

**Spotlight  
Initiative**  
*To eliminate violence  
against women and girls*



# **A manual on Gender Sensitive Reporting on Sexual and Gender-based Violence under the Liberia Spotlight Initiative**

Training Manual Developed by the Liberia Spotlight Initiative for  
Liberian Journalists

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## **Glossary**

### **Definition of Key Terms**

**SGBV:** Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

**GBV:** Gender-Based Violence

**COVID-19:** Corona Virus Disease (2019)

**FGM:** Female Genital Mutilation

**SV:** Sexual Violence

**SDG:** Sustainable Development Goals

**VAG:** Violence Against Women

**VAWG:** Violence Against Women and Girls

**UNW:** UN Women

**UNFPA:** United Nations Fund Population Agency

**OHCHR:** Office of the High Commission for Human Rights

**UNESCO:** United Nations Education and Scientific and Cultural Organization

**LSI:** Liberia Spotlight Initiative

**EU:** European Union

**UN:** United Nations

**MGCSP:** Ministry of Gender Children and Social Protection

**CEDAW:** Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women.

*“Media coverage of gender issues has been lacking in depth, substance and analysis of the core issues affecting women and girls in Liberia. In many instances, sexual and gender-based violence is covered in insensitive ways and with questionable headlines that trivialize the experiences of women and contribute to stereotypes and victim blaming.”*

**Ms. Marie Goreth Nizigama UN Women Country Representative for Liberia**

## Introduction

The Spotlight Initiative is a global, multi-year partnership between the European Union and the United Nations to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG) worldwide by 2030. The European Union \$500 million investment in gender equality serves as a driving force for the achievement of the Sustainable Development goals (Goal 5 on Gender Equality and Goal 16 on inclusive peaceful societies). Liberia was one of eight African countries selected to implement the initiative designed to build new multi-stakeholder partnerships and provide targeted support to eliminate all forms of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), including human trafficking, child marriage, harmful practices such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and ensure that women and girls have access to sexual and reproductive health care services.

The initiative was launched in Liberia on June 18, 2019 in partnership with the European Union (EU), United Nations (UN) and the Government of Liberia (GOL). The Vice President, Her Excellency Jewel Howard Taylor and other key government officials joined the UN, EU, traditional leaders, and civil society actors in Tienne, Grand Cape Mount County for the launch of the initiative. The Liberian government working in collaboration with the UN, EU and civil society organizations (CSOs) are implementing a series of activities in the five targeted counties: Montserrado, Grand Cape Mount, Lofa, Nimba and Grand Gedeh.

For the Spotlight Initiative in Liberia to be impactful, the media must serve as a powerful tool in the fight against SGBV because the messages transmitted by the media can either change or reinforce social mores and behaviors and mobilize citizens to act. Journalists Media need training on how to identify and report on SGBV, harmful practices and other forms of VAWG in a gender sensitive manner and how to portray survivors and alleged perpetrators. Experts in media and SGBV say the language used to report or describe the various forms of SGBV, in particular rape, sexual assault, and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) can reverse criminalization and result in blaming the survivor.

Journalists need to identify and familiarize themselves with the survivor centered approach, sources and stakeholders working on SGBV. To strengthen the media's capacity in gender sensitive media reporting, UN Women contracted the Female Journalist Association of Liberia (FeJAL) to implement the media engagement and advocacy component of the Liberia EU/UN Spotlight Initiative. FeJAL trained and engaged reporters, media managers and news editors on how to report on VAWG and increase awareness and better understanding of how violence against women and girls affect communities and the nation.

FeJAL targeted 300 media practitioners from some of Liberia's 125 commercial and community radio stations, 30 print and online media outlets and three television stations. FeJAL exceeded its goal by twenty-nine (29) percent or 88 media practitioners. FeJAL trained 388 media practitioners comprising 288 reporters (91 females; 197 males); 50 community radio journalists (45 males; 5 females) and 50 Monrovia-based media editors (45 males; and 5 females).

Journalists learned how to develop story ideas on SGBV, COVID-19 and its impact on SGBV, identify credible sources in order to accurately report on SGBV, and examine data with the goal of increasing awareness and shaping public opinion and response to the problem. Commercial and community radio stations learned how to produce talk shows and other programs on all aspects of VAWG. Journalists also learned how to develop talk shows on thematic issues under the Spotlight Initiative (SI), engage citizens on the issue and produce messages in local languages to increase public understanding of SGBV prevention and response.

This manual is based on lessons learned and the impact of the media engagement and advocacy capacity building training for media practitioners on Gender Sensitive Reporting under the Liberia EU/UN Spotlight Initiative.

## *ABOUT THIS MANUAL*

This manual was designed to build the capacity of media institutions, including media managers and reporters in understanding SGBV, connect them with sources at the UN , EU and Liberian government ministries, agencies and civil society organizations implementing the Liberian Spotlight Initiative (LSI).

Facilitators can use this document to conduct virtual and in-person trainings for journalists on reporting SGBV issues in a gender sensitive way. The manual will also inform on how to report on LSI's activities, how journalists can produce stories to create awareness, influence public opinion and stimulate response and minimize sensational coverage on SGBV. Included in this manual are resource materials and templates designed to support training delivery and also gauge trainees' performance before and after the training, track and report on stories, talk shows, voice spots and other reports on SGBV.

### **How to Use this Manual?**

Select the modules you wish to use and prepare your own agenda, based on what would be most useful in the participants' particular operational context. Each module can be conducted as a stand-alone training session or can be covered in combination with other modules.

**Know your audience:** Review participants' profile, background, their work, experience reporting on SGBV, and adapt the training accordingly. Find out if participants have had previous training on SGBV.



### Training Objectives:

- Strengthen journalists' capacity in reporting on SGBV , harmful practices, and other forms of VAWG.
- Ensure that gender sensitive reporting is enhanced in all media programs.
- Provide journalists with skills in identifying gender sensitive stories
- Sharpen skills on strategies to engage in media advocacy, report women issues and SGBV/HP in the media
- Create a network of media practitioners reporting actively on SGBV, HP and SRHRs and all thematic areas under the LSI and its impact on SGBV.
- Facilitate capacity building training on COVID-19 Gender Sensitive Reporting for journalists

### Desired Outputs

The following would have been achieved at the end of the training

- Training content developed on gender sensitive media coverage and advocacy under the LSI
- Deliver gender sensitive reporting capacity training to 300 journalists
- Increase advocacy with editorial staff and prominent journalists to provide coverage of SGBV, COVID-19 and its impact on women and other issue affecting other marginalized groups in Liberia
- Mentor journalists in producing stories on LSI and in-depth reports on all forms of violence against women.
- Increase gender-sensitive reporting on SGBV in the media landscape
- Enhance knowledge and skills on gender-sensitive reporting.
- Create a network of journalists to cover activities under the LSI
- Create gender desks in newsrooms enhance journalists' capacity to report on SGBV accurately and in a gender sensitive way.

## *International Declarations on Violence Against Women and Girls*

Since the founding of the UN in 1945, equality between men and women have been among the most fundamental guarantees of human rights. The UN Charter stipulates that the dignity and worth of human beings and the equal rights of men and women is enshrined in the constitution<sup>i</sup> The UN developed policies to guide states under international laws on the steps they should take to prevent violence against women, provide support for survivors and punish perpetrators. The international framework and policies have guided states and continental bodies such as the African Union (AU) in developing local laws to address violence against women. All countries that are signatories to international policies on SGBV must implement them. Liberia is a signatory to all international and legal framework on SGBV.

According to the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, “States have obligation to eliminate discrimination against women and men in all areas of their lives. This obligation requires States to take measures to address gender stereotypes both in public and private life as well as to refrain from stereotyping.”<sup>ii</sup>

Journalists reporting on SGBV need to understand the international and legal frameworks and policies that protects women, girls and boys, so that they can monitor, evaluate and report on how their respective countries are working toward eliminating violence against women.

Below are examples of international frameworks protecting women and girls from SGBV:

**The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW):** In 1979, CEDAW recommended that states include information in their reports to the committee on the incidence of VAWG. In 1990, the committee addressed female circumcision and other traditional practices harmful to women’s health. In addition, the committee also defines VAWG as violence directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately and declares it to be form of discrimination against women because it inhibits women’s ability to enjoy rights and freedoms on basis of equality with men.<sup>iii</sup>

**UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls, 1993:** The UN General Assembly defines violence against women as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.”

**The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action** identified 12 critical areas of concern that requires urgent action to achieve the goal of gender equality (1995): VAWG constitutes one of the critical areas of concern. The platform adopts the definition of VAWG contained in the Declaration, but highlights forms of VAWG, not explicitly mentioned in that instruments such

as violation of the rights of women in situations of armed conflict, particularly murder, systematic rape, sexual slavery and forced pregnancy, forced sterilization and forced abortion, coercive or forced use of contraceptives, female infanticide and pre-natal sex-selection.

**Sustainable Development Goals and Violence Against Women 2030 Agenda:** SDG Target 5.2: Eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls; SDG Target 5.3: Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage, and female genital mutilations; SDG Target 16.1: Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere SDG Target 16.2: End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against children.<sup>iv</sup>

**The Maputo Protocol on Women’s Rights: A Living Document for Women Human Rights in Africa:** The African Union adopted the Maputo Protocol in 2003 to challenge the old stereotypes about the role of women in society and placed the moral obligation on all member states to protect equal opportunities for men and women in society. The Maputo Protocol complements the AU’s Charter on Human and People Rights. The protocol addresses state responsibility to eliminate violence against women including threats to women in the family, at work in their communities and during armed conflict. It calls for the elimination of all forms of gender-based violence within the rights to life, integrity and security of the person and includes other provisions reinforcing state obligation to end gender-based violence and discrimination.<sup>v</sup>

## *Reporting Sexual and Gender Based Violence: Why Gender Sensitivity Reporting Matters?*

The term “Sexual and Gender-based Violence” has a two-prong definition. The United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner defines “sexual violence” as a form of gender-based violence that encompasses any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances against a person’s sexuality using coercion. Sexual violence takes multiple forms and includes rape, sexual abuse, forced pregnancy, forced sterilization, forced abortion, forced prostitution, trafficking, sexual enslavement, forced circumcision, castration and forced nudity.

The crime becomes gender-based violence when the act is act directed against individuals or groups of individuals on the basis of their gender. It may include sexual violence, domestic violence, trafficking, forced/early marriage and harmful traditional practices.

SGBV threatens the peace and security of women and girls. In Liberia, the incidents of rape and sexual assault continues to surge, and very few perpetrators are prosecuted because of interference from family, community, and lack of enforcement of the rape law. The number of SGBV cases in Liberia increased 47 percent over a five-year period, from 1,392 in 2014 to 2,643 in 2019. In 2019, only 14 percent of the reported rape cases resulted in conviction.<sup>vi</sup> Experts say the number of reported rape cases are only a fraction of what occurs in society. Survivors are afraid to report assault and rape cases to law enforcement because of stigma and fear and in some cases, authorities do not believe women.

When journalists are empowered to accurately report on SGBV in a gender-sensitive way through the publication of articles about survivors, perpetrators and community response it can change the culture of acceptance that surrounds SGBV. Journalists can end the stigma of talking about gender-based violence by enhancing their skills and knowledge about SGBV and developing sources and networks that include law enforcement professionals, health care personnel, survivors, perpetrators, international and local organizations working on the issue.

<sup>vii</sup>

Reporting on SGBV must go beyond the arrests of perpetrators and reported cases. Journalists must follow-up on cases as they are processed through the courts, medical and social support services for survivors and the impact of initiatives created to address SGBV. For example, most news stories on SGBV focus on the arrest or the most recent incident. Some journalists do not follow-up on the arrest or the outcome of the court process.

News coverage of VAWG is often marred by unethical and sensational reporting on sensitive cases, lacks reporting on prevention, how survivors are treated in the legal system and how communities are responding to the problem. For example, a newspaper in Liberia published on its website a video of a survivor talking about her experience, that was later disseminated on social media. The survivor and her family members were identified and the story included too many graphic details that did not provide much context to the issue of SGBV.

In interviews with survivors, journalists often ask survivors about their sexual history and the clothes they were wearing when they were raped. Such line of questioning blames the victim/survivor for the assault instead of trying to gather facts about what happened.

“  
Journalists have the power to amplify the voices of women and girls, to shed light on the forms of violence that target them, and to help communities worldwide address the harmful social norms that underpin gender inequality and gender-based violence.

## Media’s Role in Reporting SGBV

In order to address these challenges in reporting on SGBV, the media can play these critical roles:

- **Agenda Setting**—The media can set the tone for public discussion on SGBV issues. For example, citizens will discuss issues in the market, grocery store, beauty salons and in their neighborhoods, if they hear about it on radio, television or read it in the newspaper. The media can give value and importance to SGBV if they provide the appropriate context in their reporting based on facts, not sensationalism. When journalists report the facts that includes a broad range of well-sourced experts and credible information, it provides an opportunity for the public to understand the issue based on facts, so they can contribute meaningfully to the discussion. The heart of the media’s agenda setting role is based on the premise that media do not tell us what to think, but they do tell us what to think about. Media set the agenda for public discourse by parsing out the issues the public need to know when forming attitudes.<sup>viii</sup>
- **Advocacy Role** – The media is often used strategically to advance public policy and initiatives. The media can be used as a tool to advocate for an end to SGB. Accurate and gender sensitive reporting in the right context can influence advocacy for stiffer and deterrent punishments for perpetrators and raise awareness about the need for prevention programs and medical and social support for survivors. For example, the media can advocate for safe homes for survivors, so they do not have to return to the communities where they were assaulted. A series of stories highlighting the dilemma of protecting the survivor/victim when the perpetrator is still roaming the streets, will draw public attention to a major gap in services in SGBV response. In addition, reporting on domestic violence and Female Genital Mutilation can influence policy leaders to enact laws or enforce existing laws to protect women and girls. Reporting on the impact of the Liberia Spotlight Initiative can be used to advocate for additional funding to continue the program or convince policymakers to support initiatives to address SGBV.
- **Watchdog Role** –The media often use its watchdog role to hold officials accountable for how they manage public funds and resources. News reports about corruption, human rights abuses against women and children, child and maternal deaths have influenced societal response to those issues. In the case of SGBV, the media has a role to monitor and unearth abuses of power by perpetrators and/ or by the justice system, the health

care system and the failure of the government to implement and enforce the Rape Law, Domestic Violence Law, international protocols on SGBV, temporary ban on FGM and other efforts to protect survivors and their families.

- **Inform and educate** - The media can educate the public about SGBV, its impact on survivors, their families, communities, and the nation. For example, increased reporting on SGBV prevention and survivor services can educate the public on how to seek support for survivors and their families. The media can use its platform to educate the public about the Spotlight Initiative and the work it is doing to address SGBV.

*"Sexual violence against women and girls is rooted in centuries of male domination. Let us not forget that the gender inequalities that fuel rape culture are essentially a question of power imbalances."*

**UN Secretary-General António**

## MODULE 1

### *Understanding Gender and its impact on Violence Against Women*

**Objective:** By the end of this module, participants will have a deeper understanding of gender terminology and how language used to portray women and girls negatively contribute to stigma and stereotypes about SGBV.

In order to fulfill its critical role in reporting on all forms of VAWG, journalists need to understand gender roles and how our patriarchal society contributes to VAWG and how language and gender stereotypes fuel inaccurate and sensational reporting on SGBV. Module 1 comprise four lessons aimed at helping journalists understand SGBV terminologies, gender stereotypes, the various forms of SGBV and how the low representation of women in the media impacts media coverage on the issue.

#### **Lesson 1**

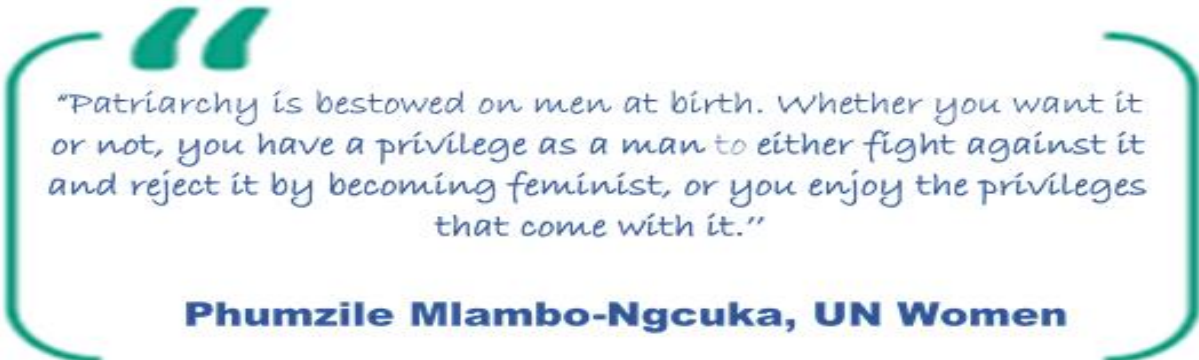
In this lesson, participants will learn how to define gender, the impact of gender norms on SGBV and how to avoid stereotyping in reporting on violence against women.

## Gender Definition: “Sex Vs. Gender”

In order for participants to accurately report on SGBV, they need to understand how gender norms and patriarchal values contribute to VAWG. The definition of “gender” and how it relates to VAWG is essential for the remaining modules. This lesson will include a brief exercise to reinforce participants’ knowledge of the difference between sex and gender. “Sex” refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that define men and women. “Gender” refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women.

Most of what we learn about gender roles come from our upbringing and the decisions that are made in the family. For example, household chores are assigned to girls. When money is tight, parents prefer educating the boy child because of the traditional belief that boys are more likely to take care of their parents, while a girl gets married and will be taken care of her husband. Girls are forced into early marriage to support the family.

Unequal power relationships and discrimination are root causes of violence against women. In most societies, men make the decisions in the family and have the final say in all family matters. Women are expected to be obedient to their husbands and male relatives. When a woman does not obey her husband, cook for him or fulfill his sexual needs, she exposes herself to violence or threats.<sup>ix</sup>



*“Patriarchy is bestowed on men at birth. Whether you want it or not, you have a privilege as a man to either fight against it and reject it by becoming feminist, or you enjoy the privileges that come with it.”*

**Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, UN Women**

Gender norms in Liberian society follow a traditional and conservative pattern and are connected to the larger structures of economy, legal framework, and religion. The understanding in this context is that men are the breadwinners, they control the home and family, are the primary decision makers. The notion of being a man is also understood as a part of a gendered hierarchy, in which men have the right to control and use violence’.<sup>x</sup>

These gender norms contribute to the patriarchal construction of Liberian society and some of the harmful cultural practices and VAWG. For example, a community leader in urban Montserrado explained, “Men beat on women because it is our tradition that women respect their husbands.” The beating is to teach her a lesson, so she does not disrespect her husband anymore. The tradition requires that women must bow to their husbands’ demands.<sup>xi</sup>

**Activity 1.1.** Explain to participants the difference between gender and sex. Ask participants to list three characteristics they learned about the opposite sex when they were growing up. See if they can make a distinction between which characteristics are based on gender and which activity is based on sex.

**Examples: Women breast feed, men bottle feed babies (S)**

**Men are cab drivers, women do not drive cabs (G)**

**Men do farm work. Women do not. (G)**

**Women bear children, men do not (S)**

## Lesson 2

### Gender stereotyping

During lesson 2, participants will learn how gender and social norms contributes to the way women are portrayed in the media, especially when it comes to reporting on SGBV. Gender stereotyping is a generalized view or pre-conceived notion about attributes, characteristics, or the roles that are or ought to be possessed by or performed by women and men. Gender stereotyping is harmful when it limits women’s and men’s capacity to develop their personal abilities, pursue their professional careers and make choices about their lives. The International Human Rights Law framework prohibits gender stereotypes and stereotyping which undermine the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms.<sup>xii</sup>

Find below a list of gender stereotypes. This is not an exhaustive list, but here are some of the common stereotypes that are used to describe men and women.

Women	Men
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• aggressive</li> <li>• submissive</li> <li>• weak</li> <li>• nurturing</li> <li>• Irrational</li> <li>• Timid/shy</li> </ul> <p><b>These characteristics reinforce the perception that women are weaker and less powerful than men.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ assertive</li> <li>• Powerful</li> <li>• strong</li> <li>• articulate</li> <li>• confident</li> </ul> <p><b>These characteristics reinforce the perception that men are more powerful than women.</b></p>

### Language and its impact on SGBV Reporting

Structures of many societies have been based on assumptions of sex-biased roles, which are entrenched in the use of language. To be truly equal, women and men must be seen and heard. This means eliminating language that misrepresents, excludes, or offends women.<sup>xiii</sup>



Careful use of language and images in the media will give a more accurate reflection of your audience or readership, and this can positively affect people's consciousness over time. For example, avoid using 'man' or mankind as the generic pronoun. Using the word 'man' to represent both women and men excludes women and minimizes their contributions and their worth as human beings. A more inclusive language could be humanity, people and human beings,

### Examples of Gender-Neutral Language:

- Clergy, not clergyman
- Firefighter, not fireman
- Chairperson, not chairman
- Salesperson, sales representative, not salesman
- Spokesperson, not spokesman
- Police officer, not policeman
- Journalists, not newsmen
- Entrepreneur/petty traders, not businessman
- Letter carrier/postal worker, not mailman

### Lesson 3

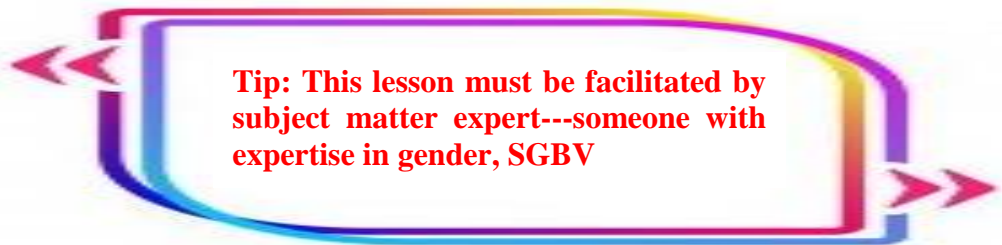
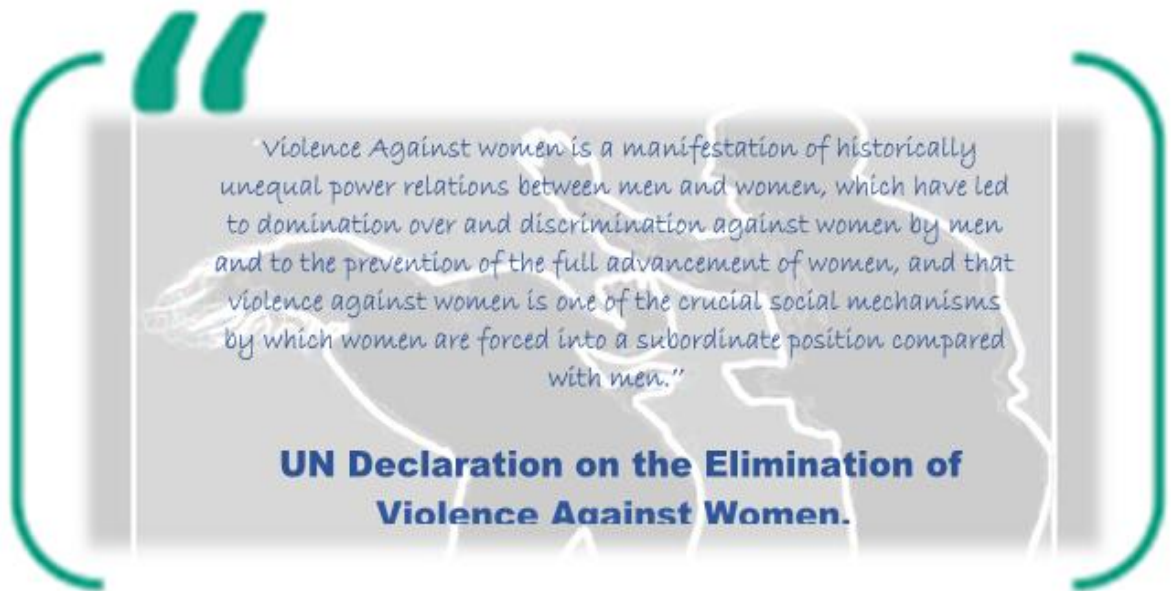
In this lesson, participants will learn about the various categories of SGBV, so they can begin to frame story ideas they might want to pursue.

#### Understanding SGBV: :

The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women states: SGBV is a violation of human rights because it denies the human dignity of the individual and hurts human development.

#### Definition of SGBV:

Sexual and gender-based violence refers to any act perpetrated against someone based on gender norms and unequal power relationships. It encompasses threats of violence and coercion. It inflicts harm on women, girls, men, and boys.



### **Gender-Based Violence (GBV):**

Refers to violence that targets individuals or groups based on their gender. CEDAW defines GBV as “violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately,” according to the Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

Rape has been going on for centuries, but it was always the big elephant in the room that no one wants to talk about. In Liberia and across Africa, male relatives abused young girls and boys, but it was always handled the family/community way, leaving survivors scarred and no accountability for the perpetrators.

But the rape of women and girls in conflicts in Rwanda, Liberia, Congo, Sierra Leone, and many war-torn countries ignited conversations about SGBV. Liberia enjoys relative peace and stability since the 14-year civil war ended in 2003, but VAWG continues in multiple forms. That is why the SI was created to tackle and respond to the problem and ignite community discussions, so that citizens can join the fight to eliminate SGBV.

For journalists to accurately report on Gender-based Violence (GBV), they need to understand the various forms of VAWG , to expand their coverage on the issue.

Below are some examples of GBV:

- Physical (e.g. rape, domestic violence)
- Mental (psychological)
- Threat/coercion any other deprivations of liberty
- Gender-based violence can also be inflicted on men when the man is a victim of a sexual assault, harassment, beaten or killed because they do not conform to society's view of masculinity.
- FGM (the partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. The practice has no health benefits to women and girls. FGM is practiced in 10 of Liberia's 15 counties.

### **Violence Against Women (VAG)**

The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (adopted by UN General Assembly Dec. 20, 1993), describes VAG as any act of gender-violence that results in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women. It also includes gender-based violence.

Violence against women shall be understood to encompass, but not be limited to, the following:

- Physical includes battering
- Sexual psychological violence occurring in the family (sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation, and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation.
- Physical, sexual, and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution.

### **Sexual Violence**

- Includes sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. It refers to any act, attempt or threat of a sexual nature that results in physical, psychological, and emotional harm (it is also a form of GBV).
- Sexual violence includes sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. It refers to any act, attempt, or threat of a sexual nature that result, or is likely to result in, physical, psychological, and emotional harm.



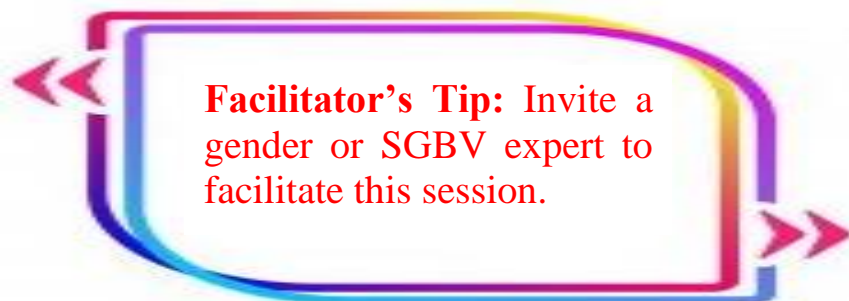
In Liberia, there is a misconception shared by men and women, boys and girls, that women provoke rape and sexual harassment because they dress inappropriately. However, that

argument is challenged in cases where babies in diapers are raped. In one survey, a woman said, “The way women dress causes rape. If a woman wears clothes that catches a man’s heart and he asks her for sex, but she refuses, he will force her.”<sup>xiv</sup>



Women have internalized that they are the ones to blame when their rights are violated. In one focused group discussion in Lofa, girls expressed that “the women are the cause of violence because they do not do their household work on time and disrespect the husband”.

The younger generation, both men and women, strongly believe that men hold the power in the relationship. All the girls interviewed in a focus group discussion in Liberia’s Grand Cape Mount County, agreed that, “some women cause violence because they do not cook for their husbands on time nor do their housework properly”.<sup>xv</sup>



#### Lesson 4

In this lesson, participants will learn about how women representation in the media is significant to improving reporting on SGBV. Participants will also understand how to examine the diversity of sources they include in their news stories and how to capture more women voices in stories and as journalists in their newsrooms.

### Women representation in the media

Numerous studies have shown that the low representation of women in the media both as sources and staffers is one of the major reasons for the lack of sensitivity in the way journalists report on SGBV. Men control newsrooms and the issues that are covered in the media. The Global Media Monitoring Project survey of media outlets from 1995-2015 found that women represented just one quarter of people featured in the news. The survey found little change in two decades.<sup>xvi</sup>

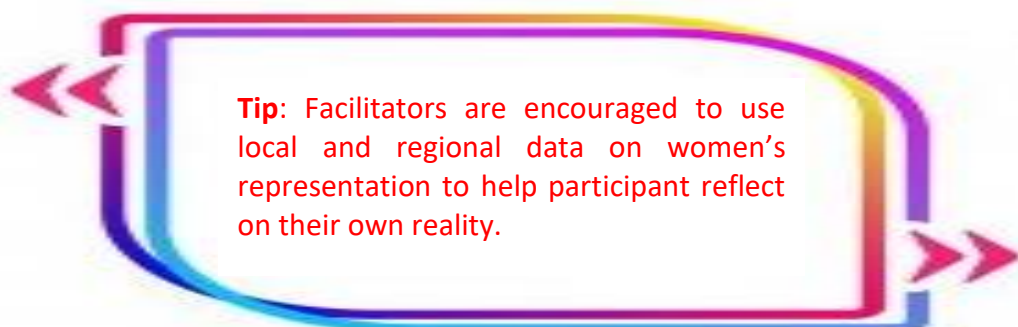
The 2010 Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media found that women represent 33 percent of the journalism workforce worldwide. The study was done by the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF) in collaboration with UNESCO.

In Liberia, women comprised 22 percent of newsroom staff, according to a 2015 Advancing Women in the Media Strategy by the Liberia Women Media Action Committee, under the USAID Liberia Civil Society Media Leadership Program implemented by IREX.<sup>xvii</sup>

Since 2015, the number has dropped significantly because some women left to pursue other opportunities including higher education at home and abroad, sexual harassment, lack of growth opportunities and pursued other professional opportunities. FeJAL has plans to conduct a follow-up study on the status of women in the Liberia media next year.

The lack of women in media influence the way the media reports on women. When reporters fail to speak to women experts and leaders, they risk leaving out perspectives relevant to a huge portion of society and miss out on new and interesting stories that otherwise may not surface.<sup>xviii</sup>

The marginalization of women's voices in the news denies women the right to freedom of expression enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, articulated as the right to "hold opinion without interference, to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media."<sup>xix</sup>



Activity 1.2: **Women Representation in the Media:** In this lesson, participants will learn about the lack of women voices in the media. Journalists often have limited access and knowledge about women- thought leaders in their communities. In this exercise, ask participants to list 10 female and 10 male sources. Have participants share their lists with each other to see how many male vs female sources they came up with.

## MODULE 2:

### *Interviewing SGBV Survivors*

**Objective:** By the end of this session, participants will be equipped with interviewing techniques to conduct gender sensitive interviews that informs the public rather than blames and stigmatize the survivors.

“Sensitive reporting means ensuring that the media interview meets the needs of the survivor. Considerations around a survivor’s best interest must take precedence over other objectives, including drawing attention to a particular grave gender-based violation such as mass rape.”

**Source: Media Guidelines for Reporting on GBV in Humanitarian Context.**

#### **Lesson 1**

In this lesson, participants will learn to develop a survivor-centered approach when reporting on SGBV. Participants need to understand the psychological and social impact sexual assault has on a survivor, so they can approach the interview in a gender-sensitive way.

#### **Impact of SGBV on Survivors**

VAWG is one of the most prevalent human rights violations in the world. Globally, one in three women will experience physical or sexual violence in her lifetime. The abuse leaves survivors scarred for most of their lives. The impact could include:

- Unwanted pregnancy
- Sexually transmitted diseases including HIV, AIDS
- Fistula
- Unsafe Abortion
- Low self-esteem
- Trauma
- mental illnesses (depression anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, attempted suicide)
- Sexual dysfunction

Journalists should understand the psychological, emotional, and physical impact that a sexual assault has on survivors and their families. When journalists fail to ask the right questions, survivors can feel exploited or exposed to stigma and retaliation. Journalist do not want the survivor to relive the trauma through your questioning and reporting.<sup>xx</sup>

**Activity 1.3: Interview Questions.** This exercise seeks to determine how journalists approach the interview process in reporting on SGBV. Ask participants to come up with the first three questions they would ask the survivor during an interview.

Here are examples of some of the insensitive questions’ journalists have asked survivors:

- How can you accuse your husband of rape? He has the right to have sex with you whenever he wants.
- You had sex with your ex-boyfriend before, why are you saying he raped you now?
- The rumor is you have had sex with other teachers before for grades. Why should anyone believe you now that you are accusing this other teacher of rape?
- What were you wearing?
- Were you a virgin?
- Did it hurt?
- You are a prostitute, why are you saying the guy rape you?
- Why did you leave your 5-year-old baby girl with your boyfriend?

## Preparing for the Interview

### Research, Research, Research

SGBV is a complex, delicate topic that requires in-depth understanding and sensitivity, according to UNESCO’s “A Handbook for Journalists.” Journalists most often write about isolated incidents, instead of exploring the depths of the problem. Often journalists ignore the basic ethics of journalism because they are more concerned about getting the story first and meeting daily deadlines. Most journalism experts say “getting the story right is just as important as getting it first.”

But when journalists are reporting on an issue that involves a vulnerable ~~traumatized~~ person, who might be dealing with health and other mental issues, journalists much understand the issue before reporting on it. Journalists and media outlets must make it their duty to familiarize themselves with all the research on SGBV provided through international organizations such as the UN agencies, scholarly journals, government sources including police, agencies that deal with women and children and spend a lot of time getting to know social workers and other professionals who work with survivors and their families. Background interviews and research will guide journalists in conducting gender-sensitive interviews.

**Treat Survivor with Respect:** Respect the survivor’s privacy. Provide detailed and complete information about the topics that will be covered and inform the survivor on how the information will be used. Let the survivor know that they do not have to answer every question.

**Keep Preconceived Notions in Check:** Before the interview, journalists need to understand the impact of the trauma of sexual violence has on survivors. Do not go into the interview with assumptions about an interviewee who may be healing from trauma (for example, you think they made up the story or set a trap for the suspect).

## **Lesson 2**

In this lesson, participants will learn how to prepare for interviewing a survivor and develop questions that are gender sensitive. They will also learn tips that will guide them during the interview process.

**The Interview Location:** When possible, try to conduct the interview in a place where the survivor will feel safe. For example, if the alleged perpetrator is someone from the household who has not been arrested, the survivor's home may not be a safe place. Same applies if the perpetrators are from the community where neighbors have taken an oath to secrecy. Ask the survivor to recommend a place where they feel safe.

**Show Empathy:** You can make the survivor comfortable by expressing concern about their well-being and letting them know that you are sorry for what they are going through. Help them understand the value of sharing their story to draw attention to SGBV and inspire other survivors to share their stories.

**Be a good listener:** Refrain from asking unnecessary follow-up questions until the survivor has finished speaking. Do not try to be a therapist or police officer. Stick to journalism. Ask questions that relate to the context of the story. Do not force survivors to repeat the details. Focus on the facts. If the survivor is uncomfortable during the interview, process, give them time to adjust or end the interview.

**Develop a list of Questions:** Go to every interview with a list of questions, so you are not scrambling or run the risk of asking inappropriate questions. Journalist should also share their questions with survivors prior to the interview if possible, in order to make them feel comfortable and give them an opportunity to raise concerns that they might have about the interview.

## **Survivor Vs Victim**

Historically, women who were raped or sexually assaulted were called victims. But in the last 20 years, there has been a debate about whether to call women who were raped victim or survivors. Advocates say the term "victim" carries a negative connotation, while the term "survivor" is used to refer to someone who has gone through recovery process or when discussing the short-or long-term effects of sexual assault. <sup>xxi</sup>



**Activity 2.1: Media Coverage on SGBV:** This exercise is designed to help participants use some of their news skills to examine recent news reports on SGBV. Have participants break into four groups depending on number of participants, to review a sampling of news articles on SGBV that were published in their local newspapers. (20 minutes) Discuss the tone of the story, is it gender sensitive, how did the reporter treat the survivor, what sources are cited in the story?

### Lesson 3

The survivor's interest is more important than any major story on SGBV. In this lesson, participants will learn tips on how to respect the survivor's privacy, so that they can fulfil their role of informing and educating the public about SGBV.

#### **Survivor's Interest Supersedes the News Story**

If journalists want to use their craft to effect positive change, they need to apply the "do no harm strategy" to protect survivors.

**Duty to Inform:** Distinguish between what is "in the public interest" and what is "of interest to the public." For example, do you need to describe or provide graphic details about the rape. Report the bruises, but there is no need to provide graphic details of the rape. The public knows what rape is, journalists do not need to beat readers and listeners over the head with the definition of rape. Some SGBV stories have too many details that it is more sensational than informative. Stick to the facts, leave out the details.

**Respecting Privacy:** Survivors and their families must be handled delicately. If a survivor and his/her family decide to talk to a journalist, do not betray that trust. The standard journalistic practice is to protect the survivor's identity. The survivor and their family could be targeted by community and other family members who want to protect the perpetrator. If the survivor mentions other people in narrating their story, the journalist cannot publish that person's name without permission. Do not assume that because a survivor, their family, or people knowledgeable about the case are giving you permission to use their name simply because they talked to you.

**A Survivor-Centered Approach:** This approach recognizes that each survivor is unique and reacts differently to gender-based violence. They have different strength, resources, and coping mechanism. Each survivor has the right to determine who should know their story and what happens next. Prioritize what is in the best interest of the survivor with respect to safety, confidentiality, and whether they want to be identified in the story or not. As a rule, the media should not identify survivors of sexual assault. A person who has survived an assault for years and has recovered may not have a problem using their name. As a rule, survivors should not be identified. <sup>xxii</sup>

### Checklist Before publication and Broadcast

Before you air or publish a story about GBV consider these points:

- ✓ Is the story accurate (check all the facts,)?
- ✓ Is the story respectful to the survivor?
- ✓ Is the story fair, balanced, impartial?
- ✓ Does the story have expert opinions and credible sources?
- ✓ Did I get permission from the survivor to use their name? (The standard ethical principle is we do not identify the victim, but there are cases when survivors do grant permission to use their name)
- ✓ Review for inappropriate language, gender stereotypes and terminology that blames the victim or trivializes the violent act.

*Ask yourself: Will the survivor feel that I captured their story accurately, respectfully and in a sensitive way?  
Will my story influence public opinion and prompt action?*



### Module3:

### *How to Develop Sources on SGBV*

**Objective:** By the end of this session, participants will know how to identify and build sources and experts on SGBV, so that they can strengthen their reporting on violence against women.

#### **Background on Source Development**

News stories are based on newsgathering, interviews, networking with sources and research. The most successful journalists are the ones who quickly master these important skills. The source of the information determines whether news reports are credible and trustworthy by readers, listeners, and viewers.

Journalists who want to specialize in reporting on SGBV must develop long-term relationships with lawyers, doctors, women's rights groups, CSOs, traditional leaders, government officials that you can engage on a regular basis to find out what is going on with SGBV.

Activity 1.5: Where do journalists find information on SGBV? When journalists want to do a political story, they go to the Legislature or politicians. But where do they go for SGBV stories? The police, Ministry of Gender and the courts are the typical sources. Are there other places journalists can find information? Ask participants to list three SGBV sources. (take five minutes to discuss the sources and what value they bring to reporting on SGBV)

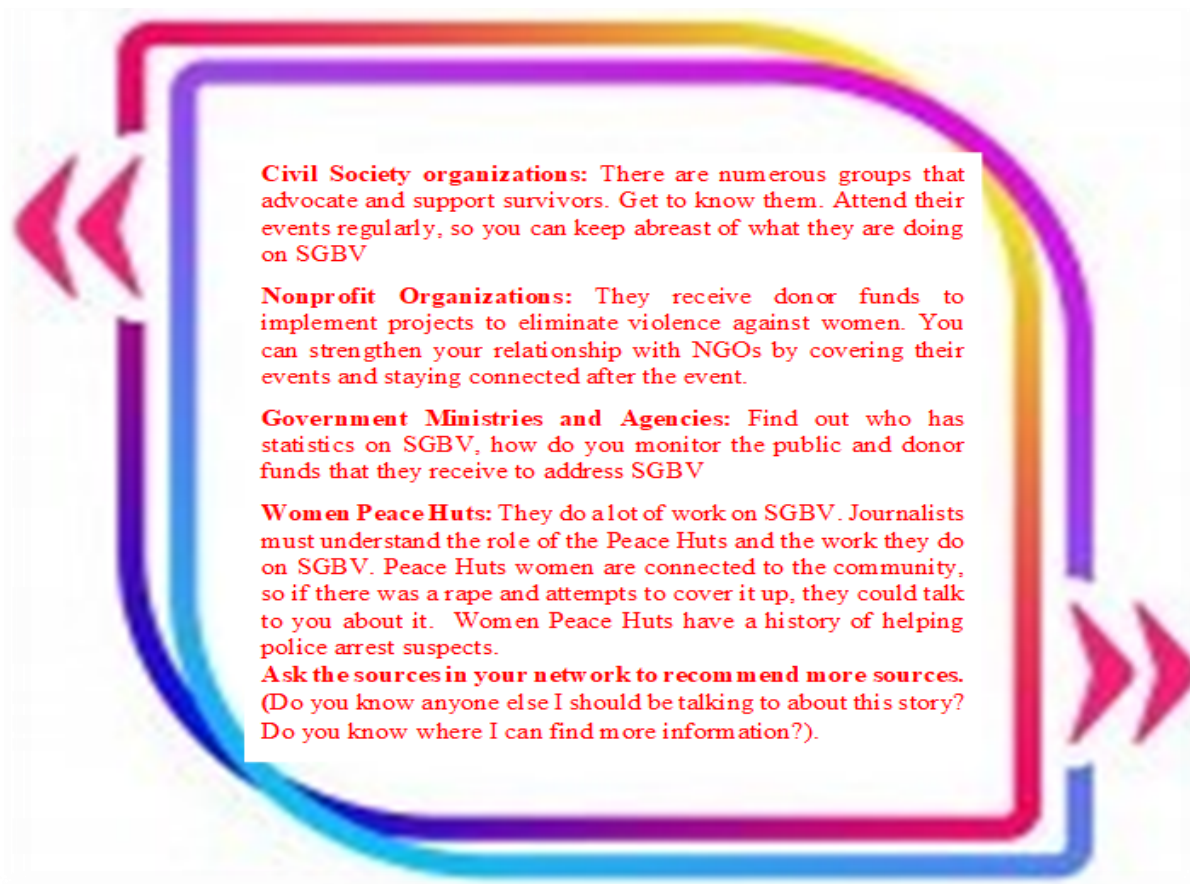
## Lesson 1

In this lesson, participants will receive tips on how to build networks in the SGBV community, so they can increase their knowledge of the issue, develop story ideas, and find out trends and issues on SGBV.

### How to Connect with SGBV Networks:

SGBV is a complex problem. Survivors and their advocates value the media, but they do not trust journalists because of the lack of sensitivity in most news stories on SGBV. Journalists who want to report on SGBV need to build a level of trust with sources, so that people are willing to tell their story.

Here are some tips on how to build sources to strengthen reporting on SGBV:



## Lesson 2

In this lesson, participants will learn how to examine the information they receive from a variety of sources to report the facts and accurate perspective on SGBV.

### Vet Sources

Journalists have a responsibility to fact check information from all their sources. They must ensure that the information is accurate. Not all news sources are credible. Journalists must carefully vet sources. Do they have an agenda? Some sources could try to spin the story because of self-interest. If the information sounds like a “Gotcha”, it’s okay to get excited. But always ask, “How do you know this? Why are you telling me this? Corroborate the information by checking other sources: data, documents, and additional interviews. The source of the information determines whether news reports are credible and trustworthy by readers, listeners, and viewers. Tips are good, but only publish information from authoritative sources that you have thoroughly vetted. Always have a variety of sources. Not every source will give you information that you can use. Sources can provide you deep background information that can inform your story or lead you to other sources to get more specifics. If you have a source that you cannot quote, the burden on you is to get the information on the record.

According to Pulitzer Prize Journalist Bob Woodward, it is the reporter’s responsibility to check the information to make sure it is fair and balance. <sup>xxiii</sup>

### TIPS ON SGBV Sourcing

- If you find someone who you think will be a goldmine of information on SGBV, check with them regularly, regardless of whether you need to interview them for a particular story. They may not fit into one story today, but they may be useful for a story tomorrow.
- Get in the habit of having small talks with people in the community working with SGBV response and prevention. Always ask about stories you could be writing about.
- Scan your contact list to see if there is someone you have not talked to in a long time. They might have a scoop for you. The SGBV story is not about the latest rape, it is about trends, context, and impact.

### Create a Network with Key Sources

- UN agencies: They fund government ministries, agencies, and civil society organizations to implement projects to eliminate gender-based violence. They also produce a lot reports, studies, and research materials on SGBV.
- Get on the email list of these agencies, so you can get their newsletters, press releases. Like their social media pages (Facebook), follow them on Twitter.
- Traditional leaders: They are part of the fight to end violence against women and girls, especially Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and child marriage.
- Law enforcement: police reports on rape and other forms of gender-based violence
- The Ministry of Internal Affairs: They work with traditional leaders on FGM
- Ministry of Labor: Good source for stories on child trafficking

Courts: Get to know the judges, lawyers, Liberian Bar Association, Association of Female Lawyers, clerks. Start filing Freedom of Information (FOI) requests for data on SGBV cases that comes to the court.

Spotlight Initiative: Get to know the implementing partners, so you can follow up on outcomes and impact of the intervention.

### Lesson 3

In this lesson, participants will review a sampling of news stories on SGBV and participate in a discussion on the ethical lapses and other problems with the stories. Facilitators are encouraged to use sampling of stories from their context for discussion with participants.

#### **Bad Reporting on SGBV:**

Throughout this manual, we have provided tips on how the media can report on SGBV in a gender sensitive way. In this lesson, we have compiled articles from some of the major newspapers in Liberia to show some of the unethical problems and flaws in reporting SGBV.

**Story Title:** Man, 56, Rapes 13-year-old Girl (Daily Observer, Oct. 21, 2020)

**Excerpts from story:** It was a beautiful morning, and Rachel has just returned from the market to help her mother to cook the family’s meal for the day. Happy and excited that the meal was about to be prepared, Rachel, immediately jumped into the kitchen to help her mother out, but in the process, nature came calling.

As she left for the toilet, little did Rachel know about the shock that was about to come her way — being raped by someone she considered as a father figure — an uncle. Meanwhile, Flomo has been arrested and is currently behind bars at the Free Port Zone 10 police depot, awaiting the medical report from the incident, to be forwarded to court.

**Why is the story bad?** Rape is a tragic experience, so journalists should not try to make light of the situation. Get to the point of explaining that the girl was raped by an uncle while she was on the way from the market. No one expects to be raped when they leave their home. Reporters must avoid using words such as ‘‘shock.’’ Show what happened or how someone felt. There is no need to beat the reader over the head with frivolous details. The reporter identified the girl’s address. The story mentioned the perpetrator by his first name, though the reporter mentioned that he had been arrested. If someone is arrested and charged with rape, journalists much use their full name. The reporter did not interview the police, the Ministry of Gender or SGBV experts. The story was based entirely on the girl and her mother’s account. The reporter mentions a medical report and court process, but where did that information come from. Is it a fact or an assumption?

**Story Title: Liberia:** Girl, 14, Gang Raped; Alleged Perpetrators Released by Police without charges (Frontpage Africa, Aug. 25, 2020)

**Excerpts from story:** Little Rachel (not her real name) was unaware that the brutal danger of rape was lurking on the day she set on a journey to visit her guardian in Paynesville. She would later get allegedly gang raped by eight boys in the home of her guardian.

According to her mother, Racheal would often visit her guardian to spend the weekend. “I was getting ready to go to my guardian home for my daughter, but when I saw him coming, I waited and he said my daughter was raped in the house, but he was not at home,” said the victim’s mother

She said the police later arrested four boys and they were in jail at the Zone 8 Depot. But they were later released with the officer in charge of the depot's Women and Children Protection Section reportedly telling the victim's mother that "the boys were not guilty".

## MODULE 4:

### *By the Numbers:*

#### *The Role of Data in Reporting SGBV*

**Objective:** By the end of this lesson, participants will have a deep understanding of why data is an effective tool to reporting GBV and how they can use it to report on SGBV.

According to UN Women, VAWG is one of the most widespread, persistent, and devastating human rights violations in our world today, but it remains largely unreported due to the impunity, silence, stigma, and shame surrounding it.<sup>xxiv</sup>

### **Global Statistics**

- 1 in 3 women and girls experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, most frequently by an intimate partner
- Only 52% of women married or in a union freely make their own decisions about sexual relations, contraceptive use, and health care
- Worldwide, almost 750 million women and girls alive today were married before their 18th birthday, while 200 million women and girls have undergone FGM)
- 1 in 2 women killed worldwide were killed by their partners or family in 2017; while only 1 out of 20 men were killed under similar circumstances
- 71% of all human trafficking victims worldwide are women and girls, and 3 out of 4 of these women and girls are sexually exploited
- VAWG is as serious a cause of death and incapacity among women of reproductive age as cancer, and a greater cause of ill health than traffic accidents and malaria combined. UN Women

Earlier in the manual, we talked about the definition of SGBV and its various forms. To report on the various forms of SGBV, journalists need to understand them, so they can follow trends and add context to their stories on SGBV. Rape is not the only form of VAWG. Journalists should track data on domestic violence, sexual harassment, emotional and psychological violence, sexual exploitation, child marriage, female genital mutilation, and human trafficking.

## Lesson 1

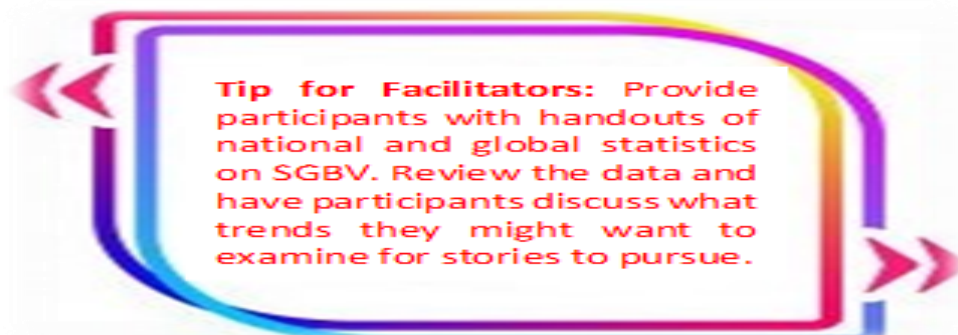
In this lesson, participants will learn how to use data to strengthen their reporting on SGBV. Facilitator will guide participants in reviewing local and global statistics to help them develop story ideas based on data trends.

### Data strengthens evidence-based reporting

- Data adds depth and provides context to gender-based violence stories.
- Data also shows impact. Numbers allow the media to show trends---is gender-based violence increasing nationwide, globally, in the region? What municipalities, counties have more prevalence of rape, FGM, child marriage or domestic violence?
- Data can help inform policies, intervention, and response to gender-based violence.
- Data can be used to hold public officials accountable for failure to address gender-based violence or address the gaps in response to COVID-19 and other health crisis.
- Data provides deeper insights and can provide the analysis and information to explain the trends and context of gender-based violence.
- Data sharpens the story by showing that the rape that happened last week was not an isolated incident but is part of a bigger problem. It also shows the prevalence of rape and domestic violence during a pandemic lockdown

Data on its own does not tell the SGBV story. Journalists must interview SGBV experts or the source of the data to explain the trends. Journalists are not SGBV experts, so they should never attempt to explain the data. Due to the challenges about reporting SGBV, it is always important to let the expert provide the context.

Sources on data analysis include civil society organizations, government ministries and agencies, lawyers and women's rights groups working on gender-based violence, law enforcement, the courts, especially the rape court; Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, UN agencies that are implementing the Spotlight Initiative. —UN Women, UNDP, UNFPA, OHCHR, UNICEF (these agencies are leading the Liberia Spotlight Initiative and online research).





## MODULE 5:

### *Reporting during a Pandemic:*

*The media training took place during the height of the Corona Virus pandemic, when governments around the world-imposed emergency lockdown to curb the spread of the virus.*

**Objective:** By the end of the session, participants will learn how report on the impact of a pandemic or other emergencies on SGBV

In May 2020, the UN issued an alert about the alarming rise of rape and domestic violence during the coronavirus lockdown. Proclaiming a “Shadow Pandemic,” UN Women cited the following reasons for alarm:

- Globally, even before the pandemic began, one in three women experienced physical or sexual violence, mostly perpetrated by an intimate partner.
- Emerging data shows an increase in calls to domestic violence helplines in many countries since the outbreak of COVID-19.
- Survivors have limited information and awareness about available services and limited access to support services.
- In some countries, resources have been diverted from mitigating violence against women to providing COVID-19 relief. <sup>xxv</sup>

In this module, the facilitator will use lessons learned from reporting SGBV during the corona pandemic to serve as a guide for journalists reporting on future health crisis that might impact SGBV

The Corona Virus pandemic brought a new set of challenges in SGBV Women and children who were confined to their homes and communities faced greater risk of being abused. UN Secretary General António Guterres called on governments around the world to ensure that addressing SGBV was a major component of their national response to COVID-19.

With the world’s focus on the health pandemic, most governments paid little or no attention to responding to SGBV, maternal health care facilities and other services for women and girls.

*“The statistics on the increased prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence in Liberia in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic are very alarming, because the prevalence was already extremely high. Most of the women and girls no longer have anywhere to hide because most of the violence happens at home, a place which should be a safe space for any individual. It is frightening to imagine, that for many women and girls, homes are not being recognized as a ‘safe space’ but in captivity and violence with their abusers.”*

**Theodorus Kaspers, Head of Cooperation at the EU Delegation in Liberia.**

In Liberia, nearly 1,000 women were raped from March 2020 to July 2020, the period of the state of emergency, according to the MGCSP.—The escalation of rape cases sparked a series of protests across the country and compelled President George Manneh Weah to declare rape as a national emergency after the UN, EU and activists raised concerns and urged the government to strengthen laws and provide support to protect women and girls. During the Corona Virus lockdown period, rape made headlines and journalists scrambled for statistics and other information to strengthen their stories.

In reporting on the impact of a pandemic on SGBV, journalists must examine data during the lockdown period and the same period in previous years. They must also consider the following:

- ✓ Track all SGBV cases reporting during the pandemic
- ✓ Follow those cases through the court proceedings
- ✓ How many of those cases resulted in arrests?
- ✓ How did the government respond to SGBV cases during the pandemic?
- ✓ What services are provided to survivors/victims

**TIP:** Invite subject matter experts from law enforcement official, Ministry of Gender, Ministry of Justice to talk how a pandemic impacted SGBV and response to the problem.

*Developing Story Ideas on Gender-based Violence:*

**Objective:** By the end of this session, participants will learn how to develop SGBV story ideas and produce stories that are gender sensitive and provide context to their stories from a diverse range of sources.

In previous modules, participants learned about the various forms of SGBV. In this session, participants will use their new-found knowledge to develop story ideas they can pursue on SGBV.

Review the list of SGBV thematic areas discussed earlier in the manual. Facilitator should encourage participants to think about aspects of violence against women they would like to write about.

**Recap of SGBV thematic areas.**

- Intimate partner violence/Domestic Violence: battering, psychological abuse, marital rape, filicide-the killing of a woman/girl because of her gender)
- Sexual violence and Harassment: rape, forced sexual acts, unwanted sexual advances, child sexual abuse, forced marriage, street harassment, stalking, cyber- harassment.
- Human Trafficking: Slavery, sexual exploitation
- Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)
- Child Marriage

**Lesson 1**

In this lesson, participants will learn how to develop story ideas on SGBV, so they can diversify their reporting on violence against women and girls. SGBV is more than the interview with the survivor or the police report. It includes data and interviews from a variety of sources.

**Data Stories on SGBV**

- Find national numbers on the various categories of SGBV.
- Identify the organizations and agencies working on the specific issue. For example, FGM, Child Marriage, domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment. All these organizations have a mission. They are receiving donor funds to work on these issues. Journalists have an obligation to examine the impact of these interventions in eliminating violence against women and girls.
- How many rape, domestic violence or FGM cases are these organizations working on? What was the outcome of some of those cases?
- What is the impact of their intervention?
- Who are the people receiving help from these organizations?
- Look for trends in the numbers. Why are there more reported cases of gender-based violence in some areas?

## **Follow the Breaking News Rape Story:**

The key to developing story ideas on SGBV is to first become an expert on the issue. In Liberia, the media is financially strapped, so most media outlets cannot afford to have reporters covering SGBV exclusively. In between covering sports, politics and business, the editor might ask a reporter to cover the rape case that was reported the night before. Once the breaking news story is over, the reporter moves on to another story. But the SGBV story does not end after the incident.

Reporters must follow up on the following:

- Was there an arrest?
- How did the court process end?
- Cover the trial
- What happened to the survivor?
- What kind of support is he/she receiving?

## **Dig Deeper into Reported Cases**

The story of Gender-based Violence is not only about the interview with the survivor or the breaking news story on the sexual assault case from last week. The best gender-based violence stories require in-depth reporting, so reporters need to work harder to find creative angles to tackle the subject. Reporters need to think creatively about sources, details, and the overall message of their reporting to produce feature stories that will influence citizens, stakeholders, and public officials to act.

To provide context to stories on SGBV, reporters must identify sources in the SGBV network—advocates, law enforcement, UN agencies, safe homes, survivors’ networks, lawyers, civil society organizations working on the issue.

Most news stories about GBV is a series of isolated incidents instead of tackling the issue from a human rights phenomenon. As a result, readers and listeners rarely connect the issue to social norms, gender stereotypes and human rights. Journalists need to explore the depths of child marriage, domestic violence, child marriage, human trafficking, and other forms of gender-based violence.

## **Lesson 3**

In this lesson, participants will learn how to use research on SGBV as one of the story angles they can pursue in reporting on violence against women and girls.

## **Track Research on SGBV**

Research is not always sexy, but they are good source of information and news. Review research reports carefully for story ideas or angles to pursue. Journalists should look for trends and statistics cited at international observances such as 16 Days of Activism and Zero Tolerance for the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). During those events, UN agencies and the government often provide statistics and other information about trends, etc.

Review speeches and statements from policymakers and experts. Create a file/folder on SGBV to keep track of statements, documents, statistics, cases and sources.

#### **Lesson 4**

It is almost impossible for journalists to report on the Spotlight Initiative if they do not have connections with the UN agencies implementing the program. In this lesson, participants will learn how about the UN agencies implementing the Spotlight Initiative.

#### **Network with UN Agencies and their Implementing Partners**

The LSI is now the leading project that is working to address GBV. The UN agencies working on LSI include UN Women, UNDP, OHCHR, UNICEF, UNFPA. Journalists must connect with the program leads and communication specialists at those agencies, in order to get tips, story ideas and other information on SGBV. Journalists must familiarize themselves with the website and social media platforms (Facebook and Twitter) of these agencies to stay on top of trends and issues on SGBV.

#### **Lesson 5**

In this lesson, participants will learn how to use clear and precise language in writing stories about SGBV.

#### **Writing Tips:**

In earlier modules, the facilitator provided participants with knowledge on the various forms of SGBV, how patriarchy impacts violence against women, tips on interviewing survivors and identifying SGBV sources. This module focuses on how journalists can use that knowledge to produce and write SGBV stories that are clear, concise and use accurate language when describing survivors. The goal is to change the culture of acceptance that surrounds gender-based violence and end the stigma of talking about SGBV.

Here are some tips that can help journalists accurately write about SGBV in a gender-sensitive way:

- Keep your opinion out of the story. Provide the facts and let the reader/listener or viewer draw their own conclusions
- Never report details that could put survivor at further risk. Names, photographs, or other identifying information about survivors and their family members or those assisting them should be avoided when possible.
- Avoid using non-consensual sex, forced sex sexual assault or sex scandal. A rape occurred say it. Sexual violence such as rape is not sex or intercourse. Using “sex” or intercourse blurs the line between consensual sex and criminal acts.
- Be selective of the graphic details you use. Use details for accuracy, not for sensationalism.
- A person who experienced gender-based violence is a survivor, not a victim. The term, ‘Victim’ has a negative connotation. Survivor is an indication of empowerment and resilience.

- Avoid using sensational language (except in a quote but use it sparingly). Using words such as ‘monster’ or ‘animal’ to describe the perpetrator conveys the idea that normal people do not commit acts of violence.
- Perpetrators of gender-based violence are real, everyday people. (think about the government officials, teachers, pastors)
- Instead of saying prostitute, say sex worker. The term ‘sex worker’ is work, while prostitution connotes criminality, stigmatizes women and denies them of social, legal and health services.
- Instead of saying domestic dispute/volatile relations or troubled marriage, say domestic violence/abuse. Avoid phrases that inaccurately portray the violence as an issue between two people of equal power.

**Source:** Reporting Gender-Based Violence: A Guide for Journalists, Equal Press.

**Activity 2.1:** Have participants break into their groups to discuss the story ideas they developed earlier in this session. Work with them to develop a plan to report the story: Look for data, identify sources, what theme of SGBV they are working on, etc.

## MODULE 7

### *Journalism Ethics*

**Objective:** By the end of this session, participants will learn how to establish and SGBV desk in their newsrooms, so they can strengthen their capacity to focus on reporting on gender-based violence beyond isolated incidents. They will develop a network of sources and resources they can tap into to report on the issue.

“The Ethics of the journalist is to recognize one’s own prejudices, biases and avoid getting them into print.”

**Walter Cronkite, Veteran American Journalist**

Journalism standards and ethics comprise the codes, principles and professional standards that guide journalists in the practice of their craft. Journalists who cover SGBV must be reminded about their professional ethics.

### Lesson 1

This lesson is designed to remind journalists about their professional obligations and why it is important to follow their professional ethics when they are reporting on SGBV.

The codes and principles of the Journalism profession are:

- **Truth and Accuracy:** Journalists cannot always guarantee ‘truth’ but getting the facts right is the cardinal principle of journalism. Always strive for accuracy. Provide all the relevant facts and ensure that they have been checked. When you cannot corroborate information, let your audience know.
- **Fairness and Impartiality:** Most stories have at least two sides. While there is no obligation to present every side in every piece, stories should be balanced and add context. Objectivity is not always possible and may not always be desirable (in the face for example of brutality or inhumanity), but impartial reporting builds trust and confidence.
- **Independence:** Journalists must be independent voices; Do not act, formally or informally, on behalf of special interests- political, corporate, or cultural. Inform your editors – or the audience – of your political affiliations, financial arrangements or other personal information that might constitute a conflict of interest.
- **Humanity:** Journalists should do no harm. What you publish or broadcast may be hurtful. Think about the impact of your words and images on the lives of others.

Source: Society of Professional Journalists, Ethical Journalism Network.

## MODULE 8

### *Creating an SGBV Desk in Newsrooms*

**Objective:** By the end of this session, participants will learn how to establish and SGBV desk in their newsrooms, so they can strengthen their capacity to focus on reporting on gender-based violence beyond isolated incidents. They will develop a network of sources and resources they can tap into to report on the issue.

## **Why an SGBV Desk?**

The participants in the media training in Liberia provided the foundation for engaging media outlets about the importance of creating SGBV Desks in newsrooms. The SGBV Desk is a special resource in newsrooms to focus on gender-based violence stories. The SGBV Desk will enable editors and reporters to create a file folder to keep track of SGBV cases, data and trends, speeches, compile sources in the SGBV network. The newsroom can use this resource to improve and strengthen its reporting on violence against women.

The SGBV Desk will comprise a team of reporters from various beats including government, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Services, health, and law enforcement. Each of these areas in one way or the other deals with women and children, so SGBV is more likely to intersect.

The team will manage the folder to track sources, SGBV cases, research reports, information pertaining to the Spotlight Initiative, statistics and other information pertaining to SGBV. The team can meet weekly to discuss SGBV cases and develop story ideas. The team serves as a resource to assist the newsroom in the way reports on SGBV. Team members must vet stories to ensure they are gender sensitive. The goal of the SGBV Desk is to ensure that SGBV becomes an important part of daily news coverage.

Participants recruited for the media training must represent print, broadcast, online and social media platforms across the country. Now, that you have journalists attention for a few days, remind them about the pivotal role the media can play in fostering a change in public opinions and behavior about gender-based violence.

Newsrooms in Liberia and other parts of West Africa are often strapped for resources and staff, so they are more likely to complain that they cannot afford to invest in SGBV coverage. Journalists are so accustomed to covering politics and the lives of politicians, and so the facilitator needs to make them understand why reporting on SGBV is important. The variety of information on SGBV, story ideas and information provided in earlier modules will help shape their perspectives.

Facilitators should encourage journalists to commit to producing a weekly column or radio/television program to discuss SGBV. Radio and television station can invite key stakeholders, program staff and advocates working on the Spotlight Initiative, law enforcement to discuss trends and issues in the news pertaining to SGBV.

Radio and television stations can also partner with CSOs working on gender-based violence to organize community engagement forums

## **Lesson 1**

Earlier modules have focused on tips and lessons for reporters in covering the Spotlight Initiative and SGBV. In this lesson, the facilitator will guide participants in understanding the role of editors in ensuring that SGBV is reported in a gender sensitive way.

## **Engage Media Editors**



Most of this manual has focused on training reporters on covering SGBV. But sending reporters back into their newsrooms with their newfound knowledge and skills on SGBV will have no impact if their editors do not understand what this Spotlight Initiative's media engagement is about.

The media intervention under the Spotlight Initiative must earmark one-day engagement with editors on the role of the media in reporting SGBV in a gender sensitive way. Editors are busy, so they do not have a lot of time to devote to two-three days of training. The one-day engagement should feature two presentations on the first two modules and incorporating some of the other thematic areas covered in the manual. The creation of SGBV desk should be an essential part of the engagement with editors.

## **Lesson 2**

Earlier modules focused on reporting SGBV, interviewing tips, guiding participants in understanding gender norms and its impact on violence against women and girls. In this lesson, participants will learn the importance of staying engaged and active in reporting SGBV and the Spotlight Initiative.

### **Mentoring reporters and media outlets**

The Spotlight Initiative's engagement with journalists and media editors should not end after the training. The United Nations, government ministries and agencies and UN organizations implementing the Spotlight Initiative must follow-up with journalists or media organizations after the training. We strongly recommend that UN consider providing incentives such as computers, phones and other support to enable media outlets to report and monitor the outcomes of the Spotlight Initiative.

*Checklist on Gender-Sensitive Reporting on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence*

Recognize the unique life experiences of each survivor. If possible, include details of their personal and communal strength.

Do not play into the “tragic victim” stereotype or rescue narratives. e.g. Emphasize that the survivor experienced a tragedy in their life rather than their courage and resilience.

Ensure that survivors and anti-sexual assault advocates are afforded space to speak about the issue. If you do not have access to the survivor’s side of the story, speak to SGBV experts, and rely on police and court documents, to keep the story balanced.

Do not Focus solely on police, legal, and perpetrators’ voices when reporting on sexual assault.

Depict sexual assault as a serious crime. Ensure that every detail you include about the assault serves to honor the survivor’s story or to contextualize sexual assault in broader culture. If a graphic detail does neither of these, it has no place in the story.

Do not sensationalize sexual assault or depict it in a gratuitous or voyeuristic way. e.g. Avoid using words such as “sex scandal,” “controversy,” or including salacious details.

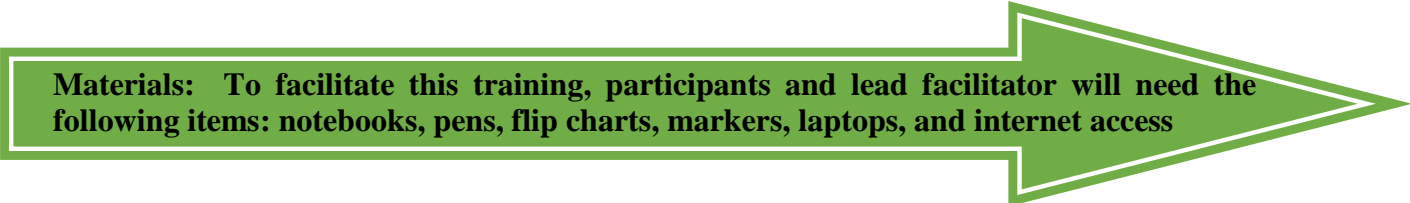
Focus on why it is an act of sexual assault and the circumstances that led to the person who was sexually assaulted accessing justice or supports. Contextualize sexual assault as part of the larger problem of sexual violence and gender-based violence.

Do not discuss a survivor’s clothing, addictions, employment, marital status, sexuality, past relationships, or involvement in the sex trade industry. Such descriptions suggest that the survivor is responsible for assault.

Include biographical details about the perpetrator but ensure those details do not suggest or imply their innocence.

Do not dismiss the violence of perpetrators by focusing on facts that make them appear to be unlikely rapists. For example, describing the perpetrator as an upstanding citizen or community volunteer. No need to emphasize perpetrator’s community standing, race, religion, mental health struggles, employment, etc.

Do not identify survivors by name, photos, videos, location or any other descriptions that will put them at further risk from perpetrators or their families.



**Materials: To facilitate this training, participants and lead facilitator will need the following items: notebooks, pens, flip charts, markers, laptops, and internet access**

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## **COURSE OUTLINE**

### **Day One Lesson Outline:**

#### Understanding

- Pre-test
- Explain program objective
- Understanding Gender Sensitive Reporting
- What is the Liberia Spotlight Initiative?
- COVID-19 reporting
- Exercises
- Lectures
- Field trip (if possible)
- Review samples of SGBV coverage
- Assignments

### **Day Two Lessons Outline**

#### Review

- Developing sources on SGBV reporting
- Interviewing survivors
- The Media's Role in Reporting on SGBV
- Lectures
- Exercises
- Field trip (if possible)
- Assignments

### **Day Three Lessons Outline**

#### Review

- Post Test
- Media Advocacy on SGBV
- Develop story ideas on SGBV
- Ethics of Journalism
- Lectures
- Exercises
- Assignments

## Pre-Training Participant Form

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Your name [optional]:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Your media organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Your role / position at your media organization:  
\_\_\_\_\_

1. What do you hope to learn or achieve by participating in this COVID 19 GBV Reporting workshop?

--

2. Years of experience in the profession Circle One: Less than 1 year; 1-10 years, 10-20 years, 25plus

--

3. How would you rate your level of knowledge / confidence / ability in the following?

	Extremely poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Exceptionally good
On the Liberia Spotlight Initiative?					
Understanding Gender Sensitive Reporting					
<b>Reporting on COVID 19 and its impact on SGBV</b>					
The Media's Role in Reporting on SGB					
Media Advocacy on SGBV					
Developing sources on SGBV reporting					
Interviewing survivors/Perpetrators /sources					
<b>Successfully pitching your story ideas</b>					

What do you know about the Liberia Spotlight Initiative?

1. Have you previously participated in any training related to COVID GBV/HP? **If yes, briefly describe the content & length.**

2. On a scale of one to ten, with one being low and 10 being high, how would you evaluate your capacity to report on Gender Base Violence generally?

**LOW**

**HIGH**

**1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10**

## Post-Training Participant Form

**Date:****Your name [optional]:****Your media organization:****Your role / position at your media organization:**

1. What did you learn or have achieved by participating in this COVID 19 GBV Reporting workshop?

2. Years of experience in the profession. (Circle One): Less than 1 year; 1-10 years, 10-20 years, 25plus

3. How would you rate the level of improvements in your knowledge / confidence / ability in the following?

	Very poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Very good
On the Liberia Spotlight Initiative?					
Understanding Gender Sensitive Reporting					
<b>Reporting on COVID 19</b>					
The Media's Role in Reporting on SGBV					
Media Advocacy on SGBV					
Developing sources on SGBV reporting					
Interviewing survivors/Perpetrators /sources					
<b>Successfully pitching your story idea what do you think?</b>					



What have you learned about the Liberia Spotlight Initiative?

1. How many other COVID GBV/HP related training you previously participated in?
  
2. What will you do with the new knowledge acquired?
  
3. On a scale of one to ten, with one being low and 10 being high, how would you evaluate your new capacity/knowledge to report on Gender Base Violence generally?

**LOW**

**HIGH**

**1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10**

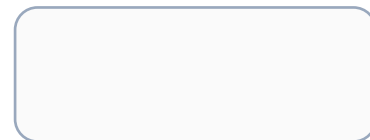
## A SAMPLE THREE-DAY TRAINING

Time	Activity	Facilitator
<b>DAY ONE</b>		
08:00 - 09:00	Breakfast & registration	
09:00 - 09:15	Introductions	
09:15 - 09:25	Opening remarks	
09:25 - 09:30	Expectations	
09:30 - 09:50	Pre-test questionnaires	
09:50 - 10:00	Ice breakers, energizers	
10:00 - 10:15	Explain program objective (use power-point)	
10:15 - 10:45	Introduction	
10:45 - 11:15	Guest speaker:	
11:15 - 12:00	Exercise 1	
12:00 - 13:00		
13:00 - 13:30	Lunch	
13:35 - 14:20		
14:20 - 15:20		
15:20 - 16:00		
16:00 - 16:15	Wrap-up & departure	
<b>DAY TWO</b>		
08:00 - 09:00	Breakfast & registration	
09:00 - 09:30	Recap of yesterday's learning	
09:30 - 10:15		
10:15 - 11:15		
11:15 - 12:15		
12:15 - 13:00		
13:00 - 13:30		
13:30 -		
<b>DAY THREE</b>		
08:00 - 09:00	Breakfast & registration	
09:00 - 09:30	Recap of yesterday's learning	
09:30 - 10:15	Guest speaker	
10:15 - 10:45		
10:45 - 11:00	Ice breaker	

11:00 - 12:00		
12:00 - 13:00		
13:00 - 13:30	Lunch	
13:30 - 14:00		
14:00 - 15:00		
15:00 - 15:30		
15:30 - 16:00	Post training evaluation	
16:00 - 16:30		

## Links to Resource Materials

unwomen.org  
unfpa.org  
globalspotline.org  
ethicaljournalism.org  
sjp.org  
internews.org



## Course Assessment & Feedback

The goal of the trainings in this manual is to improve participants' practical skills and knowledge in the areas of journalism with a focus on Gender Sensitive Reporting on Sexual and Gender-based Violence and activities under the Liberia Spotlight Initiative.

When organizing trainings, it is important to remember that formal assessment can help heighten participant commitment to the material delivered and enhance the credibility of the training. Assessment needs to be designed according to context, and can include marks for fieldwork and/or practical exercises (in which assessment criteria are provided to participants beforehand), as well as end-of-training tests, with questions based on the handouts that have been provided.

Additionally, trainers should consider developing pre-training questionnaires and post-training evaluations for each of the training modules they plan to deliver. Pre-training questionnaires can help trainers to gain a better understanding of participants' prior knowledge and skill levels regarding the topic at hand, as well as their participants' own learning goals for the module or course – allowing the trainer to better tailor the session(s) to the participants at hand.

Similarly, post-training evaluations allow trainers to gain feedback from their participants regarding the impact of the training, the trainer's own performance, and the participants' grasp of the training material – enabling the trainer to, likewise, learn from the experience, and potentially better adapt the modules for future participant groups. Post-training evaluation forms are also a great way for trainers to encourage participants to set goals for how they will utilize their new skills or knowledge in future – giving the trainer concrete items to follow up on, to better measure the effectiveness and long-term impact of the training(s).

***NOTE: These templates provide guidance – it is important that you tailor the questions and content within them to best reflect / support each separate module or training course you plan to deliver.***

CONTACT INFORMATION  
Female Journalists Association of Liberia



## End notes

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<sup>i</sup>United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, “Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (proclaimed by the General Assembly Resolution 48/104, 1993.

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/ViolenceAgainstWomen.aspx>

<sup>ii</sup> United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women,

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<sup>xv</sup> Liberia Spotlight Initiative Comprehensive Sexual and Gender-based Violence Prevention Strategy for Liberia, November 2019.

<sup>xvi</sup> Global Media Monitoring Project 1995-2005

<sup>xvii</sup> Liberia Women Media Action Committee (LIWOMAC), “Advancing Women in the Media Strategy, 2015

<sup>xviii</sup> Geerkson-Sligh, Margaretha, “Internews: A Case Study on Gender in Media Development,” March 2019

<sup>xix</sup> United Nations, “Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948

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<sup>xxi</sup> Beth Winegarner, Poynter Institute, “Five Tips for Journalists Who Want to Do a better Job Cultivating Sources,” June 2012

<sup>xxii</sup> Society for Professional Journalism, “Code and Ethics of Journalism, 2020.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Beth Winegarner, Poynter Institute, “Five Tips for Journalists Who Want to Do a better Job Cultivating Sources,” June 2012

<sup>xxiv</sup> United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), “Reporting Gender-based Violence in Humanitarian Setting, March 8, 2020. [https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Journalists\\_Handbook\\_-\\_March\\_8\\_-\\_English.pdf](https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Journalists_Handbook_-_March_8_-_English.pdf)

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