



# Women and the Right of Access to Information in Liberia

A mixed-methods study

# THE CARTER CENTER'S

## Global Access to Information Initiative

Women and the Right of Access to Information  
in Liberia

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THE  
CARTER CENTER



**WOMEN NGOs SECRETARIAT OF LIBERIA**

**COVER PHOTO: Women in Liberia sell dry goods in a local market.**

*Photo: Micky Wiswedel/Shutterstock*



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This project was fortunate to have the support of a number of key government agencies. We thank the Ministry of Gender and the Ministry of Information, Cultural Affairs and Tourism for their collaboration and leadership on assuring that women will be able to exercise the right to information with the same facility as men.

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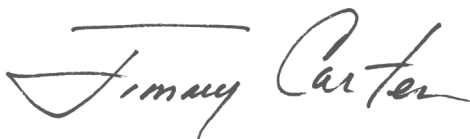
# FOREWORD

Jimmy Carter

Access to information is a fundamental human right and is critical for exercising other essential rights, such as clean water, a safe environment, and education. For governments, access to information builds trust, assists public administration in becoming more effective, and allows scarce resources to be better utilized. For citizens, access to information facilitates greater participation in public life, a meaningful voice, and a powerful tool to hold government accountable. Yet women may largely be excluded from exercising this right.

The Carter Center, noting the scarcity around the world of women's organizations promoting the right of access to information, and women using this right, developed the first study of its kind to quantify whether women are able to exercise the right to information at the same rate as men and to identify the main obstacles that women may face. This Liberia study demonstrates that there is an inequity in the exercise of the right and that both structural and cultural obstacles limit the ability of women to seek and receive information. The study goes further in establishing the information most important for increasing a woman's economic empowerment, thus serving her, her family, and her community.

While the initial study took place in Liberia, the problems are not unique to this country. Women around the world struggle for equal access in areas as diverse as education, health care, and economic opportunities. What will make Liberia extraordinary is the desire of this government and its citizens to advance the right of access to information for all people. The Carter Center and I remain committed to supporting Liberia in its pursuit of assuring greater access to information for women's economic empowerment. We hope that this study and its findings serve as an important tool for that purpose.



Jimmy Carter  
Former President of the United States  
Founder, The Carter Center

# FOREWORD

Julia Duncan-Cassell

The Ministry of Gender and Development is dedicated to promoting gender equality and women's rights, with particular focus on supporting and coordinating gender-related programs and ensuring gender is mainstreamed across government institutions. Addressing gender-based disparities in access to essential public information presents a unique opportunity for our ministry and government as a whole to empower women in their economic pursuits. As H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has so eloquently stated, "In Liberia, . . . we have found the strength and the courage to start to build a new, transformed society—where women enjoy equal rights and fair treatment and where their productive role in society and the economy is acknowledged." However, we still have much to do in the way of actualizing these rights and opportunities for women. Increasing women's access to information will help us achieve these ideals.

The Women and Access to Information study conducted by The Carter Center and the Women's NGO Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL) is an integral first step in identifying the prevalent barriers that women face in getting the necessary information to become economically empowered. The study includes views from community leaders, experts, and public servants from agencies crucial to women accessing information about land, agriculture, starting a business, education and other issues in economic development. The findings illustrate how structural barriers and entrenched cultural mores can keep women from being able to access information with the same frequency and ease as men.

In understanding the realities women experience, we can more effectively coordinate government programs, education, and awareness efforts to ensure that all of our citizens can access this critical information. The Ministry of Gender and Development is profoundly hopeful that this landmark study, along with collaborative dialogue among key stakeholder groups, will provide the necessary input to design targeted programming to address these evident disparities. Using the study as a baseline, we look forward to working with our government counterparts and civil society organizations to gain consensus on recommendations and to implement innovative solutions toward ensuring women can fully exercise their right to information.

We commend The Carter Center for beginning this effort and dedicate ourselves to assuring that all women and men in Liberia are able to exercise the fundamental right of access to information.



Julia Duncan-Cassell  
Minister, Ministry of Gender and Development

# FOREWORD

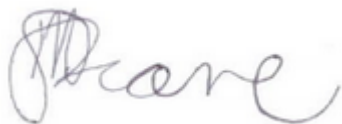
## Marpue Speare

The Women’s NGO Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL) began in 1998 and serves as a coordinating body and umbrella organization for more than 100 organizations across Liberia. The vision of WONGOSOL is to achieve a just and fair Liberian society where women and men equally participate in and benefit from decision-making processes at all levels.

WONGOSOL recognizes that meaningful participation depends on a free flow of information that reaches to both men and women and that without information, women are unable to fully realize their socioeconomic rights. Understanding the extent to which women can access information is the first step to assuring this fundamental human right.

Therefore, we are proud to present, in collaboration with the Carter Center’s Global Access to Information Initiative, the first report examining the barriers facing women in exercising their right of access to information in Liberia. Importantly, this study dispels the myth that women are not interested in information. Rather, it identifies information critical for women to become more economically empowered, such as information on education, land/property, and starting and maintaining a business.

With this data, collected from hundreds of interviews, we are now better placed to address the disparities facing women in accessing information and to promote solutions. WONGOSOL will continue to raise awareness about the value of information for women and, through our member organizations, to support women to access critical information. We understand that it is up to all of us—government and civil society—to work together to dismantle the obstacles facing women. Along with The Carter Center, we are dedicated to advancing the right of access to information for all Liberian women.



Marpue Speare  
Executive Director, WONGOSOL



# ABSTRACT

The following report outlines a study conducted by the Carter Center's Global Access to Information Initiative and the Women's NGO Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL), with support from the Ministry of Gender and Development, in Liberia over a period of six months from December 2013 to May 2014. The study is part of a multicountry project to assess the main obstacles facing women in accessing information and to identify potential solutions. The purpose of the study was to identify the cultural, structural, and legal barriers that women face that may impede access to public information as well as to determine women's most critical information needs, thus leading to ideas for overcoming the noted obstacles. Teams of local researchers collected three types of data: interviews with community leaders, expert opinion interviews, and nonparticipant observations at public agency offices, with accompanying short interviews of civil servants and visitors to the agency. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected in five regions, including Bomi, Grand Gedeh, Lofa, and Nimba counties as well as the capital city of Monrovia, providing a more complete view of the issues facing women in exercising the right to information across Liberia. Secondary data was collected through desk research and triangulated with the other data sets.

The findings were striking, indicating an asymmetry of information flows based on gender. The study found overwhelmingly that women face great challenges and a myriad of barriers in accessing government-held information critical for economic empowerment. Outcomes also illustrated the perception that information that is most important to women for gaining opportunities for advancement is also the most difficult to obtain. Through participatory validation processes in each of the counties of study and in Monrovia, additional contextual information was obtained. The Carter Center and its Liberian partners, including civil society and government, plan to utilize this evidence base to promote creative solutions to make the right of access to information meaningful for women in Liberia.



A woman participates in the 2013 International Right to Know Day high school debate in Grand Bassa County.

Photo: Kari Mackey

# INTRODUCTION

For almost 15 years, the Carter Center’s Global Access to Information Initiative has served as a leader in advancing passage, implementation, and enforcement of access to information regimes in the Americas, Africa, and China and in raising the international profile of the value of the right to information. Through this work, we have identified a potential inequity facing women in the exercise of the right to information.

Though recent years have witnessed a plethora of research and programming related to voice, participation, and empowerment of women, access to information has been implied rather than explicitly identified as a core ingredient for success. Importantly, when focus is placed on women’s ability to fully and effectively exercise their fundamental right to information, the considerable gender asymmetries become apparent. Continuing failure to engage in gender-sensitive policy making, entrenched traditional cultural mores, lack of engagement from women’s civil society organizations, information-access and -flows that actively exclude women, and long-standing obstacles such as illiteracy, overwhelming household responsibilities, and immobility all have played a role in creating gender asymmetries in the exercise of the right to information. Yet, paradoxically, it is arguable that while women are the least likely to demand and receive access to information, they are perhaps the most in need of this potent tool.

To demonstrate the hypothesis that women are not able to access information at the same rate (quantity and ease) as men, the Center developed a quantitative and qualitative study. In the designated countries, including Liberia, Guatemala, and likely Bangladesh, the Center will initiate a study—conducted by local researchers—to assess whether women are able to exercise the right to information with the same facility as men, and if not, the main obstacles facing women in accessing information and types of information most critical to women for economic empowerment. The overall goal of the Carter Center’s project is to make the right to information meaningful for women in Liberia, and a more comprehensive study to assess women’s access to information is the first step.

# What Is Access to Information?

Access to information, also referred to as freedom of information, is a fundamental human right enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and currently enjoyed by over 4 billion people in more than 90 countries around the world. Access to information allows the general public to seek and receive information held by governments, and often, by private entities that perform public duties or receive public funds. It is an important right that serves both governments and their citizens. For governments, an access to information regime helps increase citizen confidence as decision making becomes more transparent, assists public administration to become more efficient and effective as recordkeeping systems are organized and procedures are established, allows scarce resources to be properly applied and utilized, and increases foreign investment. Access to information also enables citizens to engage more meaningfully in public life, understand policies, help determine public priorities, and use the information to ensure the exercise of other human rights, including the rights to clean water, a safe environment, education, and health services. It is a tool that provides the power to ensure that social services reach the most disadvantaged and marginalized people, supports true social accountability, and promotes political and economic empowerment.

## What Significance Does It Hold for Women?

Often in our societies it is the most vulnerable and marginalized populations who suffer the greatest due to limited access of information, and this is particularly true for women. In many countries, one-half of the population may be limited in their full enjoyment of the right to information and the myriad benefits that it provides.

Women frequently face the double burden of income generation and caring for their families. A disproportionate number of people living below the poverty line (living on roughly \$1 a day) are women.<sup>1</sup> Economic opportunities for women remain limited. In Africa, 70 percent of the agricultural workers are women, focused on subsistence farming and producing 60–80 percent of the food used in household consumption, while men engage in the more lucrative cash crops. Nevertheless, studies

indicate that women invest up to 90 percent of their income into their families and communities; in contrast, men invest an average of 30–40 percent of their incomes. And while over the past decades, enrollment of girls in primary education has increased, it is still far from universal. For girls/women in post-primary education there remains an even greater disparity, particularly for households with declining income, and not all education for girls/women is of the same quality received by boys/men. Further, women are more susceptible to and affected by corruption, which flourishes with greater secrecy. However, with genuine access to information, women can take advantage of opportunities to transform their lives, families, and communities.

There have been many cases throughout the world in which women have used increased access to information to achieve economic gains. For example, in Jamaica, five community-based organizations worked together in using the Jamaican Access to Information Act to ensure necessary changes were implemented at local orphanages. The groups made over 40 requests, using over 100 documents, to protect the most vulnerable children in their communities. Women in India have been using the Right to Information Act to obtain widow pensions owed to them by the government and to monitor government employment programs for proper functioning. In 2006, women in the United Kingdom gained access to payroll records for the British Broadcasting Company, proving that female workers were being paid an average of about \$11,000 less than their male co-workers, causing the BBC to publicly change their practices.

### **In sum, access to information:**

- ◆ Allows women to make more effective decisions; for example, with relation to education, crop production, land ownership, and health care
- ◆ Enables women to know and exercise their full range of rights
- ◆ Helps women to participate more fully in public life
- ◆ Is critical for holding government and service providers accountable and reducing corruption
- ◆ Bridges gender gaps and helps to shift power
- ◆ Provides opportunities for women's economic empowerment



**“Town hall” meetings increasingly allow women and youth to participate in the decisions of community life.**

*Photo: Johnny Ndebe*



High school students in Grand Bassa County participate in a Freedom of Information debate for International Right to Know Day.

Photo: Kari Mackey

# SOCIOPOLITICAL CONTEXT

## Status of Women in Liberia

Women served a significant role in ending a long reign of conflict and violence in Liberia. Through nonviolent protests, women pressured President Charles Taylor into attending peace talks and helped put an end to Liberia's second civil war. Many of these same women supported Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in becoming the country's first female president. Since the end of the civil war, more women have been represented in government, markets, and schools.<sup>2</sup> By mid-2012, women held 31 percent, 29 percent, and 25 percent of ministerial, deputy minister, and assistant minister posts, respectively; led 28 percent of key government agencies; and represented 33.3 percent of superintendents and 20 percent of assistant superintendents.<sup>3</sup> According to a speech by Gender Minister Julia Duncan-Cassell in early March 2014, "The ratio of girls to boys in primary education increased from 69 percent in 2001 to 88 percent in 2011."<sup>4</sup> Citing a World Bank report, Minister Duncan-Cassell also noted that 66 percent of Liberian women over the age of 15 "participate in some form of employment."<sup>5</sup> Yet, despite these important advances, women in Liberia still face a steep climb toward equality.

Efforts to introduce or reform policies that affect women's livelihoods have not fully borne fruit, as a general culture of inequality persists, even among younger generations. According to a recent study in Liberian schools, "Seventy-five percent of school boys and 22 percent of school girls believe that men are superior to women."<sup>6</sup> Findings from other gender disparity studies have echoed this perception of male superiority among Liberians. For example, in a study on violence against women with relation to housing, land, and property, men believed that they should be more engaged in property-related issues than women.<sup>7</sup>

# DESPITE IMPORTANT ADVANCES, WOMEN IN LIBERIA STILL FACE A STEEP CLIMB TOWARD EQUALITY.

The statistics regarding women's status in Liberia are telling. Only 8 percent of Liberian women have completed secondary education or higher, and 42 percent of the country's women have never attended school. Related, illiteracy rates for women remain disturbingly high at 62 percent compared to 29 percent for men and impact important social issues, including land–property rights.<sup>8</sup> Studies indicate that women face greater difficulty in obtaining rights to land and property and that most evidentiary documents, such as deeds and leases, are usually filed under men's names.<sup>9</sup> The rate of land ownership for women is half that of men, yet land ownership is of vital importance to Liberian women given that approximately 90 percent<sup>10</sup> are employed in the informal sector or in small-subsistence farming and that they produce more than 60 percent of all agricultural products.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, women face gender disparities in access to networks, technical skills and experience, and business management training.<sup>12 13</sup> Women in the Liberian workforce often obtain only menial, temporary, and informal jobs, with most working in “the least productive sectors such as fishing or petty trading.”<sup>14</sup> Further, firms managed by women comprise only one-third of businesses in Liberia, and women-managed firms often have lower revenues than those headed by men.<sup>15</sup>

Pervasive among the many issues confronting Liberian women are sexual and gender-based violence. In 2011, “Rape surpassed armed robbery as the nation's most reported crime.”<sup>16</sup> This news is even more disturbing given the culture of impunity; a significant number of abuses are not being reported to authorities or go unchecked.<sup>17</sup> Violence against women occurs at home, in the classroom, on the job, and in government, for example, and amplifies many of the inequities and fears that women face.

On a global scale, women in Liberia fare rather poorly compared to the status of women in other countries. According to the 2012 Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), a measure of institutional discrimination against women, Liberia ranks 139 out of 146 countries on the Gender Inequality Index. More specifically, this index focuses on “discriminatory social institutions such as early marriage, discriminatory inheritance practices, violence against women, preference for sons, restricted

access to public space, and restricted access to land and credit.”<sup>18</sup> Due to insufficient disaggregation of data, Liberia is not assessed as part of the Global Gender Gap Index; however, the SIGI ranking provides insight into the status of women in Liberia.

## Importance of Economic Empowerment for Women

While 36 years after the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women there has been some progress, women around the world continue to lag behind men in terms of power, wealth, education, and opportunities. Despite passing the centenary celebration of the establishment of International Women's Day, gender equality and empowerment remain a distant goal. Women represent a disproportionate number of the world's impoverished and illiterate populations.<sup>19</sup> Educational opportunities remain elusive, as girls are less likely than boys to attend school. Lack of access to basic care and medications, coupled with the continuing abhorrent gender-based violence and human trafficking, remain profound issues. According to recent figures, more than one-third of women across the globe have experienced sexual violence.<sup>20</sup> Cutting across age, racial, cultural, economic, and geographical boundaries, gender-based violence negatively affects women's livelihoods, societal participation, and greater communities.<sup>21</sup>

In the areas of participation and voice, women remain in the minority. In 2013 only 17<sup>22</sup> of the world's leaders were women<sup>23</sup>, and as of April 2014, the world average of women in Parliament was 21.9 percent.<sup>24</sup> Quotas and political party systems remain at odds as women strive to find a place in electoral democracies.<sup>25</sup>

There is growing consensus of the need to empower women economically in order to improve the status of

women globally. In addition to advancing the lives of individual women, economically empowering women can help entire communities progress. Through greater economic empowerment, women's rights can be realized and broader development goals can be achieved, including sustainable economic growth, reduced poverty, food security, greater access to health care and education, and gender equality.<sup>26 27</sup> According to the International Center for Research on Women, studies have provided the following reasons for emphasizing women's economic empowerment:

- ◆ Economic empowerment is one of the most powerful routes for women to achieve their potential and advance their rights.
- ◆ Since women make up the majority of the world's poor, meeting poverty-reduction goals requires addressing women and their economic empowerment.
- ◆ Discrimination against women is economically inefficient. National economies lose out when a substantial part of the population cannot compete equitably or realize its full potential.
- ◆ Working with women makes good business sense. When women have the right skills and opportunities, they can help businesses and markets grow.
- ◆ Women who are economically empowered contribute more to their families, societies, and national economies. It has been shown that women invest extra income in their children, providing a route to sustainable development.<sup>28</sup>

Additionally, economic empowerment helps women to more fully participate and contribute to public life. As income and agency increases, women's beliefs and understanding related to issues such as education, health, marriage, family, politics, and the economy can improve, enabling women to take more control of their lives and make more informed decisions. Economically empowered women are more likely to educate and empower their daughters, thereby contributing to the future progress of their nations. Further, gender gaps are bridged and power is shifted to more closely reach equilibrium.

In light of the status of women in Liberia and issues of specific importance to women's livelihoods, the following sections highlight the value of economic empowerment of women in relation to four thematic areas—education, land, business, and agriculture.

## EDUCATION

Education is the foundation for economic empowerment. At the primary level, students learn skills in reading, writing, mathematics, science, and history as well as ways to think critically about the world around them. At the secondary level, these skills are sharpened, and students begin to solve more complex problems. Educated girls are more likely to enter marriage later, have fewer children, and enjoy healthier families.<sup>29</sup> Education increases literacy rates and can help women better know their rights and make better-informed decisions for a healthier, more productive family.

Because education was disrupted during Liberia's long civil war, many women did not complete their basic education. Furthermore, women have historically had less access to education because of traditional household roles and discrimination. Girls are less likely to attend schools than boys, and for those who do attend, girls are also less likely to stay in school to complete their education.<sup>30</sup>

## LAND

Globally, men own land at a higher rate than women.<sup>31</sup> When women do not enjoy formal title to land, especially agricultural land, they lack "asset-based security."<sup>32</sup> Increasing women's access to land has long been considered a key strategy for economically empowering women.<sup>33</sup> Owning land provides women with a more stable area for agriculture or the production of other marketable goods. Further, owning land provides equity that can be used to assess loans or to accumulate other income-earning assets such as farm equipment and livestock.<sup>34</sup> Such assets increase women's access to credit, which can help women endure more difficult economic hardships.<sup>35</sup>

While issues around land have been a long-standing concern globally, they are particularly prevalent in Liberia.

**ILLITERACY RATES FOR WOMEN REMAIN DISTURBINGLY HIGH AT 62 PERCENT COMPARED TO 29 PERCENT FOR MEN AND IMPACT IMPORTANT SOCIAL ISSUES, INCLUDING LAND PROPERTY RIGHTS.**

# GIRLS ARE LESS LIKELY TO ATTEND SCHOOL THAN BOYS, AND FOR THOSE WHO DO ATTEND, GIRLS ARE LESS LIKELY TO STAY IN SCHOOL TO COMPLETE THEIR EDUCATION.

A study by Innovations in Poverty Action on land disputes indicated that women have less access to land than men in several Liberian counties, in addition to being less likely than men to report disputes or boundary markers on their properties.<sup>36</sup> The County Development Agenda reports (2008) also cited women's land ownership as a priority issue in several counties. While there are laws to grant equal access to women and men in terms of land ownership, these laws are not always followed.<sup>37</sup> Reports allude to the impact of cultural traditions that impede women's abilities to own land, specifically through inheritance.<sup>38</sup>

## BUSINESS

The majority of women in the developing world maintain insecure, low-wage jobs, with a small minority of women enjoying senior positions.<sup>39</sup> Such gender discrimination in the work force negatively impacts access to land and loans and limits political participation.<sup>40</sup>

Entrepreneurship is one key way to achieve economic empowerment. Starting and maintaining a business can provide women with higher wages, increased access to necessary resources, and greater food and personal security, such as protection from gender-based violence.<sup>41</sup> Further, studies indicate that when the share of household income controlled by women increases, children benefit, thereby positively affecting the health and well-being of future generations.<sup>42</sup>

Currently, there is little information available that focuses on women and businesses in Liberia. In many rural counties, there are no banking institutions or access points for securing the necessary capital or resources to start a business. NGOs and government ministries might offer programs to assist women, but it is unclear both if there are resources and if women have access.

## AGRICULTURE

In 2010<sup>43</sup>, 43 percent of the agricultural labor force in developing countries consisted of women. However, due to unequal access to seeds, fertilizers, and tools, on average women produce 20–30 percent less than men.<sup>44</sup> If women enjoyed equal access to such necessary inputs, agricultural output in developing countries is projected to

increase upwards of 4 percent, thereby reducing “the number of undernourished people...by as much as 17 percent, translating to up to 150 million fewer hungry people.”<sup>45</sup>

Agriculture has been a constant industry in Liberia's history. Postconflict agriculture has consisted largely of subsistence farming. Echoing women's access issues globally, Liberia's, County Development Agenda reports (2008) cites access to seed, fertilizer, and land tenure issues as barriers to agricultural production. It also has been documented in some counties that cash crops are typically managed by men, while other less lucrative crops are managed by women. While there is fertile land in the rural counties of Liberia for farming, it is unclear how much women are able to access information about programs that aim to help them in farming or agricultural production.

As former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton noted at the 2011 Asian–Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit, “We need to correct the problem of information asymmetry—making sure women are informed about opportunities for trade and orienting technical assistance programs so they serve women as well as men.”

## Liberia's Freedom of Information Act

Following the signing of the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, Liberia has made notable progress in creating an initial framework to reverse a century of conflict, poor governance, and widespread suppression of basic freedoms. However, Liberians remain concerned about the lack of institutionalized change as the country continues to struggle with the challenges of reconstruction, including reestablishment of trust in government, combating corruption, and creating strong institutions. Liberians have asserted that a lack of information exacerbates fear and hinders citizen engagement, media, and government efficiency and effectiveness.



Recognizing the potential for democratic backsliding and continuing corruption, the government of Liberia and key civil society and media representatives identified the right of access to information as a critical tool for transparency and for mitigating dangers and a fundamental human right guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, and the Liberian Constitution. Recognizing the importance of access to information, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf signed the Freedom of Information Act on Sept. 16, 2010. With the passage of the act, Liberia became the first county in West Africa and the sixth in Africa to establish a comprehensive right to information law.

Access to information in Liberia refers to the “right of the public to request, receive, review, reproduce, and retain records and documents held by public bodies and private entities performing public functions or receiving public funding.”<sup>46</sup> Under Liberia’s 2010 Freedom of Information Act, every person, irrespective of nationality or residence, has the right to request and receive information. According to the law, all public information should be made available upon request or proactively disclosed unless it falls under a clearly defined exemption. The proactive disclosure provisions list a series of documents that must be made publicly available, without waiting for specific requests.

Citizens requesting information do not have to provide a reason for their request or show a personal or legal relation to the document. Requests can be made in person, via telephone, or electronically, and the requester can state the form in which they want the information provided. Each public authority is required to identify the appropriate member of staff who will act as designated personnel, often called the information officer. Moreover, the Liberian Freedom of Information Law mandates a duty to provide assistance to members of the public in making requests, especially illiterate and physically challenged applicants.

Upon receiving a request for information, the law gives the agency 30 days to provide the information or a denial, with a potential for an extension. The law safeguards the right of people who are denied information or are dissatisfied in any way to request an internal review,

seek an appeal before the information commissioner, and request a judicial review.

While Liberia has made great strides in advancing the right of access to information, there remains significant work in order to institutionalize and sustain progress achieved and to assure that the benefits of the law are being enjoyed by all. Low capacity, lack of resources, fluctuating political commitment, and low awareness among public administration and the general public continue to hamper further advancement.



Liberian women march for their right of access to information.

Photo: Alphonsus Zeon

**IN SEVERAL LIBERIAN COUNTIES, WOMEN HAVE LESS ACCESS TO LAND THAN MEN, IN ADDITION TO BEING LESS LIKELY THAN MEN TO REPORT DISPUTES OR BOUNDARY MARKERS ON THEIR PROPERTIES.**



A woman speaks at a Carter Center-sponsored community meeting.  
*Photo: Pewee Flomoku*

# STUDY METHODOLOGY

The Carter Center and its local partner, Women’s NGO Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL), conducted an innovative research study to identify the cultural, structural, and legal barriers that women face that impede access to critical information. The study also helped determine women’s information needs and ideas for overcoming obstacles. The research study is designed to test the hypothesis that women are unable to exercise the fundamental right of access to information with the same facility as men and to identify the structural and agency factors, including specific obstacles that women face and the particular information women most need to achieve greater economic empowerment. In light of the study design, findings emerged conveying perceptions of how well-informed women were of their rights generally (specifically, related to socioeconomic rights), their information deficits and needs, and the cultural, structural, and policy barriers that exist. Importantly, the findings reflected the perceptions of those interviewed and illustrate trends, but without statistical sampling, they may not be fully representative. The study is anticipated to be employed in multiple countries, including Liberia, Guatemala, and Bangladesh.

The research design utilizes multiple methods, relying on both existing secondary data and the collection of primary data through interviews with heads of key women’s and thematic organizations, expert opinion interviews, and nonparticipant observation of access to information practices in relevant government ministries and agencies and accompanying interviews of the public servants and “customers” who enter the public offices.

THE STUDY IS DESIGNED TO TEST THE HYPOTHESIS THAT WOMEN ARE UNABLE TO EXERCISE THE FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT OF ACCESS TO INFORMATION WITH THE SAME FACILITY AS MEN AND TO IDENTIFY RELATED STRUCTURAL AND AGENCY FACTORS.

## Types of Data

*Secondary data* is collected in advance of beginning the in-country research and comes from desk research of existing studies, where they exist, and of the situation facing women. Data on the locations of the study are also examined.

*Interviews with community leaders* (also called elite interviews) are conducted with community leaders, representing both women's and men's/combined organizations. A series of structured and open-ended interview questions have been developed, and the interview schedule is reviewed by the in-country research team for appropriate language/cultural references prior to commencing interviews.

*Expert opinion interviews* are gathered through interviews with thought leaders and thematic experts, such as ministry officials, relevant nongovernmental organizations or multilateral institutions, or university professors. Local researchers are provided a brief questionnaire for quantitative responses as well as open-ended probing questions.

*Nonparticipant observation*, a source of primary data, includes the in-country research team developing a list of potential public agencies to gather the data, assuring representation from each of the four substantive areas under review. Research teams visit the selected agency at least three times on different days and at various times of the day/week. In-country researchers will note who is obtaining the information (i.e., women or men) and what barriers to access are observed. The field researchers also engage in short interviews of the public servants working at the agency and the men and women visiting the agency for information/services.

Local researchers—trained by The Carter Center—conduct assessments in a mix of rural and urban areas in four counties and the capital city. At the conclusion of data gathering, a preliminary analysis of the findings is completed and shared with local stakeholders through a validation process in each locale where the research took

place. The validation meeting provides an opportunity for the community to reflect on whether the findings are consistent with their own realities as well as to gather additional qualitative information from the discussion and comments. The validation meetings include stakeholders from government agencies, local experts, and civil society organization leaders.

Following the validation meetings, the full data sets and qualitative commentary are analyzed and findings readied for release. As part of the methodology, the initial release of the final findings will occur at a multistakeholder meeting, providing the opportunity to discuss the results of the study, jointly consider the problems, and begin to develop considering potential solutions/recommendations for improvement. The areas of subsequent programming focus will be dependent on the priority findings from the study and the validation exercises.

## Focus Areas

Economic empowerment for women is a critical issue around the world. Thus, as a means of targeting the study and making it more understandable/meaningful for interview participants, much of the focus of the study is on information for economic empowerment. However, we are aware that in certain contexts, other issues—such as violence against women or access to justice—are of equal or overriding importance. As such, the research is designed to allow for other critical areas to emerge.

Within the area of access to information for economic empowerment, we engaged four interconnected themes. (See page 20.)

In addition, the study seeks to identify other issues where public information may be of paramount importance to women in that country, including violence against women or access to justice.

<b>Examples: Economic Empowerment Themes</b>	
<b>Education</b>	Are women able to access information on education policies and school budgets?
	Are women able to access information on curriculum, staffing, materials, and nutritional programs?
	Are women able to access information about scholarship and educational opportunities?
	Are there vocational training programs available to women?
<b>Land</b>	Are women able to access information on land policy?
	Are women able to access information on their rights to own/inherit land?
	Are women able to access land titles?
<b>Business</b>	Are women able to access information on the government procedures for starting a small business?
	Are women able to access policies and procedures for licensing?
	Are women able to access policies and procedures for government sponsored loans?
	Are women able to access information relevant to the trade/market of interest, such as how many like businesses exist; taxation; import costs etc.?
<b>Agriculture</b>	Are women able to access information about pricing for goods?
	Are women able to access information about government-sponsored programs for seeds and fertilizers?
	Are women able to access information about water for irrigation and related water policies?

## **Pilot Study 2013**

The methodology for the Women and Access to Information Study was first developed in early 2013 as a truncated version of the full study reported here. The initial methodology was utilized in the pilot version to examine the feasibility of the study and test questions for cultural and contextual relevance, specifically in Liberia. The pilot study included interviews with 30 community leaders, including men (n=5) and women (n=25) representing local civil society organizations. Nonparticipant

observational data was collected from the birth registry department and business registry office and triangulated with other data sets in analyzing and validating pilot study results. Organizations that were focused on land, agriculture, business, or birth certificates/personal identification were selected for interviews, representing gatekeepers to economic development for women. Findings indicated that women in Liberia face a multitude of barriers in accessing information.

Following the abridged study, the Center convened a meeting of 50 women civil society leaders in Liberia to validate the small research study findings. The truncated pilot study and validation provided essential feedback for revising and perfecting the methodology prior to the full

**AT THE CONCLUSION OF DATA GATHERING, A PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS WAS COMPLETED AND SHARED WITH STAKEHOLDERS THROUGH A VALIDATION PROCESS IN EACH LOCALE.**

implementation of the study. In consultation with WONGOSOL, The Carter Center worked to employ the full study methodology from December 2013 through May 2014.

## Selection of Counties for Study and Background

The methodology called for regional sample diversity. By collecting full data sets within each region, a case study for each county and Monrovia was completed to identify priority issues within those areas. This allowed for a comparison of areas to see whether there were unique factors affecting women's access to information. These regional findings were then aggregated to provide insights into the status of women and the right of access to information at the national level, identifying perceptions and trends across Liberia.

While aggregate findings may indicate that, overall, women do not access information at the same rate as men, one county might identify "lack of awareness" or "fear" as a major barrier and priority issue, while the prevalence of this obstacle may be lower in other regions. If examining only aggregate findings, the specific contexts and priorities at the local level can potentially be overlooked.

Moreover, in selecting the sample counties, we sought to promote inclusion of different religious, indigenous, and cultural groups making up the overall population of Liberia. Criteria for determining the counties included regional diversity, rural versus urban, existence of traditional societies, border-issues, etc. Based on consultations with WONGOSOL and the Ministry of Gender, Bomi, Grand Gedeh, Lofa, and Nimba were selected as the sample counties, in addition to metropolitan Monrovia.

Monrovia was included in the sample to provide a base for comparing urban and rural areas. Roughly one-third of the population of Liberia resides in metropolitan Monrovia, making it an important area for consideration. Moreover, all primary ministry and agency buildings are located within Monrovia. While most agencies have sub-offices in each of the 15 counties, each agency is headquartered in the capital city.



## Research Questions

The research questions were designed to assess the extent to which women access information compared to men, identify extant barriers in accessing public information, and ascertain the priority types of information needed for increasing women's economic empowerment. More specifically:

1. Do women access critical government information less frequently than men?
2. What are the main obstacles facing women in the exercise of the right to information?
3. What information would be most valuable to women for achieving greater economic empowerment, with particular emphasis on education, land, agriculture, and starting a business?
4. If the identified obstacles are overcome and meaningful information is accessible, would that contribute to increased economic empowerment?

# Data Collection

WONGOSOL, with great assistance from the Carter Center’s Liberia Access to Information field office, was primarily responsible for identifying and supporting local researchers, ensuring data collection according to the research methodology and organizing validation activities to complete the study. A team of 10 local researchers were trained to employ the research methodology in their local communities. Each county team, and the Monrovia team, was made up of two researchers responsible for conducting interviews, making field observations and transcribing data for analysis. Researchers collected three types of data: interviews with community leaders, expert opinion interviews, and nonparticipant observations. The field researchers were provided with forms to fill in to record the responses of the interviewees as well as to collect observational data. These forms enabled data to be collected more systematically and uniformly across regions. The interview schedule was reviewed by the in-country research team prior to commencing the interviews. Once the forms were collected, the data was then manually input into an electronic spreadsheet file for analysis.

## INTERVIEWS WITH COMMUNITY LEADERS

Interviews were conducted with community leaders in all five regions: Bomi, Grand Gedeh, Lofa, Nimba, and Monrovia). In total, 75 interviews were conducted, with 15 interviews taking place in each county and another 15 in Monrovia. Community leaders were identified as those representing key local organizations or positions, including but not limited to those leading women-focused groups, religious leaders, community development representatives, traditional leaders, and other community leaders at the local level. A series of structured and open-ended interview questions were developed to help answer the research questions. Researchers were instructed to record answers verbatim to ensure that the respondent’s meaning and sentiments were carried through to analysis.

## EXPERT OPINION INTERVIEWS

A total of 60 expert opinion interviews were conducted across the five regions. Researchers were instructed to identify two–three experts for each economic empowerment area to interview plus other potential experts related to women’s rights, totaling 12 expert interviews per county and Monrovia. Experts were defined as university professors, nongovernmental organization program staff, higher-level government representatives, and other individuals who had demonstrated expertise in one or more of the economic empowerment areas and/or women’s rights. These experts were asked a series of open-ended questions, many of which mirrored those asked of community leaders and employees at nonparticipant observation sites. The researchers also probed the experts on the links between access to information and economic development based on their experience and background.

## NONPARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

The in-country research team developed a list of potential public agencies where the nonparticipant observation data gathering could take place. When developing this list, the Liberian teams ensured representation from each of the four substantive areas under review as well as those interrelated to women’s economic empowerment. The Carter Center then worked with the researchers in choosing the final site visit list.

Once the public agency list was finalized, researchers visited each of these sites three times, on different days, at different times. Researchers were instructed to vary the day and time in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of what an average day at each site would look like in terms of interactions, presence of men versus women, and the types of information requested. Researchers took notes on who was obtaining the information (i.e., women or men) and which barriers to access were observed. The form also provided brief interview questions for researchers to engage with public employees as well as visitors to the agency. The employees were asked what types of information men and women requested, in order to identify any variance. In addition, employees were asked to comment on whether women accessed information at a different rate than did

**IN SELECTING THE SAMPLE COUNTIES, WE SOUGHT TO PROMOTE INCLUSION OF DIFFERENT RELIGIOUS, INDIGENOUS, AND CULTURAL GROUPS MAKING UP THE OVERALL POPULATION OF LIBERIA.**

## THE LOCAL VALIDATION MEETING IN EACH STUDY REGION ENCOURAGED COMMUNITY AND PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK ON THE FINDINGS SPECIFIC TO THAT REGION.

men, and if so, to explain their reasoning. Researchers were instructed to interview each employee only once, even if they encountered the same employee on multiple site visits. Male and female visitors to the agency were asked about the purpose of their visit and were asked to characterize their overall experience in engaging with the agency. Visitor engagement was intended to provide insight into frequency and ease of women gaining access to critical information at the sample agencies under observation.

### Analysis

Collecting multiple types of data allowed for triangulation during analysis. The outcomes from each source were compared against the other two sources—as well as in light of secondary data collected—to test the reliability of the findings, increasing the confidence that these findings accurately represented perceptions and sentiment on the ground regarding women and access to information.

The analysis process began by identifying emergent themes through a grounded-theory approach. Quantitative and qualitative data were included from all three

be the most critical to women’s economic empowerment, these preliminary findings were presented for validation. The Liberian research team coordinated and executed a series of focus groups to validate the research findings. The local validation meeting in each study region encouraged community and participant feedback on the findings specific to their region. This process allowed researchers, participants and community stakeholders to discuss any limitations and follow-up questions based on the initial analysis of the data, thereby contextualizing the findings. Any questions surrounding the findings were also presented to validation participants for clarification.

Once the validations were complete, all data sets were reviewed through a quality assurance process to ensure the validity and reliability of the data for final analysis. Data sources were then analyzed for existing and reoccurring patterns. Analysts utilized an emic focus in reviewing qualitative content, ensuring the respondent’s point of view was kept intact as much as possible through direct transcription from the survey instruments completed by the researchers, sensitivity to local language and meaning, and examining context provided by researcher observations.



Validation participants review barriers for women in Lofa County.

Photo: Bertee Forkpabio

data sets to derive the preliminary findings for each county. Once preliminary analysis provided (a) the perception of respondents on whether women access information at the same rate as men; (b) the key barriers identified by respondents to explain differential access; and (c) the types of information respondents believe to



**Nimba County validation participants share their group's review of the priority information for women.**

*Photo: Christina Doe*





The South East Women's Development Association gathered at the International Colloquium on Women's Empowerment, Leadership, and Development in 2009.

Photo: Pewee Flomoku

# FINDINGS

The findings in this report were derived through the collection and analysis of data in the four counties and the city of Monrovia. The data is presented as both a national aggregate, to identify trends and commonalities, as well as by county/city.

## Aggregate Findings

The data collected for the Women and Access to Information Study in Liberia includes 75 total interviews with community leaders, 60 expert opinion interviews, and 117 nonparticipant observations at 32 public agencies. During the nonparticipant observations, 177 agency employees, 104 female visitors, and 125 male visitors were briefly interviewed.

### COMMUNITY LEADERS

Among the 75 community leaders interviewed, 77.3 percent were female. Community leaders tended to work on a

myriad of issues, including but not limited to women's rights (76 percent), education (60 percent), agriculture (53.3 percent), local participation (48 percent), starting businesses (48 percent), and land (21.3 percent). When asked about the groups they serve, the community leaders indicated that 24 percent serve women and 76 percent serve both men and women. Participants represented organizations and communities ranging from two to 3,000 members and 82.7 percent of these groups hold affiliations at the local, national, or international levels. In total, the community leaders claimed to represent approximately 18,500 people, with some likely overlap.

# THE FINDINGS INDICATE OVERWHELMINGLY THAT WOMEN DO NOT ACCESS INFORMATION AS EASILY OR AS FREQUENTLY AS DO MEN.

## EXPERTS

Of the 60 experts interviewed for this study, 86.7 percent were male. When asked for clarification, researchers indicated that largely, individuals regarded as having expertise in key development areas were men. Moreover, securing interviews with experts in the more rural counties was difficult, as these individuals often are concentrated in the urban Monrovia or might have been unavailable/traveling for business. Of those experts interviewed, 15 percent were academic affiliates or university professors; 20 percent represented a nongovernmental organization or the international community; and 55 percent were higher-level government officials. In terms of areas of expertise, 61.7 percent identified education, with the rest of the experts representing a fairly equal distribution between agriculture (28.3 percent), land (26.7 percent), and starting a business (23.3 percent), respectively.

## NONPARTICIPANT OBSERVATIONS

Local researchers selected agencies that most closely related to the economic empowerment areas under review: agriculture, education, land, and starting a business. Additionally, researchers also included in the sample other offices interrelated to the development process or other key economic issues, such as the superintendent or mayor's office, if applicable. The following agencies were nonparticipant observation sites in at least one county during the study:

- Land Commission
- Liberia Business Association (LIBA)
- Liberia Business Registry
- Ministry of Agriculture
- Ministry of Commerce and Industry
- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Finance
- Ministry of Gender and Development
- Ministry of Internal Affairs
- Ministry of Labor
- Ministry of Land, Mines & Energy
- Ministry of Public Works

Researchers interviewed 177 public officers at these agencies, representing administrative staff (29.9 percent), mid-level coordinators and administrators (27.7 percent), inspectors (10.7 percent), monitors and surveyors (10.1 percent), ministers and high-level officials (8.5 percent), and reception staff (5.6 percent), in addition to other personnel that deal with agency "users." A total of 229 interviews were conducted with people visiting the agencies, including 125 male visitors and 104 female visitors. Women and men visiting the agencies were present for a variety of reasons, ranging from seeking information, lodging formal complaints, or following up on pending cases, to visiting family or friends who worked at the ministries.

## Evidence of Inequities in Access to Information

All three respondent groups within the sample, community leaders, experts, and employees at observation sites were asked whether women access information at the same rate as men. The findings indicate overwhelmingly that women **do not** access information as easily or as frequently as do men. Overall, 78.7 percent of community leaders said that women do not access information at the same rate. When asked to recall an experience where they had personally attempted to gain access to government-held information, 54.7 percent of community leaders, (mostly women) reported delays, difficulties, or never receiving information requested. Community leaders also were asked to think of a time when they needed information but did not try to attain it. Of those respondents, 44.9 percent said they did not trust the system or thought the process was too difficult to complete; 18.4 percent felt powerless, feeling that even if they gained information it would not affect change; and 14.3 percent did not know where to go or how to ask for information.

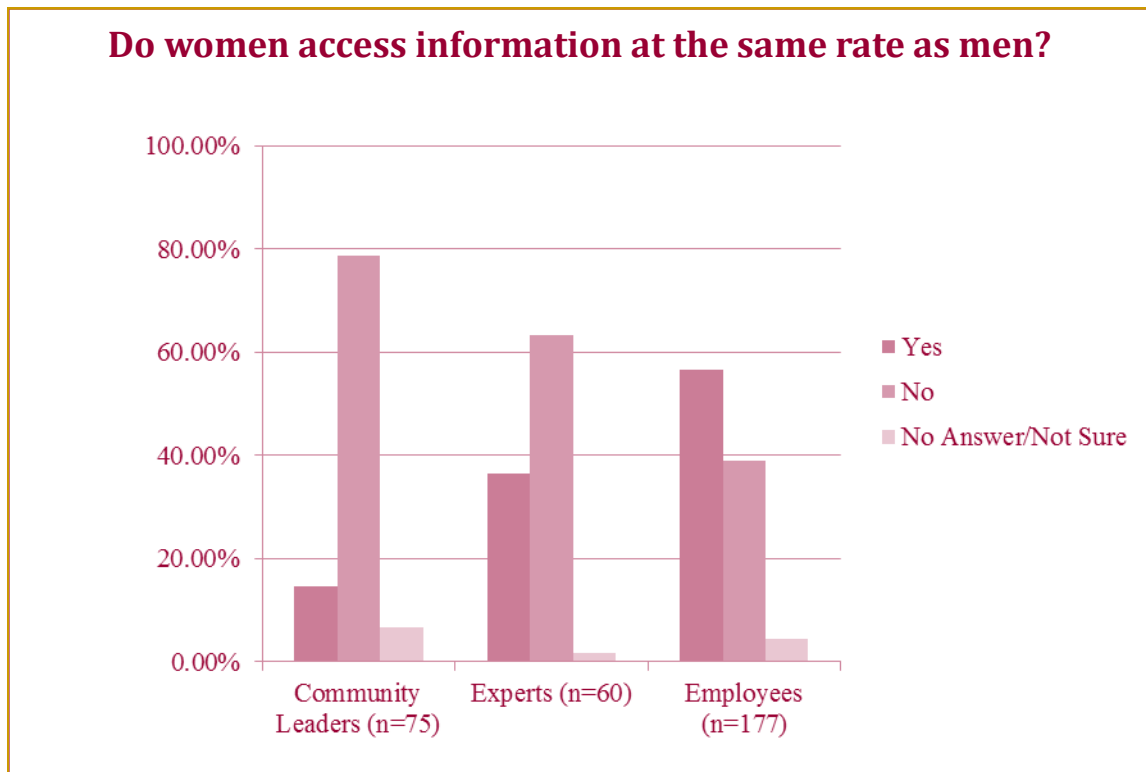
Experts (63.3 percent) also indicated that women access information less frequently than men. Of those experts that believe women access information at the same rate as men (36.7 percent), 20 were male and one was female. At public agencies included in the sample, perception was more divided. In fact, 56.5 percent of employees interviewed felt that men and women have equal access, while 39 percent felt they did not. In reviewing the qualitative data and accompanying narrative, it was clear that many employees who answered in the affirmative—that women receive information as often as men—were referring to equal coverage under the law as well as to internal policies at their agency for responding to requests or facilitating processes, rather than whether, in practice, women were accessing public information.

With regard to those coming into the public spaces, 59.9 percent of employees interviewed responded that women come into their agency as often as men; however, observations at these sites revealed that, overall, men

entered twice as often as did women. This variance strikingly demonstrates the differences between perception and real-time observation. When disaggregated, the disparity between men and women entering public agencies at the county level was even higher. Notably, when asked about women’s entry into public spaces, these employees identified cultural and structural barriers that would keep women from approaching the agency.

While men entered public agencies more often than did women, their reasons for entering were comparable, with 75 percent of women and 61.6 percent of men seeking information or completing a process such as scholarship application or business registration.

Women who entered the public agencies where researchers were observing received information with no issues 41.3 percent of the time, 29.8 percent experienced setbacks or difficulties, and 10.7 percent never received any information. Of the interviewees, 14.4 percent were not responsive.



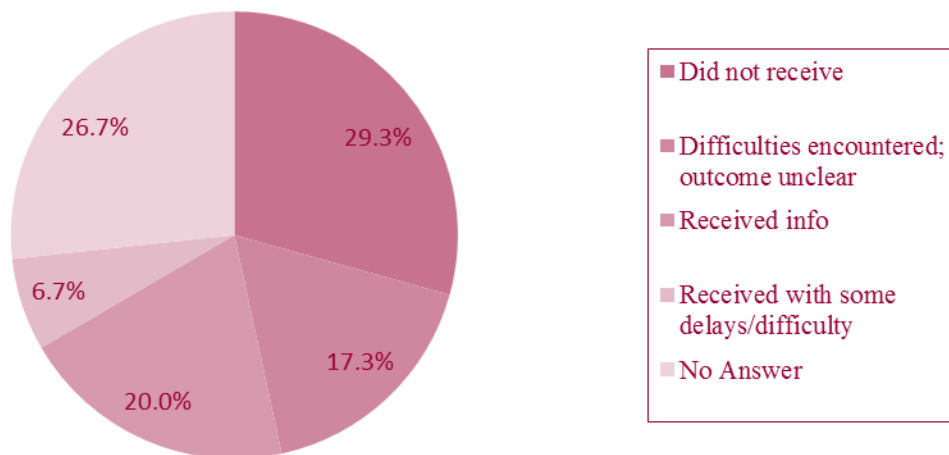
**WHILE MEN ENTERED PUBLIC AGENCIES MORE OFTEN THAN DID WOMEN, THEIR REASONS FOR ENTERING WERE COMPARABLE, WITH 75 PERCENT OF WOMEN AND 61.6 PERCENT OF MEN SEEKING INFORMATION OR COMPLETING A PROCESS.**

## MINISTRIES SHOULD RELAY INFORMATION TO WOMEN, AND GOVERNMENT SHOULD BEAR THE RESPONSIBILITY TO INFORM THE ILLITERATE POPULATION, ESPECIALLY WOMEN AND DROPPED-OUT GIRLS, IN LOCAL DIALECTS.

Community leaders also were asked to think of a time when they personally tried to access information at a government agency or authority's office. Many community leaders (46.7 percent) indicated that they encountered difficulties or did not receive the information they needed; 6.7 percent received the information but encountered some difficulty or delay; and approximately 20 percent were able to access the requested information.

barrier that some women can overcome, a large barrier that was nearly impossible to overcome, or not a barrier at all. Once the magnitude of each barrier had been assessed, the community leaders were then asked to select the three greatest barriers facing women in accessing information in their region.

### Community Leaders: What happened when you tried to get information? (n=75)



## Cultural and Structural Barriers

Community leaders were provided with a list of 18 potential barriers to consider (see Appendix) and offered the opportunity to identify any additional barriers to women exercising their right to information. Participants were requested to consider each barrier individually and assess whether that barrier was a small

When potential obstacles were mentioned, 86.7 percent of the community leader respondents indicated that confidence to make a request is a large barrier that is nearly impossible to overcome. Community leaders also felt that illiteracy (85.3 percent) and that “not knowing where to go/how to ask” (77.3 percent) were large barriers that are nearly impossible to overcome. A community leader from Nimba suggested, “[All] concerned ministries should relay information to women in the appropriate manner; government should bear the responsibility to inform the illiterate population, especially women and dropped-out girls, in the various local dialects. . . .”

Potential obstacles listed that were not barriers, according to the community leader respondents, included women not allowed into public buildings (42.7 percent) and women not supposed to ask (34.7 percent). However, interestingly, even more respondents (45.3 percent) felt that “women not supposed to ask” was a great barrier nearly impossible to overcome.

When asked to rank the top three barriers facing women in the exercise of their right to information, community leaders across all five regions most frequently identified the following:

1. Illiteracy
2. Fear of asking
3. Not knowing where to go/how to ask

When aggregating those activities related to time, i.e. childcare, housework, and being “too busy,” this became the fourth most frequently noted barrier. Mobility and distance to the public office also was often noted as a leading barrier to women’s access to information.

Experts confirmed that lack of education and the prevalence of illiteracy are major barriers to women in exercising the right to information. In addition, they felt that cultural and traditional practices, as well as lack of awareness, were among the largest obstacles. Notably, 26.7 percent of the experts interviewed felt that women were largely disinterested or had an “inferiority complex.” Most experts contextualized these labels by acknowledging that access to education and skills development was likely the explanation for women’s low capacity for engagement. Experts also were asked to describe the impact of the continued inaccessibility of government-held information for women. The majority of expert responses fell into three categories:

- ◆ 60 percent said that women will be deprived opportunities and gender inequalities will be perpetuated.
- ◆ 58.3 percent mentioned that overall development will be stultified and, thus, all of Liberia society will suffer.
- ◆ A few experts indicated that violence against women would continue.

When experts were asked if overcoming identified obstacles and making information accessible would contribute to increased economic empowerment for women, 98.3 percent responded in the affirmative.

Qualitative data indicated that many of the barriers to women accessing critical information are interrelated. One community leader explained, “Men also caused women to not be educated, by keeping women in the back taking care of children.” This leader’s sentiment describes the impact of multiple vectors of oppression, including culturally influenced gender norms, lack of education, and the burden of domestic duties on women’s empowerment.

Terms such as “weak minded” or “inferior” were prevalent throughout qualitative responses—including from government officials—in all five regions of the study as a means of explaining differential access to information for women. However, response context and researcher notes suggest that often these terms might speak to capacity and not necessarily to inherent traits of women. That being said, all three samples—responses from experts, community leaders, and agency employees—contained at least one response that described supposed innate inferiority of women in comparison to men, highlighting the fact that gender-based oppression stratifies all levels of influence.

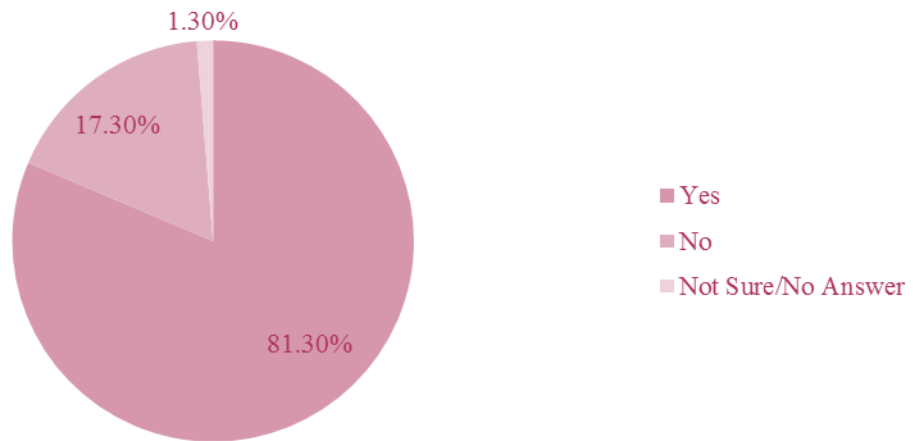
## Priority Information for Women’s Economic Empowerment

The majority of community leaders indicated that national (81.3 percent) and local (80 percent) government holds information that women need to better their lives.

WHEN EXPERTS WERE ASKED IF OVERCOMING IDENTIFIED OBSTACLES AND MAKING INFORMATION ACCESSIBLE WOULD CONTRIBUTE TO INCREASED ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT FOR WOMEN, 98.3 PERCENT RESPONDED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE.

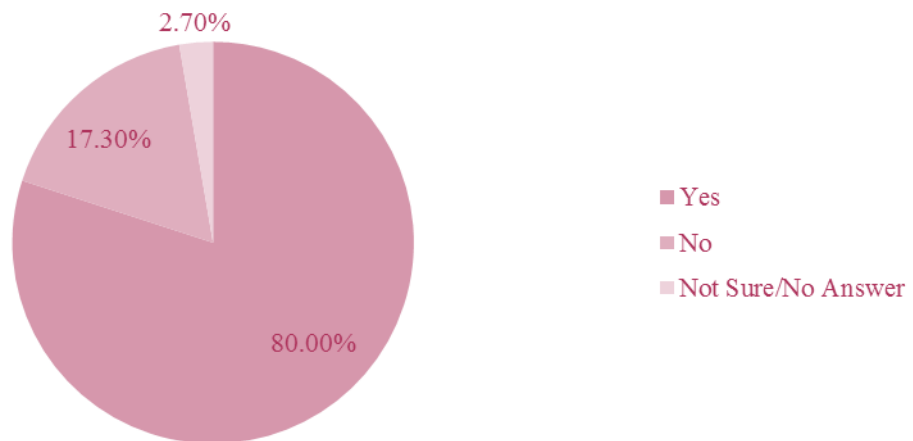
**Do you think that the national government holds information women need to better their lives?**

**Community Leaders (n=75)**



**Do you think that the local government holds information women need to better their lives?**

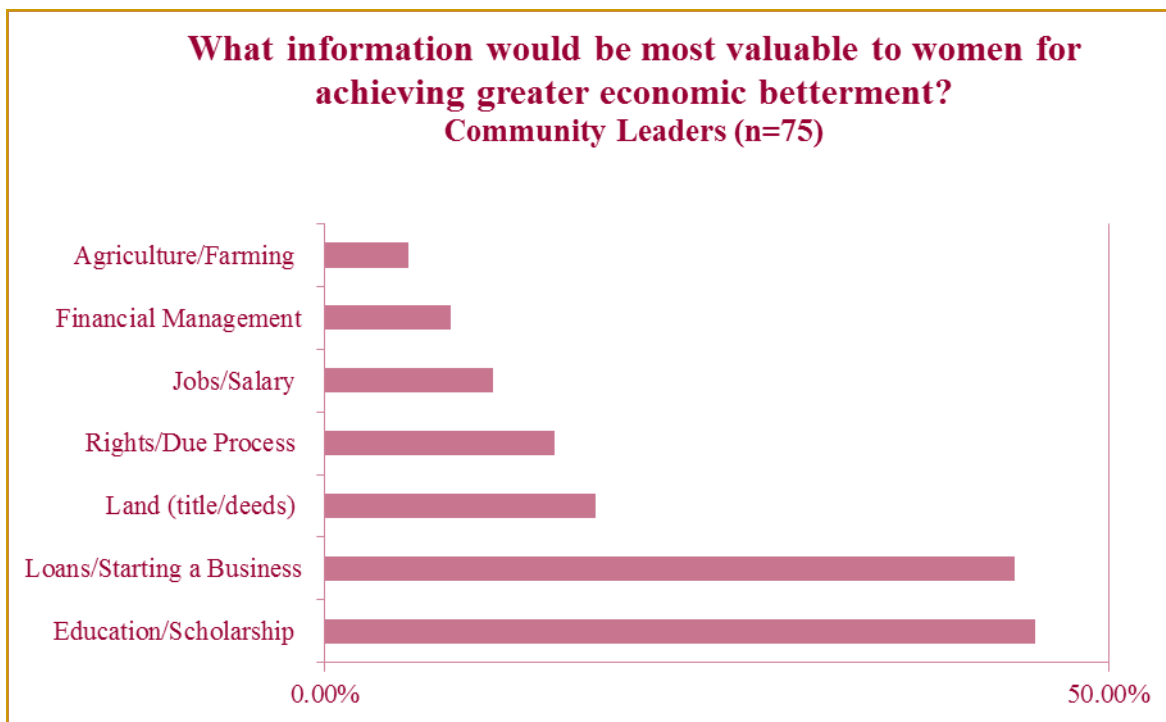
**Community Leaders (n=75)**



According to community leaders, the information most valuable to women for achieving greater economic empowerment relates to education, loans and business management, and land and property ownership. Regrettably, community leaders also identified these three types of information as the most difficult for women to access.

According to community leaders, women are **very aware** of their rights:

- ◆ To be able to join groups or associations (60 percent)
- ◆ To go to court if any rights are violated (48 percent)
- ◆ To education (45.3 percent)
- ◆ To work, under good working conditions/reasonable working hours (45.3 percent)



Experts also were asked to comment on priority types of information, but the results were too heavily influenced by their area of expertise. When asked to comment on the most important types of information for women’s economic empowerment, almost all identified information from their own field (e.g. education, land, or agriculture) as the most important for women. The question posed encouraged the experts to respond based on their own knowledge. In light of the poorly drafted questions and this apparent bias, all responses from experts to this question were removed from the sample.

These same community leaders indicated that women are **somewhat aware** of their rights:

- ◆ To information (58.7 percent)
- ◆ To be treated equally with all others (free from discrimination) (56 percent)
- ◆ To be free from violence (domestic, violence against women, etc.) (53.3 percent)

However, it is important to note that when asked about knowledge of rights, the distribution of responses related to “somewhat aware” was quite even across all rights. In other words, at least 40 percent of all community leaders indicated that women were somewhat aware of each of the eight rights.

Finally, when asked about rights that women are **not at all aware**, the community leaders said:

- ◆ Right to own property (18.7 percent)
- ◆ Right to go to court if any rights are violated (12 percent)
- ◆ Right to work, under good working conditions/reasonable working hours (10.7 percent)

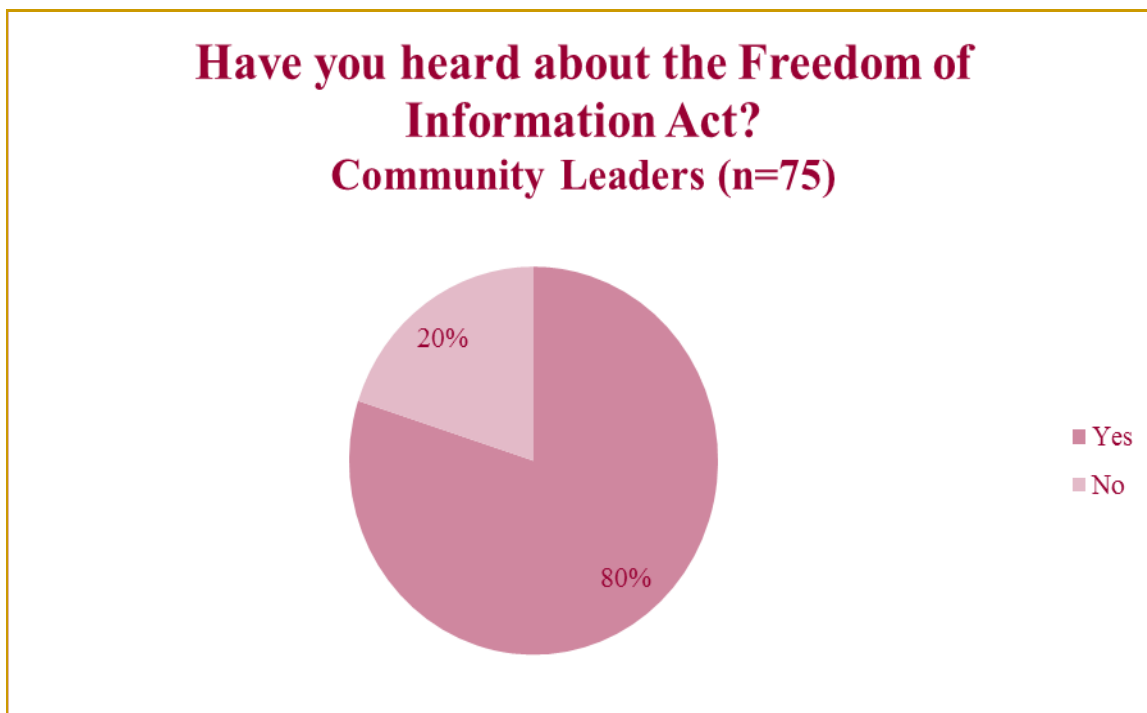
## Awareness of Rights

Community leaders were asked to comment on women’s awareness of their socioeconomic rights within each region. Specifically, community leaders were asked to assess rights (see Appendix) on the following scale: women not at all aware; somewhat aware; or very aware.

## FOR THE RIGHT TO INFORMATION, 68 PERCENT OF THE COMMUNITY LEADERS SAID THAT WOMEN WRIT LARGE ARE EITHER NOT OR ONLY SOMEWHAT AWARE OF THE RIGHT TO INFORMATION.

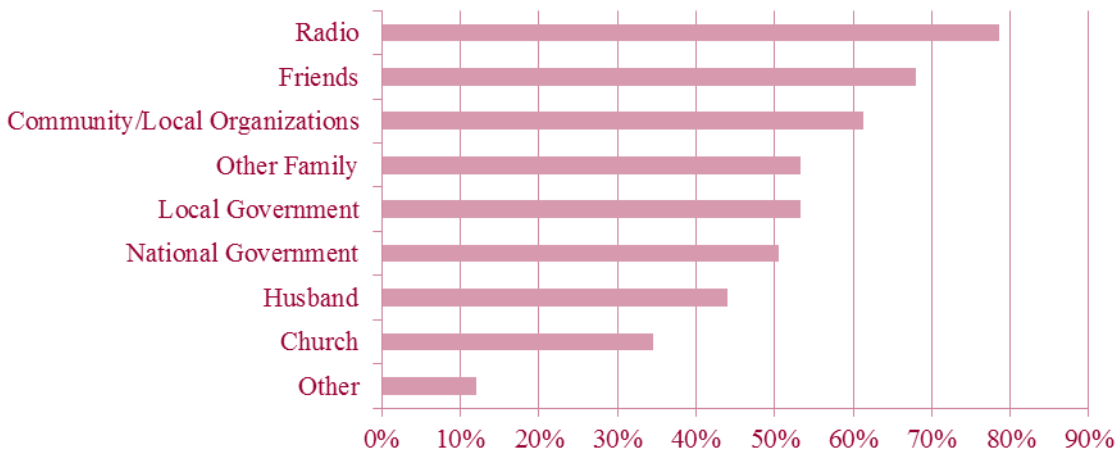
The right to be free from violence and the right of access to information were close behind, with 9.3 percent, respectively, stating that women are not at all aware. For the right to information, while 68 percent of the community leaders said that women writ large are either not or only somewhat aware of the right to information, 80 percent of these same leaders noted that they themselves had heard of the Freedom of Information Act. Approximately 50 percent heard about the act from radio, while on the other end of the media spectrum, only about 7 percent reported learning about the act through the newspaper or “dailies.”

Many (34.7 percent) community leaders were exposed to the act through public forums or government meetings or workshops, and 26.7 percent of community leaders learned through specific awareness-building efforts around the act in their county or region. Around 11 percent of participants found out about the act from a friend, husband, or another community leader (word of mouth).





## Where do women currently get information for greater economic empowerment? Community Leaders (n=75)



When asked where women currently get their information, community leaders most often noted radio, friends, and community/local organizations. For the “other” category, the community leaders noted community forums or youth centers as well as town hall meetings.

## Region-Specific Findings

The following findings are specific to each county where data was collected (Bomi, Grand Gedeh, Lofa, and Nimba counties) in addition to the city of Monrovia.

**AT THE VALIDATION OF PRELIMINARY FINDINGS, PARTICIPANTS DISAGREED WITH THE PUBLIC OFFICIALS’ SENTIMENTS, STATING THAT WOMEN ARE VERY INTERESTED BUT ARE RESTRICTED BY CULTURAL MORES AND STEREOTYPES.**

**SOME PARTICIPANTS EXPLAINED THAT WOMEN WERE LESS LIKELY TO VISIT AGENCIES, AS WOMEN WERE FEARFUL OF BEING LABELED WITH THE STEREOTYPE THAT THEY WERE SEEKING ROMANTIC PARTNERSHIPS WITH OFFICE STAFF.**

**BOMI COUNTY FINDINGS**

*Evidence of Inequities in Access to Information*

In Bomi County, community leaders unanimously (100 percent) agreed that women **do not** access information at same rate as men. The majority (66.7 percent) of experts also confirmed that women access critical information less frequently than men. At public agencies under observation, 61.1 percent of those employees interviewed correctly believed that women come in as often as men. (Observation noted that women visit the public agencies only slightly less often than men.)

However, men who visited the agency reported much more positive experiences, gaining access to requested information with little to no difficulty 83.3 percent of the time, compared to 30 percent of women. In fact, 50 percent of women claimed to experience difficulties or delays or did not receive information at all.

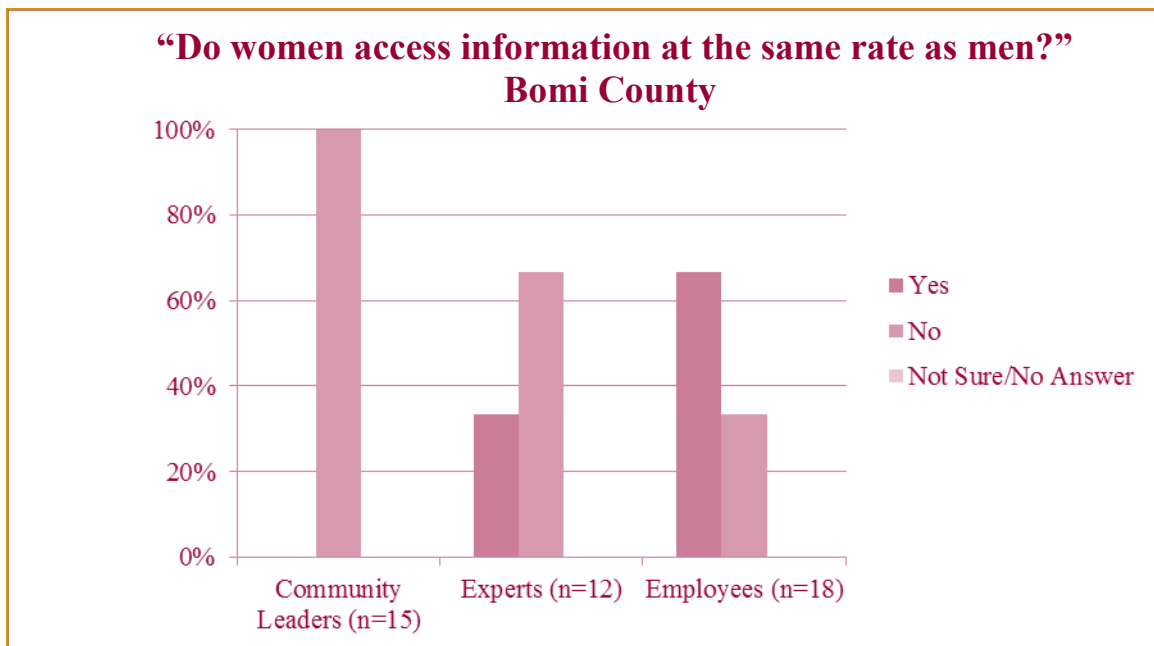
When asked about accessing information, 66.7 percent of the employees felt that women and men access information at the same rate, while 33.3 percent stated that women do not. Of those who believed women access information at the same rate, respondents indicated that

as an agency, they treat requestors/visitors equally, regardless of gender. Those employees who identified barriers to women’s access cited disinterest on the part of women in requesting government-held information. At the validation of preliminary findings, participants disagreed with the public official’s sentiments, stating that women are very interested but are restricted by cultural mores and stereotypes.

At the validation, 57 participants—30 women and 27 men—examined the preliminary findings through plenary discussions and small group discussions. The participants—individuals representing civil society, local government, elders, teachers, and students—expressed general agreement that it is more difficult for women to exercise their right of access to information compared to their male counterparts. Specifically, participants stated that many men access information more than women because they are more likely to hold key positions than women and that women avoid public offices in many instances due to fear of being negatively branded.

*Barriers*

The greatest obstacles facing women, according to interviews with community leaders, were fear of asking and distance to public office, along with mobility and money



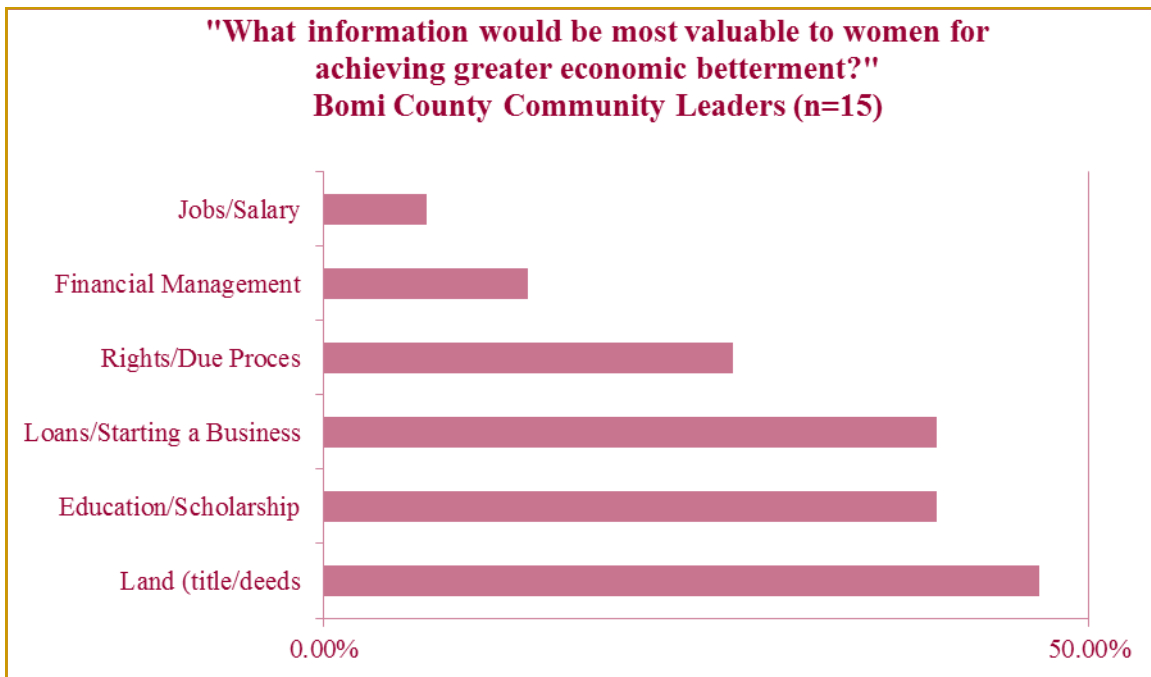
for copies, which were equally mentioned. Validation confirmed the barriers, though it also highlighted cultural perceptions as the main obstacle facing women, reporting that a) men refuse women's right of association and b) fear of molestation impacted a woman's ability to exercise her right of access to information. Issues such as tribalism and nepotism were provided as examples of cultural barriers that undermine women's right to information. Some participants explained that women were less likely to visit agencies, as women were fearful of being labeled with the stereotype that they were seeking romantic partnerships with office staff.

One group at the validation also indicated that in Bomi, limited knowledge or awareness of the national gender policy is a key obstacle that stops women from exercising their right to information. Interestingly, almost all employees interviewed, along with many visitors, both men and women, indicated the need for increased awareness-raising around issues pertaining to women's economic development, specifically loan and business development programs.

### ***Priority Types of Information***

Interviews with community leaders indicated that the most important types of information for women's economic empowerment relate to land, education, and business. During the validation, participants agreed that these types of information echoed realities for women in Bomi County. More specifically, with regard to education, participants noted the need for vocational skill training; for business, they stated that information on applying/eligibility for loans was a priority. Additionally, information on the rights of women and on county development and social development funds was mentioned as important for promoting economic empowerment.

Finally, data from interviews with community leaders in Bomi echoed aggregate findings, with women least aware of their right to information, to be free from violence, and the right to own property.



**ALMOST ALL EMPLOYEES INTERVIEWED, ALONG WITH MANY VISITORS, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN, INDICATED THE NEED FOR INCREASED AWARENESS-RAISING AROUND ISSUES PERTAINING TO WOMEN'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.**

# GRAND GEDEH IS THE ONLY COUNTY WHERE MOST (67.9 PERCENT) EMPLOYEES REPORTED THAT WOMEN DO NOT ACCESS INFORMATION AT THE SAME RATE AS MEN.

## GRAND GEDEH COUNTY FINDINGS

### *Evidence of Inequities in Access to Information*

In Grand Gedeh County, the majority (80 percent) of community leaders said that women **do not** access information at the same rate as men. At public agencies under observation, men were roughly 2.5 times more likely to enter the agency than were women. One female visitor explained, “Getting to this agency was not an easy one. Even scheduling that time for this case was not easy. I had to be going from place to place. It costs a lot of money.”

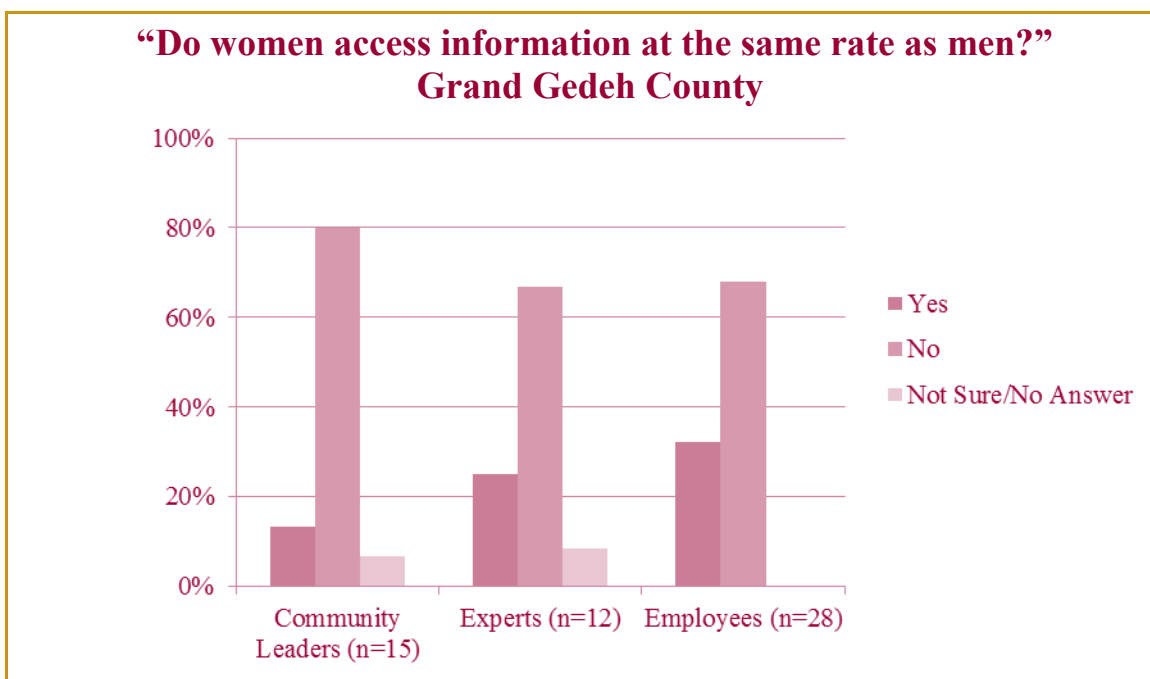
While both male and female visitors encountered high rates of difficulty in gaining access to information or completing processes at agencies under review, women were still 11 percent more likely to experience difficulties or delays than men. Of those interviewed, 55 percent of female visitors interviewed in Grand Gedeh reported experiencing difficulty or delay in accessing information at observation sites. Interestingly, Grand Gedeh is the only county where most (67.9 percent) employees reported that women do not access information at the same rate as men.

When asked to describe their experiences in attempting to gain access to government-held information, 66 percent of the community leaders reported that women experience difficulty, delay, or complete inaccessibility of information. Of those community leaders who shared experiences where they needed information but decided not to try to obtain that information, 33.3 percent indicated that they do not trust the system or find the process prohibitively difficult or complicated. In addition, 13.3 percent felt that obtaining the information would not affect change, and 13.3 percent said they were unaware of where to go or how to ask for the information they needed.

Most (66.7 percent) experts in Grand Gedeh responded that women access information less frequently than do men. When the same question was raised during the validation of preliminary findings, 27 participants agreed that it is more difficult for women to exercise this essential right, but many placed the blame on women’s complacency, which was later vociferously disputed in the discussion around barriers.

### *Barriers*

Data from interviews with community leaders indicated that both illiteracy and not knowing where to go or how



to ask for information were key barriers to women exercising the right of access to information. One community leader recalled her experience in seeking information on bank loans for her small business:

“It was difficult for me, because time used to seek information that I didn't get had been wasted, and I felt very much discouraged.”

Employees also were asked to comment on why they believe women do or do not access information at their agencies at the same rate as their male counterparts. While “disinterest” was a theme throughout the data for the county, Grand Gedeh was one of two counties (the other being Nimba) where employee explanations were more evenly distributed. Of those employees interviewed, 28.6 percent indicated that women were unaware of the process or how to get critical information, 28.6 percent said women were “lazy,” “weak,” or had an “inferiority complex,” and 25 percent indicated that the agency provides information to women and men equally. One ministry employee stated, “Women are [a] different set of people who don't pay attention to these things that in their own mind will not benefit them one way or the other.”

Competing explanations for women’s potential “disinterest” were promoted during the validation, such as historical disenfranchisement of women from political processes as well as being relegated to domestic roles. One participant spoke of her husband’s jealousy and how he would not allow her to attend an adult literacy class to learn how to read and write. So while some of the men may consider this a lack of interest, the women noted that it was underlying, fundamental challenges that impeded their accessing information rather than any apathy.

When validation participants discussed the barrier “not supposed to ask,” it was explained that while the law may not discriminate against women’s access to information, the real issue is lack of resources and skills as well as cultural barriers that make the law difficult to utilize. One example provided was cultural practice relating to decision making. It was said at the Grand Gedeh validation that:

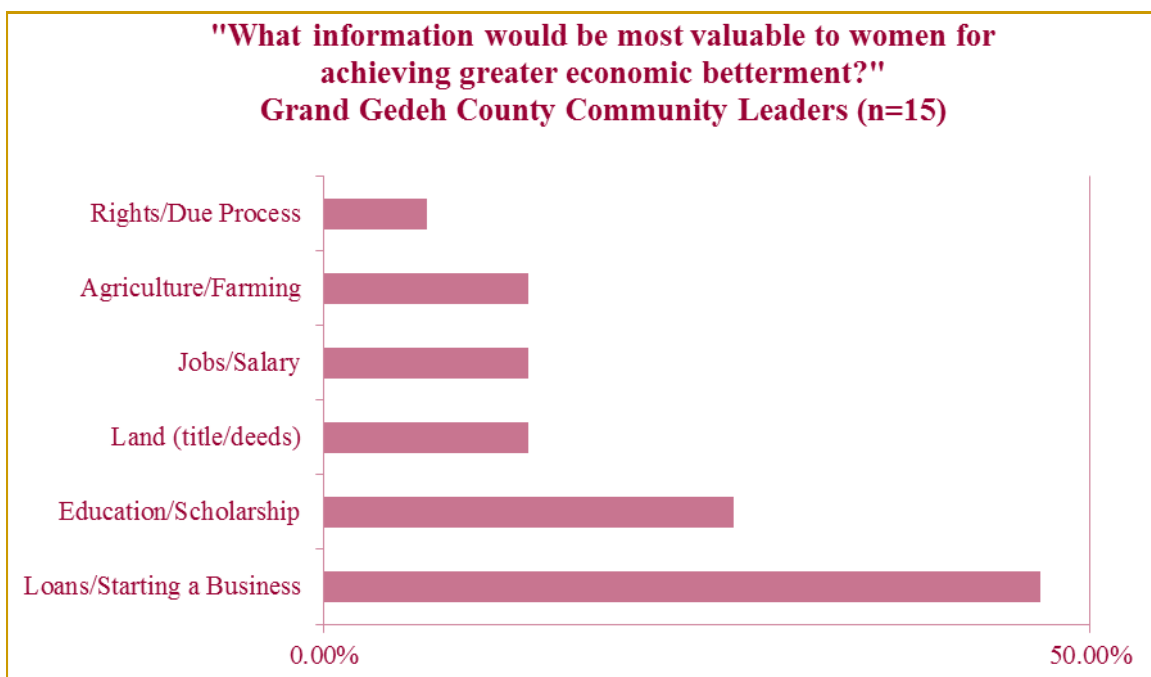
“Whenever there is a serious matter to discuss on community issues, the men would put the women in a hut guarded by the [county] masquerade [devil] to put the women in fear of leaving; and the men would discuss among themselves. Whatever was decided by the men would be final.”

A common narrative that emerged from the study’s qualitative data, along with multiple validation activities, was the prevalence of male elders and traditional leaders making decisions where women’s participation was heavily discouraged.

### *Priority Types of Information*

Data from interviews with community leaders indicated that information regarding business and loans, as well as education, were the most important types of information for women’s economic empowerment.

When asked to comment on the findings, validation participants in Grand Gedeh agreed that women need information on education but also specified that women need to be made aware of their rights as well as encouraged to get involved in decision-making processes. Community leader data indicated that women in Grand Gedeh are least aware of their right to be treated equally, to information, and to the right to own property.



# THERE HAS BEEN NO SPACE CREATED FOR WOMEN TO HAVE ADEQUATE INFORMATION ON WHAT IS UNFOLDING AT OUR VARIOUS LOCAL AUTHORITIES' OFFICES.

## LOFA COUNTY FINDINGS

### *Evidence of Inequities in Access to Information*

In Lofa County, community leader responses were equivocal: 40 percent responded that women **do not** access information at same rate; 40 percent said they do access at the same rate; and 20 percent were unsure. When community leaders were asked to comment on their personal experiences in attempting to obtain critical government-held information, 53.4 percent reported experiencing delays or difficulties and/or not obtaining the information at all. Interestingly, when asked for reasons why they did not seek information that they wanted/needed, there were community leaders from different organizations in Lofa County who cited nonsupport from other organizations as a primary factor in deciding not to move forward in accessing needed information.

At public agencies in Lofa where researchers engaged in nonparticipant observation, women were slightly more likely to be present than were men. Most employees (78.3 percent) agreed that women came to their agencies as often as men, and 69.6 percent believed that women access information and documents at their agencies at the same rate as men. Interviews with visitors resulted in seemingly comparable success rates in accessing information for men (52.4 percent) and women (57.9 percent). Of those interviewed, women (21.1 percent) were only somewhat more likely than men (15.8 percent) to report difficulty or delay.

The findings in Lofa were markedly more positive than those from the other counties. During the validation of the preliminary findings in Lofa County, the 42 participants stated that the findings did **not** reflect the realities on the ground in reference to the question of differential access. Validation participants generally agreed that women do not access information at the same rate as men. Participants explained that women are restricted by cultural mores, deprived from education, and held back by gender-based stereotypes.

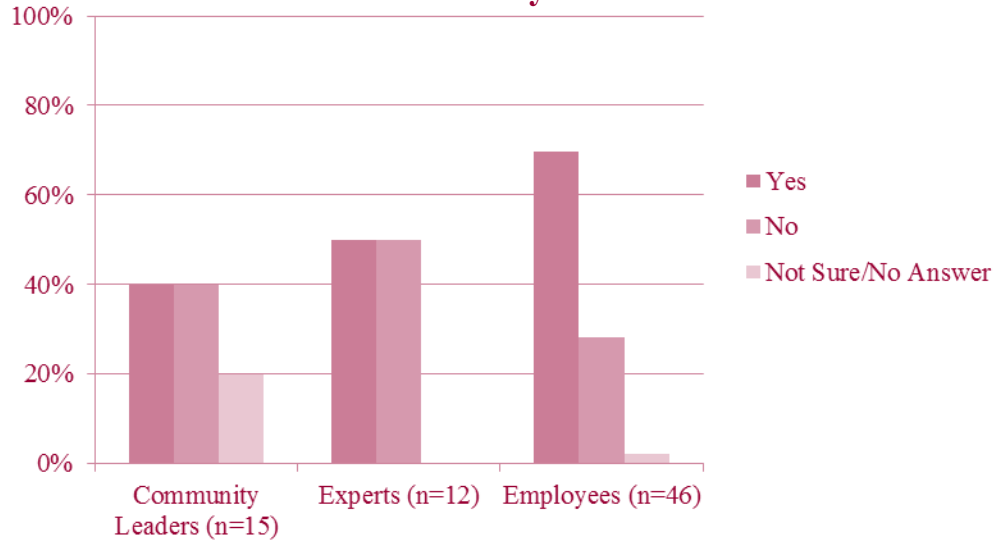
### *Barriers*

Based on responses from community leaders, the most often cited barriers for Lofa County were: information not seen as important for women, illiteracy, and not knowing where to go or how to ask for needed information. When asked to comment on these barriers, as with the other counties, validation participants noted that women were interested in information but that all of the various obstacles inhibited the ability to exercise the right to information. Participants also cited the large technology gap between men and women, lack of participation in public discussions, and lack of awareness of the right to information. One community leader noted that “there has been no space created for women to have adequate information on what is unfolding at our various local authorities’ offices.” The data confirmed that lack of awareness of the right to information is an issue, as community leaders indicated that women are least aware of this right, in addition to the right to own property and the right to be free from violence. Moreover, validation participants confirmed that education and illiteracy are large barriers for women in Lofa.

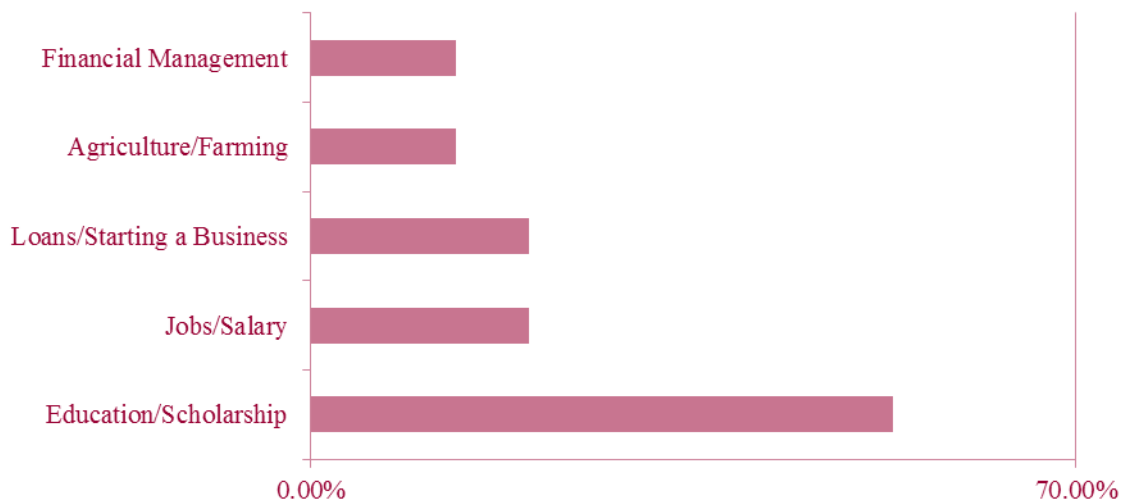
### *Priority Types of Information*

Community leader data indicated that information around education, business management and loans, and jobs were the most important for increasing economic opportunities for women. The validation participants agreed with the findings, expanding the scope to include skill training and agriculture as well as ways to exercise rights through formal and traditional justice systems. Specifically, validation participants explained that because women are not part of key traditional groups where important decisions are made, they are further disenfranchised from the necessary information and resources that could improve their economic standing.

**“Do women access information at the same rate as men?”  
Lofa County**



**“What information would be most valuable to women for achieving greater economic betterment?”  
Lofa County Community Leaders (n=15)**



# OF THOSE INTERVIEWED WHILE VISITING THE AGENCY, 46.9 PERCENT OF WOMEN REPORTED ENCOUNTERING DIFFICULTIES OR DELAY OR DID NOT RECEIVE INFORMATION, COMPARED TO ONLY 18.6 PERCENT OF MALE VISITORS.

## NIMBA COUNTY FINDINGS

### *Evidence of Inequities in Access to Information*

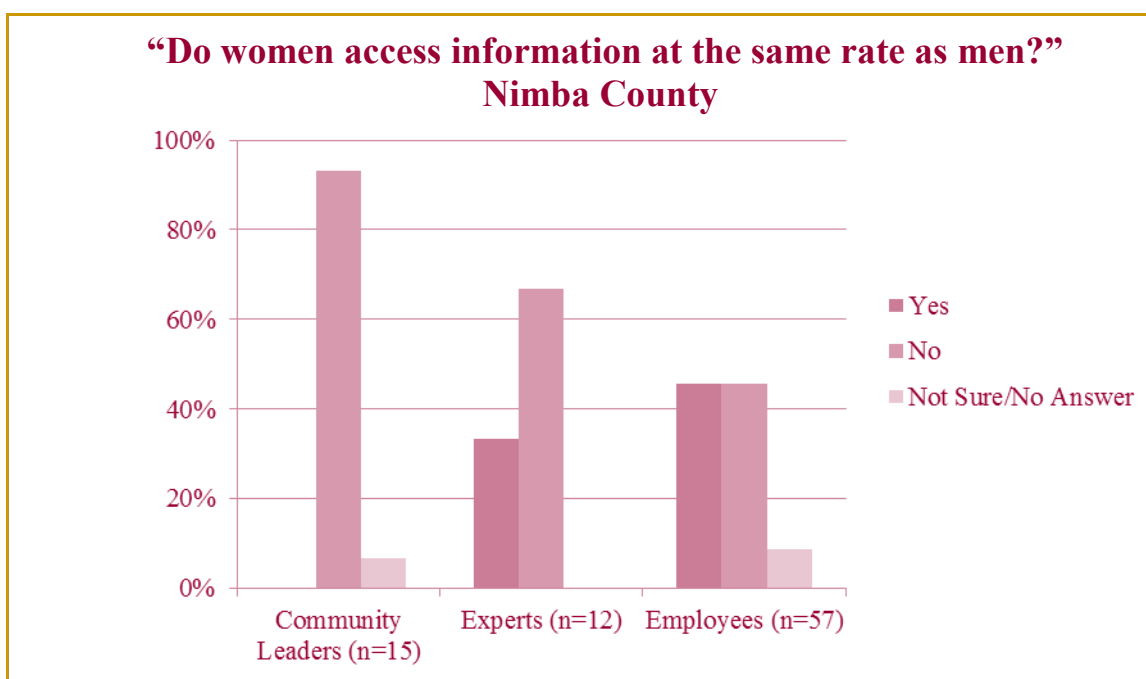
In Nimba County, a strong majority of community leaders (93.3 percent) responded that women **do not** access information at the same rate as men. At public agencies where researchers engaged in nonparticipant observation, men were about three times more likely to enter than were women. Nimba also was the only county where employees were largely divided with regard to women’s presence and women’s ability to access information at their agencies. While 52.6 percent of employees indicated that women come in as often as men, 43.9 percent more accurately responded that women do not. Moreover, employees were evenly divided on the issue of whether women access information at the same rate as men, with 45.6 percent saying “no” and 45.6 percent saying “yes.”

Men reported positive experiences at agencies, gaining access to requested information or processes 15.9 percent more often than women. Of those interviewed while visiting the agency, 46.9 percent of women

reported encountering difficulties or delay or did not receive information, compared to only 18.6 percent of male visitors.

In Nimba County, the local research team was made up of two individuals: one female and one male. Researchers in Nimba reported experiencing challenges in employing the methodology based on their gender. For example, the female researcher stated that she received gender-based insults from ministry staff. And the researchers themselves were barred from entry on several occasions. In agencies where researchers were able to observe, they frequently were denied interviews with low- to mid-level staff who were instructed by leadership not to participate.

Moreover, the 46 validation participants in Nimba County generally agreed that it is more difficult for women to access information than for men. When asked about the observation that women are treated differently in public offices, validation attendees suggested that women are treated differently because of the “way they appear, i.e., they do not know what they are looking for and low self- esteem.”





## Barriers

In interviews, community leaders mostly identified illiteracy, lack of education, and cultural norms as the largest barriers facing women in exercising their right to information. When community leaders were asked to explain why women access information at a different rate than men, 66.7 percent explained that it derives from cultural mores; specifically, that men withhold information or prevent women from seeking opportunities. “Because from the foundation of Liberia, women had never been able to access top jobs opportunities,” said one community leader, “men don’t trust women that they’re capable to keep critical government information.” Other leaders indicated that cultural norms dictate that women should be relegated to domestic roles, “The men feel that women are not educated; women should just be in the backyard doing house work.”

Experts confirmed these barriers, equally identifying cultural norms, lack of education and illiteracy, awareness of rights, and inferiority complex or shyness as the largest obstacles facing women in Nimba County. One male expert noted, “We’re Africans, and we believed an African line that women should not form a part of critical decision making. [W]e African men feel that women are inferior.”

In responding to the question about why women may not access information at the same rate as men, public servants in Nimba likewise noted culture and traditional practices as the main challenge. Interestingly, they also “blamed” the women, with responses alluding to women being too lazy/weak or suffering from an inferiority complex that inhibits request-making.

## Priority Types of Information

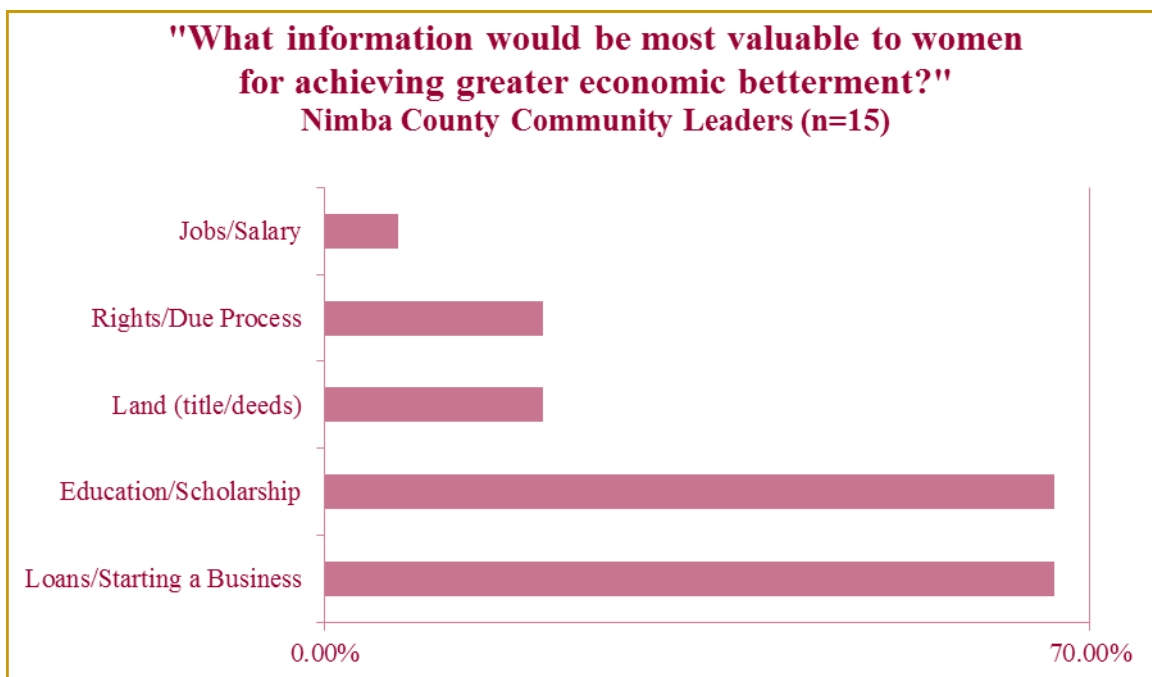
Community leaders identified information relating to business and loans, education and scholarships, and awareness of rights as the most important for women’s economic empowerment. With regard to their rights, interviews with the leaders confirmed that women are least aware of their rights to work, to own property, and to information.

Experts in Nimba County agreed, as in every study region, that making meaningful information accessible to women would increase economic empowerment. Moreover, experts indicated that empowering women to engage through access to information also would positively impact economic development processes writ large, stating:

“I believe if women have access to critical information, it will help empower them to make meaningful contributions to socioeconomic and political developments of the country.”

“If we wanted to form total partnerships with women, they must be informed, respected, and involved with planning. I also believe that in any economic process, there must be planning, and we develop our plans by our priorities. If women are involved in development planning, development will be faster and more sustainable.”

The validation ranked the various types of key information for economic empowerment and found that education was most critical, as education brings awareness of how to manage a business and knowledge related to acquisition of land and property rights.



# EXPERT OPINION IN MONROVIA. . . FURTHER ESTABLISHED THE EXISTENCE OF DISCRIMINATORY VIEWS TOWARD WOMEN, WITH 41.7 PERCENT STATING THAT WOMEN WERE SHY, WEAK, OR HAD AN “INFERIORITY COMPLEX.”

## CITY OF MONROVIA FINDINGS

### *Evidence of Inequities in Access to Information*

In Monrovia, Liberia’s capital city, 80 percent of community leaders responded that women **do not** access information at same rate as men. When asked to describe their experiences in attempting to gain access to government-held information, community leaders reported difficulty, delay or inaccessibility 60 percent of the time. Experts agreed (66.7 percent) that women receive critical information less frequently than men. However, 75 percent of the public officials questioned said that women do access information at the same rate as men.

In considering the clientele of the agencies in Monrovia, the majority of public officials (67.9 percent) indicated that men and women came into the office equally, whereas direct observation demonstrated that men were twice as likely as women to enter public agencies.

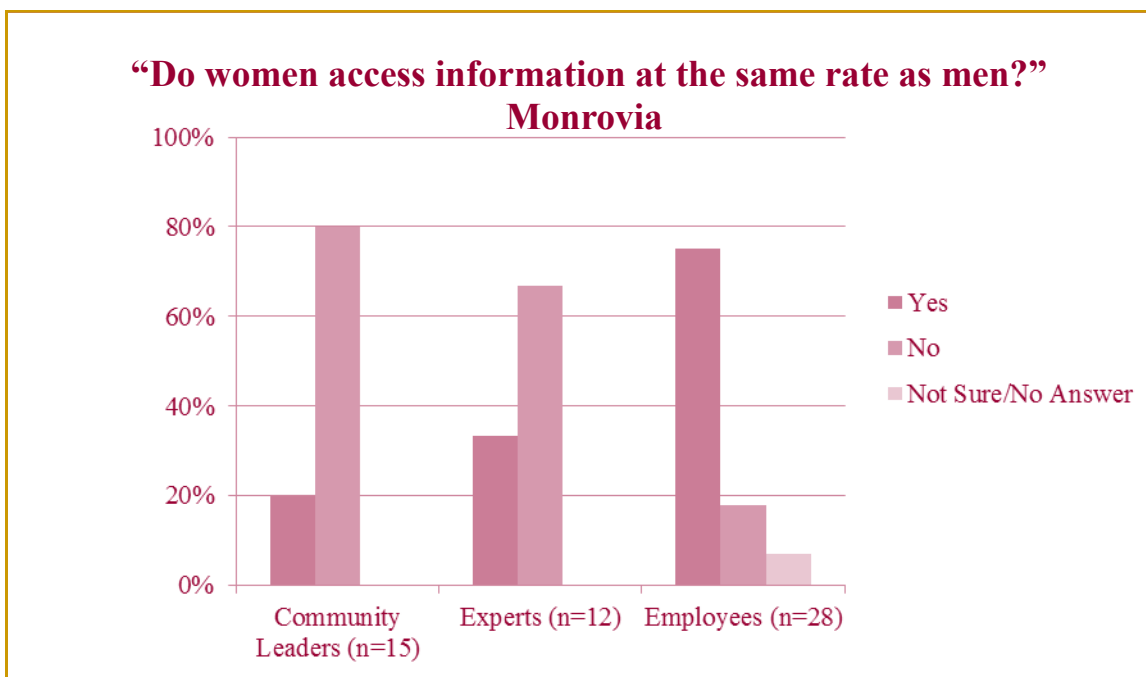
At nonparticipant observation sites, men and women received information or characterized their experiences at public agencies as having a positive outcome at roughly the same rate (33.3 percent; 34.8 percent, respectively). However, distinguishable from the other locales,

men were also 7 percent more likely to report difficulties or delays in receiving information than were women.

### *Barriers*

Even in the most urban and developed location in Liberia, 80 percent of community leaders interviewed in Monrovia identified illiteracy as a large barrier facing women in exercising the right of access to information, a barrier that is nearly impossible to overcome. In addition, community leaders highlighted that confidence to make requests and fear of asking for information were pervasive obstacles facing women. Community leaders also felt that unsupportive family members, distance to public office, and not knowing where or how to ask for information were leading challenges facing women trying to get information. While most employees in Monrovia reported that women faced few to no barriers in accessing information at their particular agencies, around 20 percent of employees recounted external barriers women face in accessing information, including culture, domestic responsibilities, system mistrust, and “inferiurity complex.” Several employees indicated supposed inferiority on the part of women, stating:

“I think this is the case because women don't normally move, because of their housework and



because most of them are impatient when it comes to information.”

“I believe this is the case because there are more male entrepreneurs or business-minded males than female.”

“This is the case because females feel that males should be doing this, which is very bad for their side.”

Expert opinion in Monrovia—of which more than 90 percent of those interviewed were men—further established the existence of discriminatory views toward women, with 41.7 percent stating that women were shy, weak or had an “inferiority complex.” In fact, one high-level government expert explained that “the main obstacle is that women do not know how to keep information due to laziness.” Another expert representing civil society expressed similar sentiments: “There are a lot of women that are not involved in taking broad steps in the decision-making process; they are shy and inferior to men.”

Nevertheless, of those experts who responded, 100 percent indicated that if the obstacles facing women in the exercise of the right to information were overcome and women could access critical information, it would lead to their economic empowerment. So while there may remain some lingering biases against women, there is unanimous agreement that information is key to women’s advancement.

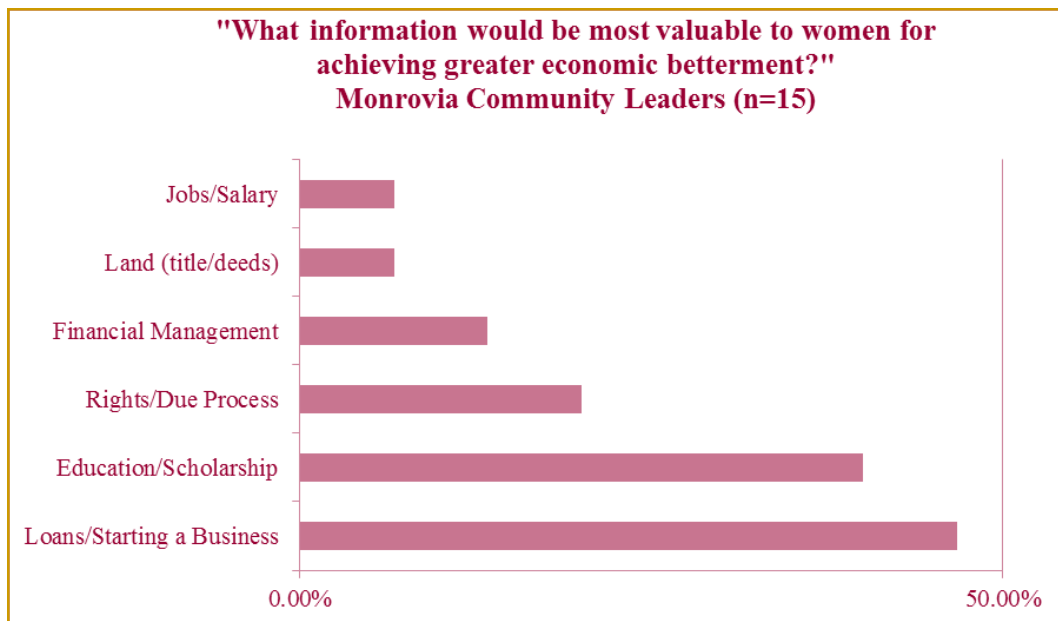
During the validation process, several participants (mostly men) representing key ministries in Monrovia also shared their belief that the main obstacle to women’s access to information was directly linked to women’s disinterest, laziness, or general lack of skills. These expressions were met with rebuttal from many of the attendees who were more convinced that the cultural

barriers and gender roles assigned to women, including domestic responsibilities and disenfranchisement from public and private decision-making processes, played the most significant role in deterring women from a meaningful right of access to information.

One-quarter of the experts stated that cultural practices and awareness of rights, respectively, were major obstacles to women in accessing information. When asked to comment on how aware women are of their basic socioeconomic rights, community leaders indicated that women are least likely to know about their right to own land, to information, and to work under good working conditions. However, in contrast to the four counties, women in Monrovia are most likely to be aware of their right to be treated equally as well as their right to be free from violence.

### ***Priority Types of Information***

According to community leaders in Monrovia, information regarding business and loans—along with education and scholarships—are the most important for women’s economic empowerment. 46.7 percent of the community leaders indicated that information regarding loans/starting a business is most important, while 40 percent said that information on education is critical. One public officer participating in the validation shared an experience recounting that a job opportunity was made available specifically to women through public channels. Unfortunately, when applications were reviewed, the agency realized that the majority of the applicant pool had not received the proper training or education necessary for the posted positions and, therefore, the agency was unable to hire many women who applied. Several validation participants echoed this sentiment, identifying education and skills development as integral information types for improving women’s economic empowerment.



# KEY FINDINGS

- ◆ The interviews and observational data collected during the study illustrate both differential access—that women are not accessing information at the same rate as men—and numerous barriers facing women in accessing government-held information in Liberia.
- ◆ Though public employees were more likely to say that women access information at the same rate as men, observational data illustrated that women experienced challenges or delays more often than their male counterparts.
- ◆ The theory that women are simply “disinterested” in accessing information was clearly disputed by qualitative data as well as in the validation activities, instead highlighting the fact that compound barriers to access, including fear of reprisal, lack of time and mobility, and deeply-rooted cultural norms, have made women less likely to seek information overall.
- ◆ While the majority of respondents indicate that women will face more barriers and challenges than men in attempting to access information, data also shows that a multitude of barriers facing women are encountered before even getting to the agency or government office. These barriers also may help explain why men were twice as likely to enter public agencies under observation as compared to women.

- ◇ Illiteracy and lack of education prevent women from reading brochures, policies, laws, and other key documents that might contribute to their knowledge of programs, resources, and rights. Moreover, illiteracy and lack of education may propagate fear/less confidence in exercising the right to information.
  - ◇ Cultural norms and mores continue to disenfranchise women from public spaces and decision-making roles.
  - ◇ Lack of time, as women are expected to take primary responsibility for most domestic tasks, and mobility serve as significant challenges to women seeking information in public agencies.
  - ◇ Fear of retaliation or of negative branding by male peers for even entering a public agency plays a major role in keeping women from accessing information that could lead to increased economic empowerment.
  - ◇ Unfamiliarity with the system for requests—not knowing how and where to seek information—prevents women from going to the designated agencies where information might be made available.
- 
- ◆ Multiple sources confirmed that access to information on education and scholarship are most important for increasing women’s economic empowerment, while at the same time noting a lack of education and illiteracy as principal barriers to women in accessing information. Paradoxically, information related to education also was cited as some of the most difficult for women to obtain.
  - ◆ More than 70 percent of the community leaders indicated that women are not at all or only somewhat informed about the right to own property. Yet, information about land and property was consistently cited as most valuable for women’s increased economic empowerment.
  - ◆ Data also confirmed that information relating to starting and managing a business, as well as gaining access to loans for business purposes, are priorities for women’s economic empowerment. In rural areas, access to this type of information is particularly difficult to procure, as banking institutions often are not present and awareness of related government programs and policies appears to be rather low for women.

# Limitations of Study and Considerations

- ◆ The methodology design, including lack of randomized sampling, results in largely perception-based findings to demonstrate the hypothesis that inequities exist and highlight trends related to women’s access to information.
- ◆ Nonparticipant observation sites were selected to provide illustrative examples of the interactions that take place within agencies representing key economic empowerment areas (agriculture, land, starting a business, and education). Due to variations in agency structures, the number of employees working on any given day, and other external factors, more interviews may have occurred at certain agencies, compared to other agencies in the sample. As these observation sites were selected by the local research teams, each county had a different selection of agencies, thereby potentially biasing the identified priority issues. In analyzing the aggregated findings, it should be noted that this variation exists, potentially with the effect of skewing the data toward certain priority issues depending on the number of interactions and/or interviews recorded at certain agencies.
- ◆ Employees at nonparticipant observation sites were asked to comment only on access to information within the context of their agency or office. Therefore, in responding to the interview questions, employees may not have been considering barriers to women’s access to information that occur outside of the agency’s walls. Had the question been formulated to generate speculation about external barriers, it is possible employees might have been less likely to answer that women access information at the same rate as men. However, in spite of the limited scope of the question, many employees did mention cultural and structural barriers, thereby perhaps confirming the magnitude of these extant obstacles that prevent women from exercising their right to information.
- ◆ All data collection occurred in the field with limited supervision from the Carter Center’s Access to Information team. Once researchers had been fully trained on the methodology and best research practices by Carter Center staff and the final interview and nonparticipant observation site lists had been approved, researchers independently implemented the methodology in their counties of origin. As such, variation in the application of the methodology may have occurred. When these variances were identified, The Carter Center attempted to mitigate their impact when possible.
- ◆ In both Monrovia and Bomi county, implementation of the methodology was incongruent for nonparticipant observations. In order to complete the data sets, local research teams collected additional data to ensure that the final data sets for both counties were reliable prior to analysis. As such, several observations took place in May 2014. While the qualitative data did not reveal substantial deviations from data collected January–March, there is the possibility that contextual shifts took place with relation to each agency, its practices, or employee understanding of the study’s purpose.
- ◆ Some questions, while broad enough to capture diverse responses and priorities, might have benefited from a more narrow scope. For example, a number of the questions may have been interpreted differently. Moreover, it appears that for some of the questions, particularly related to specific issues for economic empowerment, researchers used “prompts” to help the community leader’s comprehension. This may have led to some bias in the responses.
- ◆ In some cases, the study would have benefited from researchers asking additional probing questions. This was most evident in responses related to women’s fear, weakness, and inferiority. It was only through reviewing all of the qualitative narratives that we were able to better understand the potential meaning behind these comments.

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT, LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT, INFORMATION  
**“Access to Information”**  
Community based solutions to Information  
Dissemination for Equality, Peace and Security  
GOVERNANCE, DEVELOPMENT, PEACE AND SECURITY  
SOUTH EASTERN  
DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION  
SEWODA

**SAVE MOTHERS!**  
Ministry of Health and  
Social Welfare



Members of the South East Women's Development Association celebrate at the International Colloquium on Women's Empowerment, Leadership, and Development in 2009.  
Photo: Pewee Flomoku



Women in Liberia sell dry goods in a local market.

Photo: Micky Wiswedel/Shutterstock

## CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

While it is too often said that women do not want information, the findings of this study clearly belie that claim. Community leaders and women interviewed during nonparticipant observation affirmed their interest and need for information, particularly information that could lead to increased economic empowerment and the protection of their rights. Women want information about education, land/property ownership, and how to start and maintain a business in Liberia.

However, structural and cultural barriers exist that impede women's facility to exercise the fundamental right to information. Barriers such as illiteracy, not knowing where or how to access public information, fear/lack of confidence, and competing household responsibilities represent a challenge to women seeking information. Notwithstanding, if these obstacles can be overcome, the vast majority of respondents confirmed that access to public information would lead to women becoming more economically empowered and better overall development outcomes for her family, the community, and Liberia.

Intentionally, this study does not provide prescriptive conclusions but rather serves to demonstrate inequities and illuminate challenges. With the completion of the study and dissemination of findings, The Carter Center hopes to collaborate with key government and civil society partners to jointly identify potential solutions to change the information asymmetries facing women in Liberia. By anchoring the work in a few key areas of economic empowerment, including education, land, and starting a business, we hope to demonstrate the potential of access to information and to have more immediate impacts on alleviating the obstacles that women face in the exercise of their right. To assure that women have a meaningful and equitable access to information, all stakeholders will need to act creatively and in partnership. With the demonstrated commitment of the government of Liberia and civil society, the potential of information for women's economic empowerment will surely be realized.





# ENDNOTES

1. See estimates from U.N. Women; U.N. Millennium Development Goals; and “Our Work Towards Gender Equality,” Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, March 2011.
2. Marcelo, P., “Liberia’s Women Face Conflicting Realities in Post-War Society,” Providence Journal, September 2013.
3. “Liberia: Women’s Participation Increases in President Sirleaf’s New Govt—Representation in Legislature Still Below Proposed 30 Percent Threshold, allAfrica, July 2012.
4. Duncan-Cassell, J., “Liberia’s Committed to Implementing MDGs,” Speech given at the 58<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, New York, posted on website of Liberia Ministry of Gender & Development, Republic of Liberia, March 2014.
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# APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Survey Instruments

### COMMUNITY LEADER QUESTIONNAIRE

Name of interviewer (Your name)	
Date of Interview	
Time of Interview	
Language of Interview	
Location of interview with brief description	
<b>Background Information</b>	
<b>1. What is your name?</b>	
<b>2. What organization do you work with?</b>	
<b>3. What is your position?</b>	
<b>4. What kind of issues does your organization work on? (mark all that apply)</b>	
	Women's rights
	Local participation
	Land (titles)
	Starting a business
	Farming/Agriculture (working with women that farm/grow food for household consumption)
	Education
	Other: please describe
<b>5. Does your organization serve women, men, or both sexes?</b>	
	Women Men Both
<b>6. About how many registered members does your organization have?</b>	
Response:	
<b>7. Is it affiliated with other networks, either locally, nationally, or internationally?</b>	
	Yes (If yes, go to Question #8) No (If no, skip to Question #9)
<b>8. What network is your organization affiliated with?</b>	
Response:	

9. In general, how informed are women about their rights? Researchers: during the interview, please ask for real life examples.			
	Not at all	Somewhat	Very
To be treated equally with all others (free from discrimination)			
To be free from violence (domestic, violence against women etc.)			
To be able to join groups/association			
Right to own property			
Right to information			
Right to education (Note: the right to education extends beyond the classroom)			
Right to work, under good working conditions/ reasonable working hours			
To be able to go to court if any rights are violated			
<b>Access to Information</b>			
<b>10. Do you think that the national government holds information women need to better their lives?</b>			
	Yes		
	No		
<i>If yes, what types of information? If no, why not?</i>			
<b>11. Do you think that your local government holds information that women need to better their lives?</b>			
	Yes		
	No		
<i>If yes, what types of information? If no, why not?</i>			
<b>12. What information does government holds does that your organization needs to support the women with whom you work? Please name as many types of information/documents as you can; and provide real life examples of the type of information your organization needs.</b>			
Prompts (read only if needed): For example, information on where to get land titles/deeds; information on loans available for starting a business or farming; number of teachers in the school; money spent on books/materials for schools; budget for school; procedures for starting a business; information on laws/rights to own land etc.			

Response:
<b>13. Please think of one specific time you personally tried to get information from a government agency or local authority/local leader. What information were you seeking?</b>
Response:
<b>14. Why were you trying to access this information?</b>
Response:
<b>15. What happened when you tried to get this information?</b>
Response:
<b>16. Please think of a specific time when you needed information but did <i>not</i> try to get it. What information were you interested in?</b>
Response:
<b>17. Why did you decide not to seek the information?</b>
Response:
<p><b>READ:</b> I am going to be asking you about where women get information. I am particularly interested in information that women need to assure their rights and to achieve greater economic betterment. When answering the following questions, please keep this in mind.</p> <p><i>Economic empowerment</i> is the ability to succeed economically (ex. produce, develop and manage money and resources, such as land) and the power to make and act on economic decisions.</p>
<b>18. What information would be most valuable to women for achieving greater economic betterment? (for example information that would help women get more money/jobs/ manage their money etc.)</b>
Response:
<b>19. What kinds of information, on rights and economic betterment, are women generally <u>not</u> able to access?</b>
Response:

<b>20. Where do the women currently get information for greater economic empowerment?</b>				
Check all categories that were mentioned:	Community/local organizations			
	National government			
	Local government			
	Church			
	Radio			
	Husband			
	Other family members			
	Friends			
	Other:			
	Other:			
	Other:			
<b>21. Do you think women access critical government-held information at the same rate as men?</b>				
	<b>Yes</b> (If yes, skip to Question #23)			
	<b>No</b> (If no, go to Question #22)			
	<b>Not sure</b>			
	<b>Did not understand question</b>			
<b>22. If no, why do you think women don't access information at the same rate as men?</b>				
Response:				
<b>23. I am going to read to you a list of issues. Please let me know how great of a barrier each issue is with regards to women gaining access to information. For each issue I read to you, please let me know if you think it is 1) not a barrier, 2) a small barrier, which some women can overcome or 3) a large barrier, which is nearly impossible to overcome.</b>				
	<i>Not a barrier</i>	<i>A small barrier, which some women can overcome</i>	<i>A large barrier, which is nearly impossible to overcome</i>	<i>Did not understand the question</i>
<b>Awareness of right</b>				
<b>Childcare</b>				
<b>Confidence to make requests/ask government for information</b>				

	<i>Not a barrier</i>	<i>A small barrier, which some women can overcome</i>	<i>A large barrier, which is nearly impossible to overcome</i>	<i>Did not understand the question</i>
Money for photocopies				
Mobility				
Fear of asking/fear of retribution for asking				
Too busy				
Housework (unpaid)				
Distance to public office				
Don't know how/where to go to ask for information				
Women not allowed into public buildings				
Women ignored when go into public building/office				
Culturally not appropriate/allowed				
Women not supposed to ask for information				
Someone in family not supportive (impedes)				
Illiteracy				
Language (documents only in official language)				
Information not seen as important for women				
<b>24. What other barriers exists that I did not mention? For each barrier, can you let me know if you believe it is a small or large barrier?</b>				
<i>Barrier (write the barriers the interviewee mentions below)</i>				
	<b>A small barrier</b>		<b>A large barrier</b>	
<b>25. Of the issues which you or I mentioned, which three are the greatest barriers facing women with respect to accessing information.</b>				
Barrier 1				
Barrier 2				
Barrier 3				

<b>26. What are some possible solutions to address any of the issues you identified as barriers?</b>	
Response:	
<b>Freedom of Information Law</b>	
<b>27. Have you heard about the Freedom of Information Act?</b>	
	Yes (if yes, go to question 28)
	No (if no, skip to question 30)
<b>28. If yes, how did you hear about it?</b>	
Response:	
<b>29. What do you know about the Freedom of Information Act?</b>	
Response:	
<b>30. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about women's access to information?</b>	
Response:	
<p><i>For the interviewer: Do not read this section out loud. After the interview has been completed please write down any thoughts or recollections that you had from the interview</i></p>	



**EXPERT OPINION  
QUESTIONNAIRE**

Name of interviewer (Your name)	
Date of Interview	
Time of Interview	
Location of interview with brief description	
Type of expert being interviewed: (Mark as many as apply)	NGO/International Community
	Ministry Official
	Academic/University Professor
	Other
<b>Background Information</b>	
<b>1. What is your name?</b>	
<b>2. What organization are you affiliated with?</b>	
<b>3. What role do you play in this organization?</b>	
<b>4. In what area is your expertise? (mark all that apply)</b>	
	Women's rights
	Land (titles)
	Starting a business
	Farming/Agriculture (working with women that farm/grow food for household consumption)
	Education
	Other: please describe
<b>5. Do you think women access critical government information less frequently than men?</b>	
	Yes
	No
Please explain your answer:	
<b>6. What do you see as the main barrier(s) facing women in the exercise of the right to information?</b>	

<b>7. If women are less able to access information, what do you see as the impact of this?</b>	
<b>8. If the identified obstacles were overcome and meaningful information is accessible, would that contribute to increased economic empowerment for women?</b>	
	Yes No
Please explain:	
<b>9. What information would be most valuable to women for achieving greater economic empowerment, particular to your area of focus (i.e. land, agriculture, education, starting a business)?</b>	
<b>10. Anything else you would like to share/say on this issue?</b>	

**NONPARTICIPANT  
OBSERVATION FORM**

Name of interviewer (Your name)	
Date of site visit, including the day of the week	
Time of site visit	
<b>General Information</b>	
<b>1. What is the name of the agency you are visiting?</b>	
<b>2. What is the address of this agency?</b>	
<b>3. What is the primary function of the agency?</b>	
<b>4. About how many male employees were working in the office when you arrived?</b>	
<b>5. About how many female employees were working in the office when you arrived?</b>	
<b>6. About how many men were visiting the office during your observation?</b>	
<b>7. About how many women were visiting the office during your observation?</b>	
<b>8. Describe in some detail what the office looks like. We are interested in the physical aspects of the office. Are people able to enter the office freely?</b>	
<b>9. Describe in some detail what is taking place in the office. We are interested here in the interactions between the employees and those individuals visiting the office.</b>	

Are there one or more employees in the office that you could speak to? If so, in whatever way you feel is appropriate, approach the employee and see if you could ask them a few questions. Try not to take up too much of their time.

**Employee Interview 1**

<b>10. Title/Role of Employee:</b>	
<b>11. Do you feel that women come into the office as often as men?</b>	Yes No
<b>12. What kinds of information are men asking for when they come to your office?</b>	
<b>13. What kinds of information are women asking for when they come to your office?</b>	
<b>14. Are women accessing information/ documents in your office at the same rate as men?</b>	Yes No
<b>15. Please explain why you believe this is the case.</b>	
<b>16. Is there anything else you would like to add?</b>	

**Employee Interview 2**

<b>17. Title/Role of Employee:</b>	
<b>18. Do you feel that women come into the office as often as men?</b>	Yes No
<b>19. What kinds of things are men asking for when they come to your office?</b>	
<b>20. What kinds of things are women asking for when they come to your office?</b>	
<b>21. Are women accessing information/ documents in your office at the same rate and as easily as men?</b>	Yes No
<b>22. Please explain why you believe this is the case.</b>	
<b>23. Is there anything else you would like to add?</b>	

<b>Employee Interview 3</b>	
<b>24. Title/Role of Employee:</b>	
<b>25. Do you feel that women come into the office as often as men?</b>	Yes No
<b>26. What kinds of things are men asking for when they come to your office?</b>	
<b>27. What kinds of things are women asking for when they come to your office?</b>	
<b>28. Are women accessing information/ documents in your office at the same rate and as easily as men?</b>	Yes No
<b>29. Please explain why you believe this is the case.</b>	
<b>30. Is there anything else you would like to add?</b>	
<b>VISITOR INTERVIEWS: For all of the following interviews, please ensure that visitors are at the agency to access information. If they are there for any other reason, please thank them for their time, make a note and move on to the next visitor.</b>	
<b>Female Visitor Interview 1</b>	
<b>31. What kind of information did you come for today?</b>	
<b>32. How would you describe your experience in getting to, and dealing with, the agency?</b>	
<b>33. Is there anything else you would like to add?</b>	
<b>Female Visitor Interview 2</b>	
<b>34. What kind of information did you come for today?</b>	
<b>35. How would you describe your experience in getting to, and dealing with, the agency?</b>	
<b>36. Is there anything else you would like to add?</b>	

<b>Female Visitor Interview 3</b>
<b>37. What kind of information did you come for today?</b>
<b>38. How would you describe your experience in getting to, and dealing with, the agency?</b>
<b>39. Is there anything else you would like to add?</b>
Are there one or more <b>male</b> visitors to the office that you could speak to? If so, in whatever way you feel is appropriate, approach the individuals and see if you could ask them a few questions. Be cognizant not to take up to much of their time.
<b>Male Visitor Interview 1</b>
<b>40. What kind of information did you come for today?</b>
<b>41. How would you describe your experience in getting to, and dealing with, the agency?</b>
<b>42. Is there anything else you would like to add?</b>
<b>Male Visitor Interview 2</b>
<b>43. What kind of information did you come for today?</b>
<b>44. How would you describe your experience in getting to, and dealing with, the agency?</b>
<b>45. Is there anything else you would like to add?</b>

**Male Visitor Interview 3**



**46. What kind of information did you come for today?**


**47. How would you describe your experience in getting to, and dealing with, the agency?**

**48. Is there anything else you would like to add?**

*For the researcher: Do not read this section out loud. After the site visit has been completed please write down any thoughts or recollections that you had from the visit.*

# Appendix B: County and Monrovia Profiles

 	<b>Bomi County</b>
<p><b>Capital:</b> Tubmanburg</p> <p><b>Population:</b> 84,119 per 2008 census</p> <p><b>Established:</b> 1984</p> <p><b>Primary dialects:</b> Gola, Dey, Kpelle</p> <p><b>Ethnic groups:</b> Gola, Vai, Kpelle, and Mandingo</p> <p><b>Religion:</b> 60% Muslim, 40% Christian</p> <p><b>Governance:</b> 4 Administrative Districts; 5 chiefdoms; 18 clans</p> <p><b>Main industries:</b> Rubber, kola nut, sugar cane, fish</p> <p><b>General issues in county:</b> Food insecurity, access to farmlands, land conflicts, identity and citizenship issues, lack of capital, illiteracy, high unemployment, lack of schools, poor conditions in orphanages, chronic child malnutrition, poor roads, access to healthcare, dysfunctional justice systems</p> <p><b>Key issues for women:</b> Property rights; access to credit; ownership of assets; lack of skills and business management training; violence; access to education, health services, and justice</p> <p><b>Development priorities:</b> Roads, health facilities, educational facilities</p>	







## Grand Gedeh County

**Capital:** Zwedru

**Population:** 125,258 per 2008 census

**Established:** 1964

**Primary dialect:** Krahn

**Ethnic groups:** Krahn

**Religion:** Insufficient data, but about 34% of county population belong to some religious group

**Governance:** 8 Administrative Districts; 16 chiefdoms; 32 clans

**Main industries:** Iron ore, cocoa, plantains

**General issues in county:** Land conflicts; border instability; governance issues; illicit economic activities; poor roads; high fuel costs; access to banks/capital; access to tools, seed, fertilizer; high poverty rate; insufficiently resourced schools; lack of formal employment;

**Key issues for women:** Access to land, banking services, education, health services, and judicial services; gender based violence

**Development priorities:** Roads, health, education



## Lofa County

**Capital:** Voinjama

**Population:** 276,863 per 2008 census

**Established:** 1964

**Primary dialects:** Lorma, Gbandi

**Ethnic groups:** Lorma, Gbandi, Kissi, Kpelle, Gbondi, Mende, Mandingo

**Religion:** 60% Christian, 40% Muslim

**Governance:** 6 Administrative Districts, 7 chiefdoms, 22 clans

**Main industries:** Coffee, cocoa, plantain/banana, palm oil

**General issues in county:** School closures; shortage of teachers; corruption; land tenure; illegal mining; conflict between domestic interests and foreign investment; lack of seeds, tools, and cash for agricultural sector

**Key issues for women:** Access to land, education, healthcare, and judicial mechanisms, lack of participation

**Development priorities:** Roads, health, education





## Nimba County

**Capital:** Sanniquellie

**Population:** 462,026 per 2008 census

**Established:** 1964

**Primary dialects:** Mano, Gio

**Ethnic groups:** Mano, Gio, Mandingo, Gbi, Krahn

**Religion:** Christian, Muslim, Bahai

**Governance:** Five statutory districts, 17 Administrative districts, 34 Chiefdoms, 73 Clans

**Main industries:** Iron ore, diamonds, agriculture

**General issues in county:** Land disputes, post-conflict tensions among different ethnic groups, environmental impacts from extractive industries, border security, poor infrastructure, lack of seeds and fertilizer, illiteracy, lack of access to credit/loans, migration to cities, food security, lack of development/investment banks

**Key issues for women:** Rise in teenage pregnancy, gender-based violence, access to land and inheritance rights, chronic malnutrition, access to food, access to credit, high illiteracy rates

**Development priorities:** Roads and bridges, education, health, civil compound, police station, hand pumps, agriculture/food security



## City of Monrovia

**Population:** 1,165,000 per 2008 census

**Established:** 1847

**Primary dialect:** Kpelle, Bassa

**Ethnic groups:** All 16 tribes

**Religion:** 68% Christian, 32% Muslim

**Main industries:** Medium, small or micro business, cassava, kola nut, rubber,

**General issues in city:** Population density, urban sprawl, land disputes, identity and citizenship issues, unemployment, sustainable urban agriculture, limited farm/garden management skills, lack of access to agricultural extension services, limited food processing and marketing skills, crop contamination, pollution, lack of seeds and tools

**Key issues for women:** Property rights, access to formal employment, gender based violence, teenage pregnancy, political participation

**Development priorities:** Roads, health, education



# Appendix C: Select Frequency Tables\*

## COMMUNITY LEADER RESPONSES

Participant Sex (n=75)			
Region	F	M	%
Bomi (n=15)	12	3	80%
Grand Gedeh (n=15)	10	5	66.7%
Lofa (n=15)	13	2	86.7%
Nimba (n=15)	10	5	66.7%
Monrovia (n=15)	13	2	86.7%
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>77.3%</b>
			<b>22.7%</b>

What issues does your organization work on?												
Region	Women's Rights	%	Local Participation	%	Starting a business	%	Farming/ Agriculture	%	Education	%	Land	%
Bomi (n=15)	11	73.0%	2	13.3%	6	40.0%	4	26.6%	3	20.0%	2	13.3%
Grand Gedeh (n=15)	8	53.3%	8	53.3%	5	33.3%	8	53.3%	9	60.0%	1	6.6%
Lofa (n=15)	14	93.3%	13	86.6%	10	66.6%	11	73.3%	13	86.6%	11	73.3%
Nimba (n=15)	11	73.0%	8	53.3%	9	60.0%	11	73.3%	9	60.0%	2	13.3%
Monrovia (n=15)	13	86.6%	5	33.3%	6	40.0%	6	40.0%	11	73.3%	0	0.0%
<b>TOTALS (n=75)</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>76.0%</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>48.0%</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>48.0%</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>53.3%</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>60.0%</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>21.30%</b>

\*For all frequency tables, please contact The Carter Center at [Ineuman@emory.edu](mailto:Ineuman@emory.edu).

<b>Do you think women access critical information at the same rate as men?</b>						
<b>Region</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Not sure</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Bomi (n=15)</b>	0	0.0%	15	100.0%	0	0.0%
<b>Grand Gedeh (n=15)</b>	2	13.3%	12	80.0%	1	6.6%
<b>Lofa (n=15)</b>	6	40.0%	6	40.0%	3	20.0%
<b>Nimba (n=15)</b>	0	0.0%	14	93.3%	1	6.6%
<b>Monrovia (n=15)</b>	3	20.0%	12	80.0%	0	0.0%
<b>TOTALS (n=75)</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>14.6%</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>78.6%</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6.6%</b>

<b>Do you think that the national government holds information women need to better their lives?</b>						
<b>Region</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>No Answer</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Bomi (n=15)</b>	15	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
<b>Grand Gedeh (n=15)</b>	11	73.3%	4	26.6%	0	0.0%
<b>Lofa (n=15)</b>	11	73.3%	4	26.6%	0	0.0%
<b>Nimba (n=15)</b>	13	86.6%	1	6.6%	1	6.7%
<b>Monrovia (n=15)</b>	11	73.3%	4	26.6%	0	0.0%
<b>TOTALS (n=75)</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>81.3%</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>17.3%</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1.3%</b>

<b>Do you think that your local government holds information that women need to better their lives?</b>						
<b>Region</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>No Answer</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Bomi (n=15)</b>	15	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
<b>Grand Gedeh (n=15)</b>	11	73.3%	4	26.6%	0	0.0%
<b>Lofa (n=15)</b>	11	73.3%	4	26.6%	0	0.0%
<b>Nimba (n=15)</b>	13	86.6%	1	6.6%	1	6.6%
<b>Monrovia (n=15)</b>	10	66.6%	4	26.6%	1	6.6%
<b>TOTALS (n=75)</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>80.0%</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>17.3%</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2.7%</b>

DATA IN AGGREGATE: In general how informed are women about their rights? Researchers: during the interview, please ask for real life examples (n=15 per county; n=75 total)								
TOTALS (n=75)	To be treated equally with all others	%	To be free from violence	%	To be able to join groups/ assoc.	%	Right to own property	%
Not at all	5	6.6%	7	9.3%	4	5.3%	14	20.0%
Somewhat	42	56.0%	40	53.3%	26	34.6%	38	50.6%
Very	28	37.3%	28	37.3%	45	60.0%	22	29.3%
No Answer	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	1.3%

DATA IN AGGREGATE: In general how informed are women about their rights? Researchers: during the interview, please ask for real life examples (n=15 per county; n=75 total)								
TOTALS (n=75)	Right to information	%	Right to education	%	Right to work	%	To be able to go to court	%
Not at all	7	9.3%	3	4.0%	8	10.6%	9	12.0%
Somewhat	44	54.6%	38	50.6%	33	44.0%	30	40.0%
Very	21	28.0%	34	45.3%	34	45.3%	36	48.0%
No Answer	3	4.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%

**DATA IN AGGREGATE:** For each issue, please let me know if you think it is a 1) not a barrier; 2) a small barrier which some women can overcome; or 3) a large barrier which is nearly impossible to overcome (4=did not understand question)

TO-TALS (n=75)	Awareness of Right	%	Child Care	%	Confidence to make request	%	Money for copies	%	Mobility	%	Fear of asking	%
1	12	15.0%	14	18.6%	3	4.0%	9	12.0%	11	14.6%	9	12.0%
2	33	44.0%	32	42.6%	16	21.3%	15	20.0%	13	17.3%	17	22.6%
3	29	38.6%	28	37.3%	65	86.6%	40	53.3%	49	65.3%	47	62.6%
4	1	1.3%	1	1.3%	1	1.3%	11	14.6%	2	2.6%	2	2.6%

TOTALS (n=75)	Too busy	%	Housework (unpaid)	%	Distance to public office	%	Don't know where to go/how to ask	%	Women not allowed into public buildings	%	Women ignored when go into public building	%
1	14	18.6%	21	28.0%	4	5.3%	1	1.3%	32	42.6%	18	24.0%
2	25	33.3%	24	32.0%	21	28.0%	15	20.0%	20	26.6%	23	30.6%
3	34	45.3%	23	30.6%	49	65.3%	58	77.3%	21	28.0%	33	44.0%
4	2	2.6%	7	9.3%	1	1.3%	1	1.3%	1	1.3%	1	1.3%

TOTALS (n=75)	Culturally not appropriate/ allowed	%	Women not supposed to ask	%	Someone in family not supportive	%	Illiteracy	%	Language (documents only in Official language)	%	Information not seen as important for women	%
1	12	16.0%	26	34.7%	10	13.3%	0	0.0%	6	8.0%	8	10.6%
2	22	29.3%	14	18.6%	21	28.0%	10	13.3%	20	26.6%	23	30.6%
3	37	49.3%	34	45.3%	36	48.0%	64	85.3%	45	60.0%	41	54.6%
4	4	5.3%	1	1.3%	8	10.6%	1	1.3%	4	5.3%	3	4.0%

<b>Have you heard about the Freedom of Information Act?</b>						
<b>Region</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>No Answer</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Bomi (n=15)</b>	12	80.0%	3	20.0%	0	0%
<b>Grand Gedeh (n=15)</b>	12	80.0%	3	20.0%	0	0%
<b>Lofa (n=15)</b>	13	86.6%	2	13.3%	0	0%
<b>Nimba (n=15)</b>	11	73.3%	4	26.6%	0	0%
<b>Monrovia (n=15)</b>	12	80.0%	3	20.0%	0	0%
<b>TOTALS (n=75)</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>80.0%</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>20.0%</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0%</b>

**EXPERT  
RESPONSES**

<b>Participant Sex (n=60)</b>				
<b>Region</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Bomi (n=12)</b>	2	16.7%	10	83%
<b>Grand Gedeh (n=12)</b>	3	25.0%	9	75.0%
<b>Lofa (n=12)</b>	1	8.3%	11	91.7%
<b>Nimba (n=12)</b>	1	8.3%	11	91.7%
<b>Monrovia (n=12)</b>	1	8.3%	11	91.7%
<b>TOTALS (n=60)</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>13.3%</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>86.6%</b>

Type of Expert being interviewed (n=60 total)										
	NGO/ Int'l Comm.	%	Ministry Official	%	Academic/ University Professor	%	Other	%	No Answer	%
Bomi (n=12)	2	16.7%	5	41.7%	1	8.3%	3	25.0%	1	8.3%
Grand Gedeh (n=12)	4	33.3%	6	50.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	16.7%
Lofa (n=12)	1	8.3%	9	75.0%	4	33.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Nimba (n=12)	3	25.0%	8	66.7%	2	16.7%	3	25.0%	0	0.0%
Monrovia (n=12)	2	16.7%	5	41.7%	2	16.7%	1	8.3%	2	16.7%
<b>TOTALS (n=60)</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>20.0%</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>55.0%</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>15.0%</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>11.6%</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8.3%</b>

In what area is your expertise (mark all that apply) (n=60 total)?												
	Women's Rights	%	Land	%	Starting a business	%	Farming/ Agriculture	%	Education	%	Other	%
Bomi (n=12)	5	41.7%	2	16.7%	5	41.7%	3	25.0%	7	58.3%	2	16.7%
Grand Gedeh (n=12)	3	25.0%	1	8.3%	1	8.3%	3	25.0%	7	58.3%	5	41.7%
Lofa (n=12)	5	41.7%	6	50.0%	3	25.0%	6	50.0%	7	58.3%	0	0.0%
Nimba (n=12)	5	41.7%	6	50.0%	2	16.7%	3	25.0%	9	75.0%	4	33.3%
Monrovia (n=12)	2	16.7%	1	8.3%	3	25.0%	2	16.7%	7	58.3%	4	33.3%
<b>TOTALS (n=60)</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>33.3%</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>26.7%</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>23.3%</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>28.3%</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>61.7%</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>25.0%</b>



Do you think women access critical information less frequently than men?						
Region	Yes	%	No	%	Unsure	%
<b>Bomi (n=12)</b>	8	66.7%	4	33.3%	0	0.0%
<b>Grand Gedeh (n=12)</b>	8	66.7%	3	33.3%	1	8.3%
<b>Lofa (n=12)</b>	6	50.0%	6	50.0%	0	0.0%
<b>Nimba (n=12)</b>	8	66.7%	4	33.3%	0	0.0%
<b>Monrovia (n=12)</b>	8	66.7%	4	33.3%	0	0.0%
<b>TOTALS (n=60)</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>63.3%</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>36.7%</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1.7%</b>

## OBSERVATIONAL DATA

Approximately how many <u>male</u> employees were working in the office when you arrived?	
(Averages)	
<b>Bomi</b>	1.6
<b>Grand Gedeh</b>	4.6
<b>Lofa</b>	1.7
<b>Monrovia</b>	4.3
<b>Nimba</b>	2.1
<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>2.86</b>

Approximately how many <u>female</u> employees were working in the office when you arrived?	
(Averages)	
<b>Bomi</b>	0.3
<b>Grand Gedeh</b>	1.3
<b>Lofa</b>	0.9
<b>Monrovia</b>	2.4
<b>Nimba</b>	0.6
<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>1.10</b>

Approximately how many <u>men</u> were visiting the office during your observation?	
(Averages)	
<b>Bomi</b>	1.2
<b>Grand Gedeh</b>	8.1
<b>Lofa</b>	2.4
<b>Monrovia</b>	4.3
<b>Nimba</b>	4.4
<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>4.08</b>

Approximately how many <u>women</u> were visiting the office during your observation?	
(Averages)	
<b>Bomi</b>	0.9
<b>Grand Gedeh</b>	3.3
<b>Lofa</b>	3.0
<b>Monrovia</b>	2.2
<b>Nimba</b>	1.5
<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>2.18</b>

<b>Do you feel that women come into the office as often as men?</b>						
<b>Region</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>No Answer</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Bomi (n=18)</b>	11	61.1%	7	38.9%	0	0.0%
<b>Grand Gedeh (n=28)</b>	10	35.7%	18	64.3%	0	0.0%
<b>Lofa (n=46)</b>	36	78.3%	11	23.9%	0	0.0%
<b>Monrovia (n=28)</b>	19	67.9%	8	28.6%	0	0.0%
<b>Nimba (n=57)</b>	30	52.6%	25	43.9%	2	3.5%
<b>TOTALS (n=177)</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>59.9%</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>39.0%</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1.1%</b>

<b>Are women accessing information/documents in your office at the same rate as men?</b>						
<b>Region</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>No Answer</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Bomi (n=18)</b>	12	66.7%	6	33.3%	0	0.0%
<b>Grand Gedeh (n=28)</b>	9	32.1%	19	67.9%	0	0.0%
<b>Lofa (n=46)</b>	32	69.6%	13	28.3%	1	2.2%
<b>Monrovia (n=28)</b>	21	75.0%	5	17.9%	2	7.1%
<b>Nimba (n=57)</b>	26	45.6%	26	45.6%	5	8.8%
<b>TOTALS (n=177)</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>56.5%</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>39.0%</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4.5%</b>

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