

## CASE STUDY

# Integrity Watch Liberia and WONGOSOL: Helping Liberia's war and economic crimes court respond to the priorities and concerns of women

May 2026

Over a period of 14 years (1989-2003), two civil wars in Liberia led to the deaths of an estimated 250,000 people, displacement of 750,000 people, and widespread human rights abuses, including the recruitment of child soldiers and widespread use of sexual and gender-based violence as weapons of war. A Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established in 2005 following the 2003 Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement, to investigate atrocities and recommend justice mechanisms. The TRC's final report in 2009 highlighted the disproportionate impact of the civil wars on women and marginalised groups, who endured persistent degrading treatment and were the primary targets of sexual violence. It made 47 recommendations to address these violations, though implementation has been constrained by limited political will among successive governments to pursue justice for wartime atrocities.

This has particularly been the case for the recommendation to create an Extraordinary Criminal Court to prosecute individuals responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity. Some feared prosecutions could implicate political and economic elites, destabilise the fragile peace agreements, and reignite tensions. Over many years, awareness-raising and advocacy activities sought to demystify potential transitional justice mechanisms and engage the wider public in understanding their needs. Several civil society organisations (CSOs) played a pivotal role in advancing advocacy efforts and increasing political will. As a result, in 2024, Liberia's new president, Joseph N. Boakai issued an Executive Order establishing an office to coordinate the establishment of a War and Economic Crimes Court for Liberia (OWECC).

This presented a key opportunity to ensure justice and accountability for survivors of wartime atrocities, particularly women. Through a Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) Rapid Response Window (RRW) grant from October 2024 to April 2025, Integrity Watch Liberia (IWL) in partnership with the Women NGOs Secretariat (WONGOSOL) worked to ensure gender mainstreaming in the frameworks of the War Crimes

Court to be established. This built on previous work by IWL and WONGOSOL, including work under the RRW to raise awareness of TRC recommendations.

## Achievements

Integrity Watch Liberia and WONGOSOL strengthened the role of women at several levels and equipped them to participate in Liberia's ongoing transitional justice process by:

- **Ensuring that gender mainstreaming was integrated in the development of the Court's legislative and regulatory frameworks.** Through continued consultations with a number of policy actors, OWECC agreed to establish a gender unit, a gender mainstreaming coordination technical working group, and to take the lead in developing and implementing a gender mainstreaming strategy and roadmap framework for the new War Crimes Court. This was integral to responding to some of the gravest consequences of Liberia's civil wars, including widespread sexual and gender-based violence, forced displacement, and long-term socio-economic marginalisation. Ensuring that gender considerations were embedded into the architecture of the proposed Court was therefore essential to guaranteeing survivor-centred justice and meaningful participation of women in transitional justice processes. Crucially, a draft gender framework was developed during the course of the project.
- **Strengthening public awareness of gender-sensitive transitional justice processes.** IWL and WONGOSOL conducted awareness campaigns, education programmes and multiple media engagements reaching over 10,000 people in seven counties to enable greater understanding of the mandate of the War and Economic Crimes Court. This is critical to combat misperceptions fuelled by disinformation, including concerns around the protection of witnesses, and fears stoked that the establishment of the Court could re-ignite tensions and destabilise

the country. They have also helped to strengthen understanding and public advocacy of the importance of ensuring gender-sensitive transitional justice.

- **Elevating the need for coherence in the transitional justice process.** Through building trusted relationships with government stakeholders in the transitional justice process - such as the Peacebuilding Office (PBO), the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, the Ministry of Justice) - IWL and WONGOSOL have highlighted the need amongst government stakeholders for greater coordination and coherence to ensure full support and aligned operations to deliver the War and Economic Crimes Court. The role of both organisations to play a role for greater coherence in the process was also highlighted through the process. WONGOSOL, for instance, was made a Co-Chair of the National Transitional Justice Committee. This was an unprecedented breakthrough that demonstrated the project's influence on institutional power dynamics, as women moved beyond consultation into influential, decision-making roles within national transitional justice governance.

**“Ordinary citizens are looking for acknowledgement from the government of what the conflict did to them and their families. Now OWECC is here to listen, but their expectations may not be met by OWECC. We need to understand what people want and how OWECC can deliver it, so people won't be left disappointed by OWECC.”**

## Lessons learned

- **Working with religious and traditional authority leadership is critical to gender-transformative peacebuilding efforts.** Working closely with leadership such as the National Traditional Council (which brings together elders and chiefs across the country), the Inter-religious Council of Liberia (which brings together

Christians and Muslim leaders) ensured buy-in for gender mainstreaming in the war crimes court.

- **Alongside building women's leadership, creating spaces for women to then influence and participate in formal spaces is critical to ensure meaningful participation.** IWL and WONGOSOL provided leadership training to 35 women and awareness sessions for 150 women, focusing on dialogue, decision-making and advocacy skills. They then organised consultative engagements with over 70 stakeholders and a national dialogue with over 50 stakeholders on strategies to incorporate gender into the procedures of OWECC. Creating spaces to connect women to formal processes was critical in ensuring that OWECC understood the different needs of women in the transitional justice process.
- **Building a broad base of women leaders that can mobilise support at the community level is essential.** Continued support from the public will be required to ensure that the War and Economic Crimes Court is successfully established, in light of misinformation and disinformation about the establishment of the Court. In many cases, many women CSOs themselves were unaware that OWECC had been established. Through awareness-raising sessions, combined with leadership training, IWL and WONGOSOL have worked to build a broad base of women leaders, which will be critical in applying public pressure to keep the government accountable to its promise of setting up the court, and to put continued funding behind the court.
- **Political sensitivities in transitional justice processes require responsive trust-building to address vulnerabilities for all parties.** This approach is essential to foster confidence between the state and affected communities. The project was implemented within a highly sensitive political environment where concerns persisted that transitional justice efforts could reopen divisions or destabilise fragile peace gains. The project therefore prioritised trust-building, inclusive dialogue, and community engagement to help foster public confidence in the process.

The Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) Rapid Response Window (RRW) is a funding mechanism that addresses urgent funding gaps with targeted, short-term support to increase women's participation in peace processes and the implementation of peace agreements. RRW is a flexible financing tool supporting quality interventions to enhance the capacity of local women to prevent conflict, respond to crises and emergencies, and seize key peacebuilding opportunities.

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