



Safe Space meeting for girls and young women in Sierra Leone, organised by WAVES.

## CONCERTED ACTION FOR ZERO TOLERANCE AGAINST SEXUALISED AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN THE MANO RIVER REGION – SIERRA LEONE AND LIBERIA

This programme in the Mano River Region aimed to contribute to building an inclusive society in which women and girls live in dignity, free from sexualised and gender-based violence (SGBV) and discrimination. Carried out between November 2021 and December 2024 with six implementing partners in Liberia and Sierra Leone, the programme sought to build commitment and capacity of community, state and inter-state actors to develop and sustain adequate sexualised and gender-based violence prevention and response frameworks, supported by a strengthened regional network of feminist civil society actors. The programme was funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). An evaluation of the programme was carried out by Impel Consultancy in the summer of 2024. In addition to accountability, the evaluation aims to identify lessons learned and assess the feasibility of future work in the region.

### FACTS AND FIGURES

- **Programme duration:**  
11.2021 – 12.2024 (3 years)  
With a no-cost extension until 04.2025
- **Funded by:** German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
- **Programme budget:** 2.077.548 €
- **Type of evaluation:** Final evaluation
- **Evaluation team:**  
Impel Consultancy Ltd.
- **Evaluation period:**  
05.2024 – 08.2024



## PROGRAMME CONTEXT

Both Liberia and Sierra Leone were involved in protracted and intertwined civil wars from 1989 to 2003 and 1991 to 2002, respectively. These wars were marked by the mutual support of rebel groups across borders, and armed groups operated transnationally. War crimes in both countries included organised and systematic rape, sexualised torture and enslavement, and forced recruitment of child soldiers. In subsequent decades, while both countries have advanced legislation regarding sexualised and gender-based violence and have heightened their attention to the issue, multiple challenges remain. These include persistent gender disparities in education and employment, limited access to sexual and reproductive health rights and services, limited access to justice for survivors, and the continuation of harmful practices such as female genital cutting.

## PROGRAMME GOALS

Under the overarching aim of contributing to an inclusive society free from sexualised and gender-based violence and discrimination against women and girls, the programme was structured around three interlinked modules, focusing on:

- 1. Prevention** of sexualised and gender-based violence through improving and implementing national policies and legal frameworks, as well as advocacy work and public awareness raising.
- 2. Improving response** mechanisms to sexualised and gender-based violence through the training of women's rights organisations and relevant service providers and public institutions (health, police, justice, education) in adopting a survivor-centred, Stress- and Trauma-sensitive Approach (STA). This also involved supporting the establishment and availability of community-based protection mechanisms for women and girls.
- 3. Strengthening feminist action** through organisational development, joint learning, and networking. Advocacy on a regional level was supported by the building of a regional value-based civil society "Feminist Alliance", which is expected to continue to work together beyond the duration of the programme.

The programme employed a multi-level approach, working at the macro (societal and political), meso (institutional), and micro (immediate environment and individual) levels. It was implemented in partnership with six local non-governmental organisations with complementary skills and experience. In Liberia, these were *Medica Liberia*, Aiding Disadvantaged and Traumatized Women and Girls (ADWANGA) and Rising Youth Mentorship Initiative (RYMI). In Sierra Leone, these were Women Against Violence and Exploitation in Society

(WAVES), Girl2Girl Empowerment Movement (G2G) and Choices & Voices Foundation for Women and Girls (CVF).

## EVALUATION SCOPE AND METHODS

Carried out between May and August 2024, the evaluation assessed the programme through August 2024. Part A focuses on evaluating the work carried out thus far, presenting findings according to criteria defined by the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (relevance, coherence, effectiveness, impact, sustainability and efficiency). Part B builds on learning from Part A to respond to feasibility questions and make recommendations for future programming. The evaluation was designed with a focus on qualitative data collection and with attention to feminist, ethical and Do No Harm principles. It included a document review, country visits to both Sierra Leone and Liberia, and combined face-to-face and remote interviews with key informants at *medica mondiale* in Germany, and programme partners and stakeholders at country and regional levels. Some quantitative data was also collected through a short survey.

## KEY FINDINGS

### Relevance

The **relevance** of the programme was evaluated as "good" to "very good". The programme's aims were well linked to government efforts in both countries to tackle the high prevalence of sexualised and gender-based violence, and the continuing need for intervention at community, national and regional levels. The three modules of the programme were seen as valuable, relevant and necessary, however there were differences in opinion among programme partners about the logic between the three modules. Working across different levels, in different countries and with multiple partners resulted in a highly complex programme with very ambitious goals within its three-year timeframe. The evaluators assessed that the programme had achieved significant results and had laid a strong foundation for further progress in addressing sexualised and gender-based violence at multiple levels in society.

### Coherence

The **coherence** of the programme was evaluated as "very good". The programme fit well with the wider work of the partner organisations, and the diversity of the implementing partners resulted in good familiarity with the programme objectives and complementarity with their existing work. Partners were able to continue with and further develop models and approaches they were already using to deliver aspects of the programme and were able to draw on experience from previous programmes, including those funded by Comic Relief and BMZ.



Medica Liberia trains partner organisations in the STA – Stress and Trauma-sensitive Approach® to working with women affected by violence. Partner organisations also learn to become trainers themselves.

## Effectiveness

The **effectiveness** of the programme was evaluated as “good” to “very good”. At the level of governance and oversight, partners emphasised the positive support provided by *medica mondiale*, which led to a sense of ownership of the programme among partners. Following some delays, partners’ organisational capacity was strengthened through a variety of approaches, including formal training and development opportunities in which those partners with greater capacity were able to support others who were less well established. A major achievement of the programme was its success in fostering connections, trust and effective working relations between partners, which took considerable effort and time to achieve.

**Module One** focused on preventing sexualised and gender-based violence by influencing policy and legal frameworks through national advocacy. Partners achieved several successes through the programme, including the inclusion of recommendations in Sierra Leone’s third National Action Plan (SiLNAP) on gender, and collaborating with the Ministry of Education in Liberia to introduce guidelines on sexual exploitation and abuse. Partners recognised the importance of continued collaboration with each other, consistent community engagement, and the positive effect of the training on the Stress- and Trauma-sensitive Approach under Module Two as important factors in their success.

**Module Two** focused on implementing the Stress- and Trauma-sensitive Approach at the community level. *Medica mondiale* and *Medica Liberia* provided training in

the Stress- and Trauma-sensitive Approach to all partner organisations, and received positive feedback on the value, impact and potential wider application of the approach. At the time of the evaluation, the training-of-trainers phase of the training was underway. There were indications of the impact of the Stress- and Trauma-sensitive Approach at the community level and on the attitudes and practices of service providers. Furthermore, within the partner organisations themselves, the principles of self-care, which are central to the Stress- and Trauma-sensitive Approach, were being recognised and influencing individual and organisational practice. Whilst good progress has been made, a key learning is the need for greater time to roll out this training to partner organisations and service providers, offer opportunities for reflection and refresher training to enable participants to build on their knowledge and apply it to more complex situations.

**Module Three** focused on increasing the capacity of women’s rights organisations to advocate for change at the regional level, through organisational capacity building and the creation of a civil society alliance. This work was intended to be cross-cutting with the other two modules. Organisational capacity building activities were significantly delayed and did not take place from the beginning of the programme as might have been expected. Despite the delays, the Feminist Alliance was considered by *medica mondiale* to be one of the most important achievements of the programme and one that should be built on in the future. The significant effort required in the first two years to get it off the ground was justified. At the time of this evaluation, momentum was beginning to build for regional advocacy work.



The Liberian National Police Training Academy and *Medica Liberia* sign a memorandum of understanding that the STA - Stress and Trauma-sensitive Approach® will be integrated into police training.

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### Efficiency

The programme’s **efficiency** was evaluated as “**satisfactory**”. The evaluation focused on the efficiency of monitoring and reporting systems. Utilisation and usefulness of methods to measure and report progress were uneven across the implementing partners. Some programme indicators were overly ambitious and there did not appear to be a clear plan for how indicators would be tracked. The set of indicators did not capture all of the programme’s impacts, rendering a lot of the programme’s value and achievements invisible.

### Impact

The programme’s **impact** was evaluated as “**good**”. The focus on establishing and strengthening relationships between partners and strengthening the capacity of organisations was vital. Whilst it resulted in less external impact in this phase, it is likely that this groundwork will result in increasing impact in a subsequent phase. Despite the internal focus, there are notable examples of wider impact, including indications of potential shifts in attitudes at a community level and better-informed media reporting. These achievements and opportunities for wider impact at a regional level will require further nurturing to take hold.

### Sustainability

The programme’s **sustainability** was evaluated as “**good**”. National advocacy achievements will require further engagement with civil society organisations for policy implementation. The partners are deeply committed to the communities they serve and see the models and approach-

es they are using to be sustainable, as well as creating increased demand from the communities themselves. For long-term sustainability, training on the Stress- and Trauma-sensitive Approach needs to be institutionalised within organisations to mitigate the loss of knowledge through personnel changes. The Feminist Alliance has the potential to be self-sustaining, but it will require further funding in the immediate to medium term to build its strength.

### KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

This section focuses on the feasibility of a further phase of implementation and key recommendations for the future.

**Question:** Is it feasible to bring in a new partner?

**Response:** There is no clear need for a new partner within the programme. The introduction of a new organisation could be disruptive to positive dynamics among existing partners.

**Recommendations:** maintain and strengthen existing partnerships, identify allies for advocacy at regional and national levels, and collectively develop a definition of feminism and what it means to be a feminist alliance.

**Question:** Is it feasible for (a) partner organisation(s) to play a coordination role?

**Response:** It might be a positive step for *Medica Liberia* to take on a coordinating role within the programme and could

strengthen regional ownership of the programme. However, this approach will require a thorough capacity assessment and a collaborative identification process for the organisation taking on this role, as well as investment and structured support from the start.

**Recommendations:** Conduct an in-depth organisational capacity assessment of *Medica Liberia* to develop a plan for support, explore opportunities to draw on wider capacity strengthening support in the region, and ensure that this is reflected in the programme's goals.

**Question:** Is it feasible to expand targeting?

**Response:** Phase two should build on and consolidate achievements made in phase one. The programme could expand on targets within existing geographic locations and institutions, rather than spread itself across new locations/institutions.

**Recommendations:** Build on advocacy efforts to date, focusing on implementation of existing laws, frameworks and guidelines. In particular, focus on the respective ministries responsible for the One-Stop Centres. Focus on national advocacy targets as an entry point to ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) and regional advocacy. At a community level, partners should identify ways to deepen engagement with existing communities. The programme should continue to support partners to strengthen their Stress- and Trauma-sensitive Approach capacities and to provide training on the Stress- and Trauma-sensitive Approach to service providers, building on current progress with the aim of institutionalising the approach within organisations.

**Question:** Is it feasible to keep the existing theory of change?

**Response:** The programme's theory of change needs to evolve to reflect the recommendations from phase one. A draft theory of change has been provided in the full-length evaluation report as a starting point for discussion among all partners in order to develop a revised version.

**Recommendations:** Ensure the programme's revised results framework reflects the revised theory of change and indicators reflect all elements of the theory of change.

**Question:** Is it feasible to establish exit strategies for the countries?

**Response:** Support to partners will be needed from *medica mondiale* to develop strategies which are meaningful for the donor in relation to the programme, as well as for the partner organisations in relation to the specific activities they are conducting and once they have achieved their desired goal.



Meeting of several Girls Clubs of our partner organisation Rising Youth Mentorship Initiative (RYMI) in the Peaynesville community in Monrovia, Liberia.

**Recommendations:** *medica mondiale* should take the lead and provide support on the interpretation of exit strategies.

The full-length evaluation report includes an analysis of recommendations weighted by urgency and importance to prioritise which to take forward.

## CONCLUSIONS

As a pilot programme, the aims of this initiative were very ambitious, yet there have been notable impacts at the three levels that the programme sought to influence. *medica mondiale's* management was appreciated and recognised by the partner organisations, and the approach ultimately led to a sense of ownership among the partners. The collaboration and development of trust and successful ways of working between the six partner organisations was a key achievement of this programme, although these ties took much time and effort to cement. The organisational capacities of implementing partners were strengthened by this programme. This progress suffered at times as a result of competing priorities within the programme and a focus on external outcomes. Systems and processes for monitoring and documenting the programme's impact may not capture all of its important achievements. The partners are well placed to build on the achievements and learning from this phase of the programme and to develop this model to build towards greater impact in a second phase.

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