

medica mondiale Liberia



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Background

The civil war in the West African nation of Liberia lasted for 14 years. From 1989 to 2003, gangs of rebels and soldiers ransacked cities and towns. An estimated two out of every three women were raped, including small children and elderly. Many of these women were forced to become soldiers or unwilling prostitutes in the camps of the war waging parties. Even with the end of the fighting, the violence against women in Liberia is still not over. Rape is still commonplace – it is presently the most frequently reported crime – and sexual exploitation of women and girls is on the rise; poverty is forcing many of them into prostitution for survival.

In May 2006, *medica mondiale*, in cooperation with Deutsche Welthungerhilfe (German World Hunger Relief), launched a large-scale project in south-eastern Liberia, where the infrastructure is weak, to provide war-traumatized women with psychosocial and economic aid. The project work is focusing on the River Gee, Sinoe, and Grand Gedeh districts.

The work of *medica mondiale* Liberia

The women's centre in Fish Town

medica mondiale has built a women's centre in Fishtown, in the River Gee district. Many local women's groups from the region have contributed: They cut down trees, cleared the land, and made bricks from clay.

The women's centre was officially opened in 2007 and has since become the central contact point and place of refuge for the women of River Gee. Along with legal and health counselling, there are training courses: Women learn sewing and dyeing, others bake bread or make soap, which they sell in their communities. In addition, a small restaurant for travellers is in the planning stages. Literacy courses are held in the centre so that the women can acquire basic skills for marketing their products. In addition, there are cultural events on a regular basis, and the doors to them are open to all interested parties.

Above all, however, the *medica mondiale* staff provides psychosocial counselling to women victims of violence. Women are helped in overcoming their wartime experiences and in finding ways out of the daily violence. Women acutely threatened with violence find shelter and temporary refuge in the centre.

Training in dealing with trauma and violence

medica mondiale also trains the staff members of local and international aid organizations and other institutions in the professional care of women who have survived sexualized violence. Women's groups, health care, police and judiciary personnel, as well as development aid workers are trained. Midwives also receive special training on the consequences of sexualized violence on the reproductive health of women.



Stop rape – a Liberian woman at the opening of the *medica mondiale* women's centre in Fish Town © Sybille Fezer/*medica mondiale*

Education in the villages

medica mondiale routinely goes out to the villages and informs the residents about topics such as human and women's rights, and sexualized violence against women. In market places, schools, or hospital wards, the village population is called upon to work together to protect women. Educational campaigns and local radio programs also deliver this information to the villages.

Protection for women

With the organization of a "protection group" currently counting 70 members, *medica mondiale* Liberia's goal is to get rapid and all-embracing aid to women who have been raped and brutalized. Aid organizations, women's groups, representatives from the police, justice system, local government, and the UN Peace Mission work together here to develop protection and aid measures for women. In addition, *medica mondiale* is starting a network of local women who are on the spot immedia-

medica mondiale Liberia's successes

- Since 2007, around 180 women rape victims have received psychosocial counselling;
- almost 2,600 patients in hospitals were educated on the subject of violence against women;
- around 300 police, judiciary, and hospital employees took part in training sessions on trauma and sexualized violence;
- a women's centre was built, which provides counselling, support, education, and training courses for female victims;
- one "Palaver Hut" – a meeting hut – was successfully completed, meanwhile construction on others commenced.

tely in their communities whenever women experience violence or are threatened. They will be trained in the fundamentals of crisis intervention and will accompany women victims to the hospital or to court. In order to create as many places of refuge as possible for women in isolated regions as well, *medica mondiale* is constructing so-called "Palaver Huts" – smaller buildings that women in emergency situations can get to rapidly and with no red tape. Once there, women can work with the first aid workers and other women to find solutions. In addition, the "Palaver Huts" are places for self-help, where women can exchange ideas on development and women's topics and come up with proposals for improving the protection of women.

"Run, run, run"

Ellen (42), a tall, thin woman from Glarro, has been on the move for eight hours. On foot, through the bush, and on poor roads. She would like to tell *medica mondiale* and all forty female delegates from the entire district of River Gee her story: "Run, run, run! We women and children have always shouted that to each other, over and over. I no longer count how many times. We have lived in the bush for fourteen years. We almost never had warm food, a fire would have attracted the rebels immediately. They were simply cruel, there's no other word for it: My husband and my brothers were hacked to pieces before my eyes. We are so happy that *medica mondiale* and Welthungerhilfe are here. This is the first time that anyone has ever really come to this forgotten spot of Liberia before!"

Political Commitment in Monrovia

In order to achieve far reaching improvements for the women in Liberia, *medica mondiale* is also active on the political level. In Liberia's capital city, Monrovia, *medica mondiale*, together with other organizations, is advising the government and authorities on issues of national strategies and legislation regarding the situation of women. In 2006 the experiences of *medica mondiale* were incorporated in a strategic paper of the Ministry of Women's Affairs for combating sexualized violence against women. Since 2007, *medica mondiale* has been helping the national "Truth and Reconciliation Commission" with recommendations on the topic of witness protection, among other things. The Commission was employed to raise awareness of human rights violations during the civil war.

Funding

By 2010 the project expenses will have come to a total of 1,400,000 Euro. The program will be financed with funds from the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation; the Reconstruction Credit Institute is sponsoring the program.

Your donation will help us help the women in Liberia!

medica mondiale e.V. | Hülchrather Str. 4 | 50670 Cologne (Germany) | Tel. +49/221/931898-0 | Fax +49/221/931898-1
info@medicamondiale.org | www.medicamondiale.org | Donations account: 45 000 163 | Sparkasse KölnBonn | Bank code: 370 501 98