMIL mandate works to empower women, by supporting and promoting their roles in government and civil society. According to (Better World Campaign [BWC], 2012) “the UN is supporting the legislature to increase women’s political representation to 30% and is helping the LNP (Liberia National Police) to increase female representation in the police force, which currently stands at 715 women, representing 17 percent of the total force”.

UNMIL and the Liberian government have also been working to battle the prevalence of sexual violence and gender-based violence (GBV). A plan has been made to decrease gender-based violence by 30% by the end of 2011. To achieve this, a special court has been installed to take on GBV cases, and to also encourage victims to report GBV incidents. According to BWC (2012), “despite improvements in the legal system; through, a study conducted by the UN in Liberia tracking cases of sexual violence found that it would take nearly ten years at the current speed the criminal justice system operates to clear the backlog of sexual violence cases alone”.

UNMIL is also tackling the issue of gender based violence in primary schools; working with the Liberian Government, accelerated learning programs have been established to allow those whose secondary education was disrupted during the war to complete their education in a short program, “44% of the participants in this program are female” (BWC,2012).

The United Nations has also taken measures in an effort to combat Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA). Efforts have been made to prevent, report, and investigate SEA cases and to enforce sanction against the perpetrators. An example of this is the creation of the In Country Network (ICN), “ the INC is a network of representatives from the United Nations and international NGOs that serve as the primary body for coordination and oversight on prevention and response to SEA among the humanitarian community” (UNMIL,2003) since its

establishment in 2005 INC has taken critical steps to ensure that accountability, coordination's and communication are accounted for relating to the prevention and response to cases of SEA by people working for the UN, affiliated partners, and other NGO and humanitarian organizations. Working along with the Liberian government INC has had a good success in setting up mechanism to prevent sexual violence.

Microfinance

According to Gupta (2009), "women are more likely than men to spend their income on the well being of their families, including more nutritious foods, school fees for children and health care" (p.5). A program that has proven to reduce violence and empower women, increase income and wellbeing is microfinance. Microfinance consists of small loans given to poor people mostly women, to help them start or develop a small business. Programs like BRAC, and World Relief Liberia work to empower women in one of the worlds poorest and most war torn countries. They provide loans and savings services to some of the most marginalized women in Liberia. These programs not only change a woman's economic conditions but also help to empower her social and political status as well.

Angie Brook/ Carter Center

Angie Brooks International Center (ABIC) Liberia encourages women's empowerments, leadership development, and international peace and security. ABIC key directions are training women for political leadership, peace building, mediation and negotiating skills. ABIC is improving the lives of the next generation Liberian and African youth through the use of their Intergenerational Legacy Initiative and by offering internships for those who qualify. ABIC has reached a level of success and this is due to "the contribution and dedicated service of the hard

working youth who have served as interns, volunteers, consultants, Fellows from the Council of Women World Leaders, and members of our staff, many of whom are young Liberians returning to Liberia to contribute to the country's development” (PeaceWomen).

The Carter Center was established in Liberia March 1991 to work on peace and democracy. The Carter Center advocates for “waging peace, fighting disease, and building hope” (Carter Center). The Carter Center works to develop things such as “Strengthening and expanding the Justice and Peace Commission's rural offices; to train human rights monitors and paralegals, provided financial and technical support for Liberian human rights nongovernmental organizations, and Monitor the political and human rights situation in Liberia”(Carter Center). CC has also worked to observe presidential elections, also working with the Liberian government and opposition leaders to discuss possible moves toward peace

VIII. Conclusion

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf the president of Liberia, the first woman to be elected to lead a country in modern African history has made considerable progress transitioning Liberia from conflict to development. Despite the fact that the humanitarian crisis has come to an end, the humanitarian needs of many Liberian people remain substantial. The country has started to move toward peace and stability, but much still needs to be done to aid the reconstruction of livelihood and to make certain that peace and stability continue. The government has taken positive steps but long lasting efforts have to be made at reconstructing the lives and livelihoods of individuals, families and communities in the aftermath of armed conflict. After 14 years of war, violence, and horrible crimes Liberia needs to encourage its citizens to respect human security and become a law abiding people. Liberia now needs to build a nation from what was once a cancer in the midst of

Rape is Cheaper than Bullets: War Related Sexual Violence in Liberia.

a war torn region of West Africa. The ultimate goal of ending the epidemic of sexual violence against women and girls during war seems to be a distant aspiration.