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Mission Report on Consultancy

“Reinforcing Gender Awareness and Gender Equality”

Dr. Hildegard Scheu, Consultant

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1 Introduction

The mission of the international consultant on gender to the EC-funded Project “Support to the Legislative Assembly in Liberia”, which is implemented by the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation” was carried out from 12th to 28th of August, 2005. The consultant was contracted by BBJ Consult AG in Berlin and was asked to prepare for a gender training. The Terms of Reference (TOR) referred specifically to work with women in two counties. The consultant worked in close cooperation with the Project Officer, Ms Menekeh Pshorr, and coordinated with the Project Coordinator, Dr. Heinz Jockers.

1.1 Terms of reference

The following **Terms of Reference** guided the consultancy:

The programme *involves two main types of strategies concerning gender equality and awareness:*

- A. *A direct approach of female organizations*
- B. *As part of workshops with members of the Legislative Assembly*

The following subjects are the main issues in this programme:

- Training in the identification and abolition of common obstacles to women's participation in leadership positions*
- Training in enhancing women's self-confidence to enable them to stand for leading positions in their constituencies*
- Training in the identification of ways in which constituencies can encourage and support women to participate in leadership at the local as well as the national level*
- Awareness-building and training in reflection on past elections to identify mistakes that could be avoided in future elections (including local ones)*

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The expert should especially concentrate on the work with women in two counties since it is in the counties where the understanding of gender awareness and equality is lacking. It is common knowledge that the situation in the districts is even worse. It is also not sure whether any political demand from these levels have their counterparts in the capital and are taken into consideration. The target groups are esp. in the two counties and in some of the districts.

Like in most African societies there are a number of traditional female organizations in the villages as well as in bigger areas not alone based on tribal relationship. It would be of great interest to know how far these groups can be politicized or if they are already. Since these are grassroots movements they usually have an easy access to women. It is not sure whether these groups can function as a target for the project concerning future activities.

A strong influence on political and social life esp. in the villages have so called secret societies. The result of the elections in Sierra Leone were for a great part conditioned by them. In Liberia two of them are known to be active: Sande and Poro. They are not secret in the sense that members are not known. It is rather the opposite, esp. with their leaders. It will be of great interest to know which role they are playing in the upcoming elections and how far their members are represented in other organizations esp. in political parties or if they have been approached by political parties.

1.2 Definition of gender

Gender is a term used in contrast to sex, to draw attention to the social roles and interactions between women and men, rather than their biological differences. Gender relations are social relations. They include the ways in which the social categories of male and female interact in every sphere of social activity, such as those which determine access to resources, power and participation in cultural and religious activities and political decisions. Gender also denotes the social meanings of male and female, and what different societies regard as normal and appropriate behavior, attitudes and attributes for women and men. Although the details vary from society to society, and change over time, gender relations always include a strong element of inequality between women and men and are strongly influenced by ideology, traditional beliefs and religion.

A gender aware analysis opens up the possibility of changing gender roles. Through gender analysis we can identify the differences between women and men regarding their specific activities, conditions, needs, access and control over resources, and access to development benefits and decision-making. Three key elements have been highlighted in identifying gender analysis:

- division of labor
- access to and control over resources (material resources like land, property, tools, capital, markets, and also immaterial resources, like information, education, skills)
- needs (practical and strategic gender needs)

Women's practical needs include education, health care, water and sanitation, etc. Women's strategic needs are leadership, decision-making, empowerment, etc.

A better understanding of women's needs is crucial in deciding how benefits and resources are distributed and accessed by men and women.

Gender analysis is the first step in gender sensitive planning and for promoting gender equality.

2 Meetings in Monrovia

The consultant had a number of meetings in Monrovia to get an overview on the work of other organisations on gender and election issues. She met and discussed with Ms Kagwiria Mbogori, Country Programme Manager of United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), Mrs Joana Foster, Senior Gender Adviser of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), Ms Marayah Fyneah, the Chairwoman of the Coalition of Political Party Women in Liberia (COPPWIL), and Mr Sidi Mohamed Diawara, Country Director Liberia of the National Democratic Institute (NDI) for International Affairs. Unfortunately, a planned meeting with the Minister of Gender and Development, Mrs Varba Gayflor, did not materialize.

3 Workshops in two counties

3.1 Preparations of the workshops

Four different meetings with women were envisaged and planned for in two counties, Bong and Bomi County, by the Project Officer, Ms Menekeh Pshorr. She had also drafted workshop plans, which foresaw presentations, questions and answers. The objectives of those meetings were vague and had to be specified: awareness raising, informing the women about the forthcoming elections, discussing participation of women in leadership, as well as getting more information about those women's groups.

In discussing the workshop's content for two workshops with women from local women's groups in Bong County, the concept of active participation in group discussions as a method of awareness-raising was introduced.

The following topics and questions for discussion in small groups were specified:

Are women's needs and concerns different or the same as men's?

Group discussions in small groups (5-6) on the following questions:

- What do you as women see as most important for the future (next five years) of yourself, your family and your community? What are your major needs? Agree in the group on 3 priorities.
- Which of those priorities do you think are the same for men? Which of those are different for women? Why are they different?
- What can you do to get those needs/concerns met? Whom do you approach? Who should act on your priorities? How?

1. Presentation of group discussion results

2. Discussion on how women can promote their needs/interests in politics

Women's participation in decision making

1. Group discussions in small groups on:

- A) What is women's role in decision making? What is men's role in decision making?
 - Family level
 - community level (religious, social, political)
 - district level
 - county level
 - national level
- B) What are the constraints for women to have a bigger role in decision making? Why are women not equally involved in decision making as men?
- C) How can women overcome those constraints?

2. Joint discussion and agreement on next steps

It was also discussed and agreed that voter's education material should be collected from the respective organizations, as the women might ask for explanations of the election process.

The consultant suggested giving the women at the workshops and opportunity to meet and be able to ask questions to some of the female candidates. Subsequently, female candidates were approached in Gbarnga and invited to come along with us to the women's meetings.

The consultant and the Project Officer agreed that the experiences made during the workshops in Bong County would be discussed afterwards and used for modification of the program for Bomi County. As the meeting took place already on Monday, the 22nd of August, and we returned from Gbarnga only on Sunday, 21st, there was finally no time for any discussion. In addition, the workshop for Bomi County had already been planned - before the arrival of the consultant - together with Ms Marayah Fyneah, the Chairwoman of the Coalition of Political Party Women in Liberia (COPPWIL), who acted as a speaker and a facilitator for the workshop. Therefore, the workshop went ahead as planned. The consultant saw her role mainly of a resource person giving additional inputs as well as an observer of the processes and discussions at the workshop.

In general, the consultant realized that this first gender consultancy could be only exploratory in nature and come up with recommendations for future activities. As too many women had already been invited to the workshops, and the workshops had not been conceptualized as training workshops, there was no point in intervening too much into the pre-planned workshop agendas. In addition, as a foreigner not knowing the local languages and with difficulties understanding the local Pidgin English, training would have required the assistance of well trained local facilitators.

3.2 Workshops in Bong County, 17. - 21.8.2005

Ms Menekeh Pshorr had met a week before with Ms Ida N. Moore, a young woman living in Palala and, as the Secretary of the Association, one of the driving forces behind the KPAAI Women Development Association. In 2003, a group of eight women started a peace initiative among women, trying to reconcile among women who felt being

betrayed by the boys of other women, sometimes their neighbors, who humiliated them, looted their homes, and made them suffer during the war. After inviting women from surrounding villages and towns for a workshop, where they discussed those issues and how they could work as women together, many more women joined the movement. Until now, women's groups have been formed in all the 52 communities of the five districts of Bong County, with about 750 members. Those groups decide on joint small projects, for which they collect funds in cash and kind, and implement them locally. They have started six adult literacy classes for women, which are conducted by young educated women. These women want some kind of payment or compensation, which the groups cannot pay. So far, the organization did not receive any outside support, except some stationary from the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) for the literacy classes. It is officially recognized by the government.

3.2.1 Meeting in Palala school with women from Clan One Waytuah (18.8.2005)

The meeting was attended by 92 women and some men, who acted as the secretaries for the women's groups.

After the opening session, we had planned to divide the women in groups of 5-6 persons, let them discuss about their major needs and agree on three priorities. In a second step, they were to discuss if those identified needs differed from the needs the men have. As gender needs are – as a matter of principle – first discussed in gender homogenous groups, the consultant suggested that the men formed their own group. This proposition was opposed on the argument that the groups needed the secretaries to write down their discussions. As this view was shared and supported by the co-facilitator, Ms Menekeh Pshorr, her intervention made it impossible to insist on a gender approach. The result was that the groups discussed the community needs and not women's needs, and that the secretaries were leading the discussions.

The task of dividing up in small groups posed already a major challenge. It took some time and effort to make the participants sit in smaller groups (ending up in groups of about 10-12 people, which is still too big for a discussion group). The questions had to be explained to them again; Ms Menekeh and Ms Ida went from group to group and gave the necessary information in Kpelle, the local language. The groups needed a lot of time to start the discussion and then to conclude it. When all the groups came back to

the plenary, none of the groups presented three priorities they had agreed upon, but all had a longer list of needs. The lists included several of the following needs in different orders:

- peace
- a good leader
- education / schools
- vocational training
- midwife house (maternity clinic) – health post – hospital and equipment
- drinking water and sanitation
- good roads and bridges to be able to transport goods to the markets and pregnant women in labor or sick people to hospitals
- a palaver house
- a guest house
- better shelter/houses for the families
- improvement of agriculture, tools

It is interesting to note that the need of a midwife house came up in several groups, which is definitely a specific gender need.

However, the idea behind the group work of getting women actively involved in discussing their own gender needs did not really work for various reasons:

1. The consultant, not knowing the local language, suspects that the specific meaning of the questions was diluted/lost in the interpretation by the facilitators, and that in addition, the male secretaries instructed the groups on the basis of their own understanding of it. This clearly shows the necessity of trained local facilitators. It is not possible for a foreigner to conduct a “gender workshop” in any meaningful way without a gender trained local person supporting her.
2. The gathering was too big in numbers to discuss anything in a meaningful way. A training workshop should consist of not more than 12-15 persons.
3. The women seem to be used to being addressed in a top-down manner and expecting that they are “being told”.

After the lunch break, Menekeh explained the election process with the help of a NEC Picture Chart Set. Then, the female candidate for representative, Ms Esther Coaline Warbey (Liberia Action Party), introduced herself and answered questions. The women were happy to see one of the female candidates and said they wanted to know the other candidates as well.

3.2.2 Meeting with the Zoes and the elderly (19.8.2005)

Brief interview with Zoe Fatu Masaley before the start of the meeting:

She said that she inherited the function from her grandmother (father's mother) about 20 years ago. She was born 1944.

Her group has 15 female members of mixed age. They teach young girls from 8 and above about proper behaviors and their culture. The girls stay for approximately 4 months at a specific hut. The war destroyed the hut and other material, so that presently they cannot continue in the normal way.

She has the authority to decide on conflicts. When she sends her messenger (with a broom) to a quarrel within family or community members, they have to stop the quarrel and see her for conflict resolution and advice.

21 women gathered at the meeting in Palala, 3 of whom were the female chiefs (Zoes) of the Sande societies of their area. Some of them were traditional midwives; others had different roles in their society, like messenger, cook, and assistants. A few men, who acted as their secretaries, were also present, but they had no active role and did not speak.

The questions and answers were translated by Ms Ida N. Moore into the local language, adding some additional explanations when she felt those were needed.

The women were initially very cautious. The question of whether they agree to have a photo taken was discussed at some length in the beginning. As they were still expecting some women to come, they did not want to decide without their consent. Every decision in the Sande groups is discussed among all members and decisions are taken by consent of all.

We asked about their perception of the forthcoming election. The women said they all registered as voters. They all agreed that the country needs a good leader. When asked what a good leader is for them, they listed the following:

A good leader

- should look at all the people equally, should be concerned about all the different groups, about women and men, and should act on behalf of everybody;
- should see to it that all children are going to school;
- keep peace, not return to war again
- should use the money for the development of the people, not for themselves;
- should not listen to bad advices, must not be stubborn
- should identify with all, knowing their concerns;
- must listen to the people, must go to the people in the communities and ask them, find out about their problems, listen to their needs.

The feeling of being neglected, not listened to, not cared for, was a predominant description of their situation. They referred to the war, when many men disappeared and took to the arms, and they had to fend for their children and themselves alone.

After the war, there are many divisions within the communities. While in earlier times, people obeyed the law and listened to elders, there is no discipline today. The introduction of guns made people fight and the lack of unity today makes it difficult to solve problems. The statements of some women seem to indicate that the Sande women lost influence in the communities.

3.2.3 Meeting in Zoentai school(with clans of Wolota & Zoenta) (20.8.2005)

In the meeting at Zoentai, about 95 women from the KPAAI Women's Development Association were present, as well as the clan chief, male secretaries and some other men.

When asked about the decision-making process at the local level, the women said that all the decisions are taken by the men; women were not allowed to participate in the village meetings. When a man claimed that the women were always consulted before a decision was taken, women claimed this to be a lie and insisted that they should be

consulted, but in fact are not. Several women were very firm in expressing that women can also be leaders.

Discussing the qualities of a good leader, they came up with the following characteristics:

- must be a good organizer
- must be actively involved and influential
- peace maker
- giving advice
- patience minded
- implements group decisions
- consults before making decisions
- share knowledge with others
- care for her people, love for people
- should be honest, just and fair
- creative
- should treat all equal
- avoid self interest
- shows good attitude

When asked if a woman can be the president of this country, they answered affirmatively. But, they insisted, she must not have participated in any war activity, she must be a good and honest person. She must go to all the communities to introduce herself and listen to them. Not only before the elections, but also later. In earlier elections, the women felt being used to cast their vote for a politician, who later on never cared for their needs. The feeling of betrayal by the politicians was very vividly outspoken.

One woman referred to a female Paramount Chief who was a very good leader and did a lot of good things for her people. But men did not like her to be a leader and questioned the legitimacy of her leadership. Finally they killed her. – Men do not allow women to participate in decision making. That problem started long ago and dates back to the Barclay administration. But male leaders have destroyed the country, the time

has come that women have to stand up and speak up for themselves and their country, the women said.

So far, no political party or candidate has shown up in their villages. The women were very clear that they need to know the people they are asked to vote for. They strongly requested that we should tell especially the female candidates to go and meet them and to answer their questions. They asked “How can we vote for a person we have never seen?”

After the lunch break, Menekeh explained the election process with the help of a NEC Picture Chart Set. Then, the two women candidates for representatives, Mrs Esther Coaline Warbey (Liberia Action Party) and Mrs Comfort Mowai Dolo (Liberty Party), introduced themselves and answered questions. Both encouraged the women to vote for women to make their voices and concerns more heard on the national level.

3.3 Workshop in Bomi County

3.3.1 Meeting with women from political parties and women’s organizations in Tubmanburg (22.08.2005)

After the opening session, the female superintendent of Bomi County, Mrs. Hajai Washington, presented a short speech on what role women played, can play and should play in their male dominated society. She narrated her own struggle as an example and encouraged women to come forward and stand for leadership positions. She also lamented that there are eight different women’s organizations in the County, which are unfortunately not united and have therefore no impact on the overall political process. She urged the women to work together and unite. She left after the speech, as she had to meet a group of demobilized ex-combatants who had seized a farm and occupied the land for days, unwilling to leave.

The consultant started the discussion by asking some of the women to narrate how and why they decided to get involved in the women’s group or in the party. Several told that their husbands had left them to fight in the war, they had to do something and joined with other women. They felt that women have the heart to care for others that is why they came together.

When asked if they met with opposition to their commitment from their husbands or other family members, several of them narrated that their husbands played around with other women, left them, came back, left them again, so they decided to develop strength in themselves, not to depend on their husbands and what they were doing, but just to live for themselves and their children. One woman was very particular that she is still married, though her husband does not live with her, but she did not divorce him.

The consultant then initiated a discussion on the means they use and can use to reach other women in the communities. It became clear that they especially need transport to reach out to the remote communities, which no NGO is providing, even not when the NGOs go to those communities, as their policies do not allow the NGOs to take anybody inside their car which is not employed by the organization.

The women so far did not use the radio as a medium to transport their messages, as airtime has to be paid for. As a journalist from the local Bomi radio station was present, we discussed briefly the possibility if airtime could be provided free of cost to the women's groups. This issue should be followed up with the chief person responsible for the local radio.

The need for new slogans and possibly songs to transport messages for women was briefly touched.

After the lunch break, Mrs. Marayah Fyneah, the Chairwoman of the Coalition of Political Party Women in Liberia (COPPWIL), gave a presentation on "Education or Tradition / Which is best" – a topic given to her by the Project Officer. She identified tradition as one of the causes for male domination and women staying behind – their grandmothers taught them what proper and improper behavior is for girls. She argued for a critical review of tradition and for a need to abolish the bad things. She also spoke about the need of education for all children, including all the girls.

3.3.2 Continuation of the meeting (23.08.2005)

On the second day of the meeting, Mrs. Marayah Fyneah first talked about "Women's Chances in the upcoming elections"

The qualities of a good leader were also briefly discussed, before the Superintendent, Ms. Hajai Washington, presented herself as a senator candidate. She had to respond to

angry questions from some women, who accused her of not consulting with the women's groups and not doing what is needed for the district/county. Several incidents were discussed and clarified. The women seem to have expected that a woman in the position of Superintendent would change things quickly and were disappointed that it did not work out that way.

As a debate with senator candidates was going on in parallel on that day, the workshop was concluded with the lunch, as several of the women wanted to attend this debate.

4 Observations

The KPAAI Women's Development Association is remarkable, as rural women themselves took the initiative to organize and sustain it so far without outside support.

Women referred to social expectations like being married is the preferred status for women, women are the caretakers and main providers for their families, etc. Several women also clearly voiced their anger about the humiliation and violence many of them have experienced during the war.

The Zoes and the elderly saw their role in educating the young girls in their traditions, but also described the disruptions the wars have caused. Probably they are much less influential nowadays, but this has to be further substantiated. It seems that they were not involved in party politics and have not been approached by any party.

In general, the discussions revealed that the women had no clear ideas about the voting process, let alone about the political structure of their nation. None of them was able to describe what the House of Representatives and the Senate were going to do, what their role in the political process is. This not only indicates a need for voter education, but also raises principal questions about the legitimacy of the upcoming elections. The functions, decision-making power and also the limitations of the functionaries on the district/county level – like the Superintendent – were equally unknown and unclear.

The questions addressed to the female candidates present at the meeting were much more related to their personal integrity and the honesty of their intention to do something for the people when they are elected than to their programs and plans. There was hardly any question on what the candidates intended to do for them after the elections and how they are going to do it.

The women knew what they wanted for their communities, but there seems to be no mechanism on the local level to address those concerns. Some referred to God who might send them a good leader who will then solve their problems. Some called upon the internationals/donors to support them.

The meeting in Tubmanburg also revealed the lack of unity among the women themselves and the divisions mainly along ethnic lines, which they themselves saw as a major problem.

In general, the women were grateful for the opportunity to meet and discuss issues of participation and leadership. They regarded the presence of the international consultant as a sign of being recognized and that their concerns are taken seriously. These workshops provided an entry point and should be followed-up with trainings of smaller groups of women on specific issues.

The EC/KAF Project Officer, Ms Menekeh Pshorr, is an excellent animator and an advocator for greater participation of women in the social and political spheres. She was able to build up a good working relationship with the women in the meetings. The consultant would like to thank her very much for the good cooperation and the organization of the meetings. However, she needs specific training on gender issues, as the concept and methods of gender analysis are not familiar to her. It is therefore recommended that she is not called “gender expert” unless she has acquired the necessary knowledge and skills, as it is important not to dilute defined terms. (A gender expert is a person who has been trained on doing gender analysis.)

5 Recommendations

The objective to increase the participation of women in political decision-making on all levels is not achievable in a few years, and it has to start from the local, the community level. Obstacles are, apart from male opposition to women acquiring new leadership roles, women’s lack of education and high rate of illiteracy, lack of knowledge on political processes, lack of space and possibilities to define their gender specific needs and to lobby for their demands in the political process, and also divisions among women within communities along ethnic lines. At the same time, years of war and suffering have made women to realize their potential and strength, they have taken over new

responsibilities and they organized themselves into women's groups. They are now demanding to take part in decision-making and to take over leadership roles.

Women need definitely more knowledge and training in different areas to be able to effectively act as change agents.

At the grassroots/community level, women need

- Support to non-formal adult literacy, including training of “teachers” in problem oriented and participatory methods (“active learning”)
- Training in the areas of:
 - communication, advocacy and lobbying skills
 - conflict resolution (building on existing methods and skills and introducing new ways of dealing with differences among women to help them working together)
 - organization and management of women's grassroots organisations
 - leadership in political decision-making
- Gender training (raising gender awareness) for local facilitators

Each activity should be carefully planned and have clearly achievable objectives.

The KPAAI Women's Development Association can be a partner for future activities. Some younger, literate women are involved in this organization, which can be trained in new skills as listed above as well as trained as trainers for their fellow women. Those trainings can probably be done in cooperation with a qualified NGO already working in Bong County. As the KPAAI women are involved in small projects which aim at improving their livelihoods, it is important that their immediate practical needs are taken into account and not only addressing the issue of political participation. If women cannot see any immediate impact on their lives, they may soon loose interest.

Women from the Sande societies could probably be integrated in such activities. Some aspects may have to be addressed specifically, e.g. the midwives can be targeted regarding issues of female health related to pregnancy, child birth and traditional rituals like female genital mutilation, which is a very delicate issue and has to be approached with great care. Working with those women requires first building up a good relationship and trust and second a continuous, regular interaction for quite some time. It should be left to local NGOs working in the area of health care.

The consultant would like to caution against focusing on the Sande societies. Even if there is some evidence that they are de facto influencing/directing their members voting choices – which we can neither confirm nor deny – this cannot be countered in a short period of time, but is a rather tricky issue, which can definitely not be addressed in working with a few Sande societies in one county.

Nevertheless, as a first rapport was built with the Zoes, the meeting could be followed-up regarding their involvement in politics.

Training on the grassroots level needs to be done by skilled local trainers able to communicate in the local vernacular. It is recommended to first collect information from other international organizations and NGOs on trainings already been done and on women who have already been trained as trainers in different skills and could therefore be hired as trainers (compile pool of skilled trainers). Furthermore, specific training of trainers (TOT) can be organized, if needed.

It is strongly recommended to organize gender training for EC/KAF core project personnel, probably in cooperation with COPPWIL or another organization. Alternatively, EC/KAF core personnel could participate in a gender training organized by another organization.

In gender training, concepts to analyze gender relations are discussed and skills for analyzing them in different communities in Liberia are learned. A better analysis of the root causes of gender inequality and what perpetuates it in a specific situation/community is essential for developing strategies to address those causes. It should include a specific analysis of gender relations in a post-war situation. This workshop should last for a minimum of 3 days and have not more than 12-15 participants. (In mixed groups, gender training is normally done in pairs, by a female and a male trainer).

Possibly, young female students /student activists can be motivated to participate in such a workshop, and then be further trained as trainers to work occasionally (on short-term contracts) with local groups in the counties. This would give these young women not only more knowledge and skills, but also experiences with other women in the rural areas and may thus also be a good motivation for further political engagement.

6 Annex

Terms of Reference

Workshop programs