

GENDER-POWER RELATIONS IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT DISCOURSE
AND PRACTICE: THE CASE OF USAID IN POST-EBOLA LIBERIA

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Liberia became the United States' priority in the fight against the Ebola epidemic in West Africa between 2014 and 2015. After the epidemic was officially declared over in May 2015, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) restructured three interventions—the Land Governance Support Activity, Feed the Future initiative, and the Maternal and Child Health program to empower Liberians, particularly women, who were the most affected by the epidemic. Drawing on modernization theory, critical approaches such as political economy, postcolonial theory, and feminist perspectives on development, this dissertation examines the gender-power relations that characterized the discourse and practice of international development in post-Ebola Liberia.

Data were collected via in-depth interviews with development officials implementing the three USAID-funded interventions and leaders of women's organizations. The study also employed focus groups with rural women in six communities in Lofa and Montserrado counties in Liberia, and analysis of documents for creating awareness about the three interventions. These methods examine factors accounting for Liberia as the United States' priority in response to

Ebola, the communication strategy deployed by USAID, gender representation in the design and implementation of the strategy, and its impact on women's participation and empowerment in the development process in post-Ebola Liberia.

The study finds that the United States' priority of Liberia is mainly ideological and humanitarian in nature, based on the position of Liberia as the most affected by Ebola. Thus, USAID's role in post-Ebola Liberia is a moral responsibility that the international community expects the U.S. to fulfil. Regarding the strategy, the study observes that USAID uses a formal communication approach that is designed and implemented by male development practitioners to promote development interventions that are predominantly women sensitive. The study further observes how the elitist representation of women, whose orientation differs from those at the grassroots, departs from USAID's participatory approach to development. Conceptual contributions to strategic development communication with emphasis on intersectionality, and the practical implications for advocacy in public policy in sub-Saharan Africa, are discussed.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The idea for this study was inspired by an opportunity I had as a student-journalist to report on a protest by Liberian refugees in Ghana. It started in February 2008 when hundreds of Liberian women converged on a football field at the Buduburam refugee camp with banners, some of which read: “Integration? No! Repatriation plus \$1000? Yes! Yes! Resettlement? Why not!” The protest was to demand a voice in finding satisfactory solution to their situation and specifically ask for greater material help in repatriation. It started with governments and international agencies’ proposal that Liberian refugees in Ghana were safe to return home after the civil war in Liberia had ended. In the view of the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), the refugees’ apathy toward repatriation to Liberia required that local integration was the next option. Little did UNHCR know that the refugees wanted to have a say in the process—to either be repatriated to Liberia with \$1000 allowance each, or be resettled in the West, particularly the United States.

The protests continued for a month, forcing the Ghanaian authorities to respond. This resulted in the arrest of over 600 protesters and the subsequent deportation of about 16 others who were considered a security threat. The refusal on the part of many of the refugees to accept local integration meant they could not access some services such as health insurance. A year after the incident, my college roommate, himself a Liberian refugee, suggested that I do a news feature about the plights of his fellow Liberian refugees. Of much concern was the increasing rate of unsafe delivery among women refugees. I was motivated to do the story because I identified with these group of women and somehow understood their predicaments. The reason

was that I grew up with 14 sisters in rural Ghana and understood the level of marginalization that women face.

This women-led refugees' protest presents a valuable lesson—that humanitarian and development agencies respect the 'tenets' of participatory communication that requires that local stakeholders have a voice in any decision that affects their lives. In the same vein, this dissertation examines the gender-power relations in international development discourse and practice, using USAID as a case study in post-Ebola Liberia. The study seeks to find out to what extent USAID considered women's socio-economic roles in the post-Ebola development process in Liberia, the communication strategies used by USAID in its post-Ebola development campaign, how gender was represented in the design and implementation of the strategies, and how they enhanced women's participation and empowerment in the post-Ebola development process.

After decades of political turmoil and civil wars in the Mano River Union in West Africa, the governments and people of Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia had resolved to chart the path of democracy as a sustainable alternative to rebuilding their countries. This attracted investments from international development organizations, whose main goals have been to champion the livelihood empowerment of women who are the most affected by crises. The gender focus of development assistance to these West African countries has been informed by the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that emphasize reduction of maternal mortality, achieving universal access to reproductive health services, and improving the rates of women's participation in all sectors of national development. The impacts of war on the achievement of these universal goals for women in the sub-region justified the need for development assistance to these war-ravaged countries in which achieving these critical goals remain almost farfetched.

While the three countries had yet to recover from the vagaries of war, build their economies, and revamp their healthcare systems towards attainment of the new UN vision of Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 (see, UN, 2015b), the first case of the Ebola virus disease was reported in Guinea on December 6, 2013 (Alexander et al. 2015; Dixon and Schafer, 2014). By the time the World Health Organization (WHO) could designate the Ebola outbreak in West Africa as a “public health emergency of international concern,” 1,546 deaths had been recorded (WHO, 2014a). The global threat of Ebola attracted military response from the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, as well as humanitarian organizations that sought to curb the outbreak in the three-affected countries. By August 2016, when the WHO officially declared West Africa Ebola-free (WHO, 2016), the death toll had risen to over 12, 000 (Undurraga et al., 2017). In 2014, Liberia was the hardest hit by the virus and accounted for more than half of the epidemic's deaths (1,224) compared to Guinea and Sierra Leone (Izadi, 2014), which reflected in the economic impact of the outbreak on Liberian citizens (Mackey, 2016; UNDP, 2016). The clarion call by Liberia to the United States to intervene to stem the spread of the epidemic was premised on historical and ideological reasons, which will be discussed next.

Liberia as United States’ Responsibility

The view that “Liberia is an American responsibility” (Gwertzman, 2003) and that the latter has a moral obligation to help the former (see, Hodge, 2002), became popular with calls on the United States to intervene to end Liberia’s civil war in 2003. Since the end of that epoch, the United States has contributed over \$1 billion in bilateral assistance and more than \$1 billion in assessed contributions to the UN Mission in Liberia (Global Security.org, n.d.). While France and the United Kingdom have taken steps to assist their respective former colonies of Guinea

and Sierra Leone in the post-Ebola development process, the United States, on the other hand, has prioritized its responsibility towards Ebola recovery and development investments in Liberia, apart from the nearly \$600 million in emergency assistance to Liberia's Ebola response (U.S. Embassy in Liberia, 2015).

The United States' enduring interest in Liberia dates to 1819 when the U.S. Congress appropriated \$100,000 for the establishment of the small West African country for the resettlement of freemen and freed slaves from North America (Global Security.org, n.d.). This followed the precedent of the British, who relocated slaves found on trading ships captured by their Navy on the west coast of Africa, in what has become Liberia's neighbor and fellow failure, Sierra Leone (Radu, n.d.). The United States' long-standing relations with Liberia has been premised chiefly on U.S. interest in Liberia as a strategic navigational station for the landing and refueling for its military aircrafts and ships on 24-hour notice in the Atlantic (Krauss, 1990). There have been other long-standing political and economic interests, namely: the strategic relations with Liberia as a frontline country for the United States government in the fight against socialism in Africa; the strategic benefits that the ports of Liberia provide the United States as a favorable business environment on the West African coast; as well as the political economy of Firestone project in relation to U.S. government's goal to break the British rubber monopoly (Hahn, 2020).

The US-Liberia relations have evolved to give expression to the United States' moral leadership in the world, which Harry Truman stated in his 1949 inaugural address, should involve a program of development based on the concepts of democratic fair dealing (Truman, 1949 cited in Esteva, 2010). This translated in the United States' commitment to working with Liberians to rebuild and recover from the devastating impact of the Ebola epidemic on their

livelihoods, health, and families, as well as bolster Liberia's capability to implement a global health security agenda to detect future threats (U.S. Embassy in Liberia, 2015). The USAID, in keeping with its gender equality and women's empowerment policy, has strengthened capacity building by promoting access to economic opportunities and healthcare for women in Liberia (USAID, 2017).

Despite the significant roles that global development organizations play in developing countries, critics frown on the "Eurocentric" way that the development process disempowers local populations that are the focus of development programs (e.g., Peet & Watts, 1996). This reduces 'participatory development' to a mere *buzzword* that serves as a manipulative tool to engage local people in a development process that is predetermined by development organizations (see, Keough, 1998). It is therefore critical that when problematizing the way in which 'gender' is used to address development goals, there is the need to also reconsider participatory development to discern concerns of women who constitute the most marginalized in the development process (Cornwall, 2003; Guijt & Shah, 1998). As the international development industry continues to grow and increasingly becomes gender-focused, so is the need to critically examine the gender-power relations that characterize the discourse and practice of development programs that are implemented by development agencies and their actors.

The Current Study

This dissertation undertakes a case study approach to examine the gender-power relations adopted by USAID in the discourse and practice of international development in post-Ebola Liberia. As the world's largest international development vehicle representing the United States government, USAID has its set of guidelines for sustainable communication for development and social change, based on principles that engage local systems and tap into local knowledge,

based on the realization that “local people understand their situations far better than external factors” (USAID, 2014, p.8). To improve development outcomes through social and behavioral change communication, USAID also acknowledges that top-down, unilateral messaging from actors—public officials, health officials, and other development experts—as often ineffective (Pirio, n.d.).

Notwithstanding USAID’s belief in a community participatory approach to development based on culturally sensitive motifs in communication (Pirio, n.d.), critics have identified factors that account for why the Agency’s new approach to development assistance is stalled and virtually failing. Dichter (2016) attributed the failure of many USAID’s development projects to: the insular nature of USAID expatriate personnel from the local environments in which they work; how they tend to be uninformed or misinformed about local organizations and trends; and their limited knowledge of who is who; or what happens in the rural areas. Bate (2006) also disputed USAID’s purported engagement with local systems everywhere it operates by arguing how works typically performed by USAID “contractors actually undermine the local institutions and indigenous capacities that the aid process is presumably trying to build” (p.115).

The dominant criticism of USAID’s expatriate development experts’ insular thinking about the people they are supposed to serve (see, Dichter, 2016; Bate, 2006) typifies the infrastructure of global governance that puts development and humanitarianism to practice in a manner where development organizations are themselves riddled by power inequalities. This reflects in current situations where many of the policies and practices that direct foreign aid are crafted by Western-educated technocrats, with little or no meaningful input from the objects of aid whom these policies affect most directly and forcefully (Biswas, 2016). In this milieu, it is mostly women in developing countries who are often the targets of development programs and

encounter these power inequalities in development policy formulation and implementation (Wilkins, 2016).

Understanding how these power dynamics played out in the development communication strategies deployed in the post-Ebola development discourse and practice in Liberia is crucial. Thus, this dissertation investigates how USAID created awareness about the need for women in rural Liberia to access land as a crucial resource for their livelihood empowerment. For example, Pemunta (2017) examined why, although women constitute the majority small-holder farmers, they are deprived of access to farmlands in many African societies based on patriarchal norms that reinforce the concept of gender and power.

Another critical question that this dissertation project seeks to investigate is the extent to which the communication strategy employed by USAID involved the active participation of women in the post-Ebola development process. Additionally, the study examines the impact that this has had on the livelihood empowerment of women in rural Liberia, and thereby provides a framework to critically evaluate the projects' impact on the livelihood of women in post-Ebola Liberia.

Significance of the Research

Theoretical and Conceptual Contributions

In advancing the question of gender-power relations in the discourse and practice of development, Cornwall (2003) suggested that "bringing a gender perspective to bear on the practice of participation in development must assist in identifying strategies for amplifying voice and access to decision-making of those who tend to be marginalized or excluded by mainstream development initiatives" (p.1326). This dissertation attempts to help address the gap in theory by

examining the question of who gets to participate and at what level their participation is relevant in the discourse and practice of development. Thus, this dissertation has made some theoretical and conceptual contributions to the field of communication research in two ways:

First, the study has converged stakeholder theory with the concept of participation to produce the “stakeholder-participatory nexus in development model.” The model attempts to explain the disconnect between international development discourse and local participation, a situation caused by development agencies’ use of ‘participation’ in a functional and utilitarian way to achieve predefined objectives, and not as a tool for empowerment of beneficiaries of development programs (see, Bliss & Neumann, 2008). The model attempts to offer solution to this phenomenon by outlining how the synergy of development expertise and local knowledge could use participation as a tool to prolong the lifespan of development initiatives to address the yawning question as to why many development projects fail in sub-Saharan Africa.

Second, the study has made another innovative contribution to theory-building with the “power relations in development implementation model,” using the referential and predication strategies in critical discourse analysis to examine the power matrix in the discourse and practice of development. For example, Fung and Wright (2003) observed the superficial nature of ‘participation’ between development experts and targets of development projects, where final decision-making turns to be top-down, even if the impulse originates from bottom-up. This is corroborated by Arnstein (2007) who argued how many development programs create such artificial fora for “citizens to hear and be heard, ...but lack the power to ensure that their views will be heeded by the powerful” (p. 217). This conceptual model explains the case in Liberia, where the generally unilateral nature of decision-making for the USAID projects was determined within the sites of power and control in the post-Ebola development process.

Contributions to Knowledge, Policy, and Practice

This dissertation makes significant contributions to advance knowledge and research on the power relations that characterize the discourse and practice of international development, and more broadly to the research area of strategic development communication in sub-Saharan Africa. The dissertation suggests many potential areas for future research questions that have been identified or will arise from further analysis of, and possible additions to my data set. For example, the study offers some specific research questions on advocacy communication for gender inclusion in land governance in Liberia; gender perspectives on maternal health choice and utilization in sub-Saharan Africa; and cultural sensitivity in health crisis communication. These questions will add to the growing body of scholarship on gender and advocacy in strategic development communication in the sub-Saharan African context.

The study also has some practical applications for public policy. What is learned from the critical review of literature on the concept of participation, local ownership in development discourse and practice, as well as the thorny issue of women's role in development, provide an avenue for an intersectionality approach to public policy on development in Africa. For example, the disproportionate impact of the Ebola epidemic on women in Liberia, vis-à-vis the significant role they play in the economy of Liberia, provides useful lessons for incorporating gender in the discourse and practice of development.

Organization of the Dissertation: Chapters Outline

This study draws on a set of theoretical approaches and literatures from cross-disciplinary sources to investigate the gender-power relations that informed the communication strategies adopted by USAID in the post-Ebola development process in Liberia. It examines how USAID

development experts navigated the socio-cultural factors that militate against the approaches, and the agency of women in the discourse and practice of the development process. The study is organized in eight subsequent chapters as described below:

Chapter II extends the introduction of this study by providing additional background to the historical, social, and political systems of Liberia and the consequences that they had had on the country. The chapter also discusses the historical role of USAID in Liberia, with focus on the agency's role in the livelihood empowerment in Liberians, particularly women, in the post-Ebola development process.

Chapter III discusses the theoretical frameworks and conceptual models that shape the design and execution of the study—namely: modernization theory, critical approaches, gender and development with focus on intersectionality, and the stakeholder-participatory nexus in development model. The chapter also undertakes a critical review of relevant empirical studies, identifies the inherent gaps in them and how this dissertation attempts to fill them. The chapter concludes with a recap of the set of research questions that shape the study. The dissertation seeks to find out what factors accounted for Liberia as the U.S.' topmost priority in response to Ebola in West Africa and the role of USAID in Liberia during the crisis and what it has been between 2015 and 2019; the communication strategies USAID employed in its post-Ebola development campaign in Liberia; how gender was represented in the design and implementation of the communication strategies employed by USAID in the intervening period; and how USAID's communication strategies enhanced women's participation and empowerment in the development process in post-Ebola Liberia.

Chapter IV of the dissertation discusses the research approaches, which include documents reviews, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions, and provides justification

for the research strategy. It also describes the research setting, population, samples, data collection instruments and procedures, as well as analyses of the set of data collected.

Chapter V presents the findings and analyses regarding Research Question 1 regarding Liberia as the priority of the United States in the fight against Ebola and the roles that USAID played in Liberia during the Ebola crisis and what it has been between 2015 and 2019. This involves critical analysis of selected documents on the US-Liberia bilateral relations, as well as the role of USAID in the development process during and after the Ebola epidemic in Liberia.

Chapter VI discusses findings addressing Research Question 2 on the communication strategies that USAID employed in its post-Ebola development campaign in Liberia between 2015 and 2019. The chapter draws on in-depth interviews with implementers of the three USAID-funded development projects: The Land Governance Support Activity; Feed the Future Initiative; and the Maternal and Child Health Project in Liberia.

Chapter VII presents results of the additional interviews with implementers of the USAID-funded projects and with the leadership of women's groups. It addresses Research Question 3 on how gender was represented in the design and implementation of the communication strategies employed by USAID in the post-Ebola development process. It also provides an analysis of how USAID navigated the pushbacks that stem from customary practices that marginalize women's rights to land and forms a critical part of the livelihood empowerment of women in the post-Ebola development process in Liberia.

Chapter VIII discusses findings regarding Research Question 4 on how the communication strategies employed by USAID has enhanced the active participation and empowerment of women in the development process in post-Ebola Liberia. It employed focus

group discussions with rural women who were targets of the USAID development projects in post-Ebola Liberia. The chapter assesses the overall success or failure of the three development projects from the perspectives of the target population.

Finally, Chapter IV summarizes and interprets results and their implications for theory and policy, as well as the case for gender mainstreaming in the discourse and practice of international development. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the study and makes recommendations for future research regarding the gender-power relations in participatory communication in international development in the sub-Saharan African context.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

This chapter presents the background of the Ebola outbreak in West Africa and the global response that followed. The chapter focuses on the context—Liberia (Figure 1.1). It begins by discussing the outbreak. Next, it profiles the country by discussing the geographical location, political structure, demographic, and the socio-economic characteristics of Liberia in the context of its development trajectories before the outbreak of Ebola in West Africa in December 2013. The chapter then discusses the history of USAID as the largest agency of the United States government in international development assistance in the world. It concludes by examining the history of USAID's engagement with Liberia in the context of the livelihood empowerment of women in the post-Ebola recovery process.

Ebola Outbreak in West Africa

The outbreak of the world's worst Ebola epidemic started on 6 December 2013 after a two-year-old toddler in Gueckedou, southern Guinea, was infected with the virus (Alexander et al. 2015; Dixon and Schafer, 2014). The spread of the Ebola outbreak across West Africa, particularly Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, culminated in the description of the epidemic as a disaster for the unprecedented spread of a nightmare disease (Nohrstedt & Baekkeskov, 2018). The West African Ebola outbreak has also been described as the largest in history, resulting in a huge public health burden with significant socio-economic impacts in the three countries most affected (Calnan et al., 2018).

The West African epidemic was the 25th known and documented outbreak of the Ebola virus globally, believed to be caused by a combination of dysfunctional health systems, international indifference, high population mobility in densely populated capitals, and local customs of people in affected countries (Farrar & Piot, 2014). Many other factors were responsible for the rapid spread of the virus, such as conspiracy theories about Ebola as a neocolonial ploy to weaken the already marginalized ethnic groups in Guinea, where it started (O’Grady, 2014). There also were doubts about the reality of Ebola as a contagious and deadly epidemic in rural West Africa; outrage by rural folks on the need to stop providing hands-on care to their sick relatives and friends; plus indignations regarding the World Health Organization’s (WHO) warning against customary washing of dead bodies before burial, a custom considered by the local people in Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia as essential to a dignified burial and a contended afterlife (WHO, 2016).

While the three countries hardest hit by the outbreak already had weak health systems (Jalloh, 2019), Sierra Leone and Liberia had additional baggage with the history of protracted civil wars in the 1990s, which contributed significantly to the virtual collapse of their healthcare systems (UNDP, 2015). The consequence of this was the withdrawal of international health workers, thereby worsening the conditions in these countries that already had some of the worst physician-patient ratios in West Africa (WHO, 2016). This health system deficit reinforced the description of the Ebola epidemic in the three most-affected countries as “one of the worst acute public health crises in 50 years” (Drazen et al., 2015. p.563). The ravages caused by Ebola in West Africa went beyond the huge death tolls of about 13,000 between 2013 and 2016 (Undurraga et al., 2017).

The outbreak led to the orphaning of over 17, 300 children, a subsequent loss of over \$2.2 billion in GDP by Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia in 2015 alone (CDC, 2016), as well as the total expenditure of \$53 billion incurred in fighting the epidemic in West Africa (Miles, 2018). These phenomenal impacts necessitated the WHO's designation of the Ebola outbreak as a public health emergency of international concern (WHO, 2014; Alexander et al., 2015). In examining the estimated impact of the outbreak, Liberia was described as the most affected of the three countries, and the designation of Monrovia, the country's capital city, as the epicenter of the epidemic (Mackey, 2016; Cooper, 2014). This had a corresponding impact on Liberia as having 83.8% of its population living in poverty, compared to Sierra Leone's 52.9% and Guinea's 55.2% respectively (UNDP, 2016). A detailed understanding of Ebola in Liberia requires a brief history of the country and the prevailing socio-economic factors that fueled the spread of the outbreak in the next section.

Figure 1: Map of Liberia within Africa



Source: Worldmaps.com

Profile of Liberia in the Context of Ebola in West Africa

Geographically, Liberia is located along the Atlantic coast of West Africa. With a population of nearly 5 million and a land area of 43,000 square miles (111,369 square kilometers), Liberia borders Guinea to the north, Sierra Leone to the northwest, Cote D'Ivoire to the east, and the Atlantic Ocean to the southwest (Thompson, 2020). Liberia was founded in 1822 as an outpost for returning slaves from the Americas, after some abolitionists and owners of slaves deliberated the idea of creating a colony in Africa as a destination to move freed African-American slaves (Perry & Sayndee, 2017). Liberia evolved as a quasi-colony and eventually became a commonwealth and achieved independence in 1847 with the help of the American Colonization Society, a private organization based in the United States whose members deemed it a moral duty to repair the injuries inflicted on the African-Americans by their colonizing fathers (see, Dennis, 2006).

Since its independence in 1847, Liberia was ruled by descendants of the freed slaves, generally known as Americo-Liberians, who remained in social and political control of the country. Although the Americo-Liberians constituted less than two percent of Liberia's population, they made up nearly 100 percent of qualified voters in the country between the 19th and early 20th centuries (Thompson, 2020). This small but elite class of Liberian citizens remained in social and political control of the country, while the indigenous population, considered the tribal groups, were consigned to the lower rungs of the social ladder. The Americo-Liberian dynasty was however truncated in 1980 when Sergeant Samuel Kenyon Doe seized power through a military coup (Werker & Pritchett, 2017). Liberia enjoyed relative political stability after the overthrow of the Americo-Liberian rule until 1989 when a mutiny in

the military plunged the country into waves of civil wars up to 2003, after which the country returned to constitutional rule with the first post-conflict election in 2005.

Administratively, Liberia is divided into 15 counties, each of which is administered by a superintendent appointed by the president who rules from the Montserrado County as the seat of government (Jones, 2020). Liberia is considered multi-ethnic. There are 20 ethnic groups with great diversity in terms of origin and size. The major ethnic groups include the Kpelle (20.3%), Bassa (13.4%), Grebo (10%), Gio (8%), Mano (7.9%), Kru (6%), Lorma (5.1%), Gola (5.1%), Kissi (4.8). A combination of other lesser ethnic groupings constitutes 20.1 % of the population of Liberia (LISGIS, 2011). Religiously, approximately 85.6% of Liberians identify as Christian while 12.2 % practice Islam (CIA World Factbook, 2008). The country's literacy rate by the population age 15 and above is 47.6% with men constituting 62.4%, while women make up 32.8% (LISGIS, 2011). The impact of this on health education, as far as awareness creation is concerned, might factor into what resulted in the impact of the outbreak of Ebola in the country.

Liberia is described as “not a case of a ‘poverty trap’ but of a (lower) middle-income economy whose political and economic order disappeared into civil war and chaos” (Werker & Pritchett, 2017, p.2). The country's economy under Ellen Sirleaf Johnson had improved quite significantly since 2006 and continued to recover more than two-fifths of its gap in GDP per capita, thanks to foreign aid and good economic management until Ebola struck Liberia in the second half of 2014 (Bowles, Hjort, Melvin, & Werker, 2016). This was not unexpected as the impact of the outbreak and other economic factors consigned Liberia just eleven places from the bottom of the Human Development Index ranking, trailing the likes of Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Haiti (UNDP, 2015).

Liberia remains predominantly an agrarian economy with abundant reserves of natural resources, coupled with an enormous supply of fresh water and a climate conducive for cultivating food and cash crops, including rubber, palm oil, cocoa, and coffee. Liberia is also reported to have almost 42% of West Africa's remaining rainforests (Tarr et al., 2013). This makes agriculture a major sector of the country's economy worth 38.8% of GDP, employing more than 70% of the population, and providing a valuable export for Liberia (USAID, 2015). This, however, has not transformed the country's status as among the least-developed countries in the world. Several factors, including cultural norms, render gender-based social inequality a "non-issue" in Liberia, to the extent that in communities which are guided primarily by customary law, women struggle to enjoy the rights granted them under the constitution to access and own land (see, Weah, 2012).

The Poverty Reduction Strategy of Liberia identifies the crucial role that agriculture plays as the driver of the country's economy. It identifies women as responsible for over 60% of agricultural production, 80% of trading in rural areas of the economy, and women also play a vital role in linking rural and urban markets through their informal networks (PRSL, 2011; Weah, 2012). However, women continue to face challenges regarding access to and ownership of land, a situation that bellies the century-old African patriarchal perception of women as "property" of their husbands and therefore precluded from land ownership under customary law, even in the 21st century (see, Vitalis, 2017). The livelihood challenges that women in rural Liberia face due to lack of access to land for agricultural purposes has been worsened by the Ebola outbreak. The World Bank's (2015) survey revealed how women continue to experience the worst job losses impacted by Ebola, based on the major roles they play in the agricultural

value chain, from the production of food crops up to their typical self-employed vocations as traders in the market, both of which have been most impacted by the Ebola crisis.

The Ebola epidemic has worsened the already precarious situation of Liberia as the most affected by poverty prior to the outbreak of the virus in 2014. The difference in the incidence of poverty between the low and high Ebola scenarios was thus projected to rise from 17.58% in 2015 to 19.2% in 2016, when the country was officially declared Ebola free (see, UNDP, 2015). Liberia's unenviable position as the most affected by both Ebola and poverty (see, Mackey, 2016; UNDP, 2016) does not spare women, who constitute the most affected by both phenomena. The way out of this socio-economic milieu has necessitated the need to revisit the role of women in national development and by extension, address the issue of gender equality, which according to Weah (2012), is relatively new in the Liberian development discourse.

Lessons learned from the socio-economic impacts of Ebola on Liberia have appeared to give urgency to the gender-differentiated impacts of access to land for women and youth. This has given new impetus to grassroots advocacy on land governance and how that has shaped Liberia's lands rights policy after Ebola. In 2018, Liberia passed its land rights bill into law to ensure stronger protections for women's land rights, including provisions for women's participation on local land management committees. The new law also gives spouses equal rights to be members of land-owning communities, an important safeguard for women in Liberia (Roush, 2018).

In the next section, I examine the disproportionate impact of the Ebola epidemic on the health sector in Liberia compared to Guinea and Sierra Leone. I will consider how the historical and socio-political dynamics that define the development trajectory of Liberia have left behind a

dysfunctional health system that was exposed by the Ebola outbreak in 2014, thereby giving Liberia the infamous identity as the epicenter of Ebola in West Africa.

Liberia as the Epicenter of Ebola in West Africa

The representation of Liberia as the epicenter of Ebola in West Africa was due to the unprecedented nature of the outbreak and the high number of fatalities that occurred in the country, compared to other countries since the outbreak began in late March 2014 (Mackey, 2016). Studies have shown how Ebola exposed the already disintegrated healthcare system that had long been financially and physically remote to ordinary citizens, making traditional medical solutions an alternative to the increasing demand for healthcare (Perry & Sayndee, 2017). Liberia endured what was described as the worst epidemic of an Ebola virus strain in human history (Chan, 2014) as dead bodies were being dragged to the streets of Monrovia as a strategy to draw attention to the city authority’s inability to collect them for mass burials (Burphy, 2019, Personal Communication).

Table 1: Timeline of Ebola Outbreak in Liberia

Dec. 6, 2013	Mar. 30, 2014	April 23, 2014	July 2, 2014	July 25, 2014	Aug. 28, 2014
Ebola outbreak began in Guinea	Liberia reported first Ebola case	34 cases and 6 deaths of Ebola in Liberia	Two US health workers with Ebola evacuated from Liberia	Liberia closed borders	WHO declared Public Health emergency of international concern

Source: *Adapted from WHO (2014)*

The ravages of the outbreak and the attendant failure of the healthcare system to meet the needs of the people heightened public mistrust of the government and deepened the political tension within the country (Paczynska, 2016). The Government of Liberia's constant failures to tackle the overwhelming impact of the outbreak compelled health authorities to allow the dumping of bodies into community wetlands, giving rise to fear about water contamination. This resulted in the description of the Liberian state as "an avenue of disease," as Ebola hotlines were created but remained largely dysfunctional (Perry & Sayndee, 2017, p.16). The characteristic weakness of the health system in Liberia can be traced to the country's long history of outsourcing state functions, where most of the country's hospitals were and remain operated by Christian missions (Werker & Beganovic, 2011). A review of the country's national health accounts revealed that as of 2008, the share of government hospitals and clinics in Liberia's health sector outlays was 42% (Ministry of Health & Social Welfare, 2009). The deplorable state of Liberia's health system was worsened by 14 years of brutal civil wars that necessitated the destruction of state facilities, including hospitals, by armed combatants.

Although a significant 38% of Liberia's health expenditure comes from external aid (WHO, 2016), the country continues to battle with the challenge of financing Common Goods for Health (CGH). While other countries in the West African sub-region such as Nigeria have mobilized their polio field epidemiologists and polio surveillance systems to track and combat the spread of the Ebola outbreak, "Liberia did not even have an institutionalized system for disease tracking" (Nyenswah, n.d., cited in Earle & Sparkes, 2019). The recognition of Ebola as no longer a peculiar case for Africa but a global threat requiring a coordinated international response (WHO, 2016) made global intervention in West Africa necessary. But a more important clarion call by Ellen Sirleaf Johnson of Liberia to Barack Obama, president of the United States

to intervene to save Liberia from being overwhelmed by the epidemic (Cooper, 2014), showed the enormity of the crisis in Liberia.

The arrival of a team of experts from the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the Liberian capital of Monrovia was bolstered, when an Ebola infection was reported in the United States, and two infected American doctors from West Africa to the United States for intensive care (Dahl et al., 2016). The role that USAID has continued to play in the recovery process in Liberia after the country was officially declared Ebola free in 2016 calls for the need to examine the history and the role of USAID as leader in international development. This discussion is situated in the context of post-Ebola development in Liberia in the next section.

The Impact of Ebola on Women

Gender constitutes a key determinant of global health, although gender is missing from, misunderstood in, and only sometimes mainstreamed into global health policies and programs (Hawkes & Buse, 2013). Existing research has shown increasing attention to health issues resulting in growing investment in development assistance for health—from US\$5.7 billion in 1990 to US\$28.2 billion in 2010 (Blanchet et al., 2013). This is backed by well-funded investment from private philanthropic organizations (Sridhar, 2012) to cater to the increasing challenges facing global health, particularly in the developing world. Davies and Bennet (2016) lament that despite this development, persistent patterns of gender inequality continue to be highlighted by the health burdens borne by women.

Evidence exists, for example, that women are 14 times more likely to die as a result of childbirth in a developing country than in a developed country (e.g., UNFPA, 2016). The emergence of the Ebola epidemic in West Africa in 2013 had compounded the already debilitating situation in sub-Saharan Africa, where in the space of 18 months, the outbreak in Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia led to a 75% increase in maternal mortality across the three most-affected countries (see, Mullan, 2015). A critical concern from research findings has been the feminization of the Ebola epidemic, where existing gendered roles of women and girls in West Africa posed Ebola-specific risks related to the disease. This phenomenon has increased the broader gender-related risks arising from the social upheaval caused by the pandemic (Davies & Bennet, 2016; UN Women, 2015).

The disproportionate health impact of the Ebola outbreak on women was attributed to their role as primary caregivers in their homes, communities, and health facilities and, as such, assisted most infected individual, which put them at an increased risk of contracting the virus. This was compounded by traditional burial practices typically performed by women which exposed them to the virus (Mendez et al., 2015; Kitching, Walsh, & Morgan, 2015). Researchers have predicted how the Ebola outbreak in West Africa would leave “a legacy significantly deeper than the morbidity and mortality caused directly by the disease” (Evans, Goldstein, & Popova, 2015, p.439). This has been the reality as the long-term effect of Ebola has gone beyond the risk of contracting the disease to the huge impact on the economies of the affected countries, with women again bearing the greater burden brought about by the epidemic in those countries most affected (UNDP, 2015).

In Liberia, for instance, where women comprise 85% of the daily market traders, delays in delivery of goods owing to travel restrictions, and increases in transport fares, have adversely affected the livelihoods of these women and their economic security (UN Women, 2015). Liberia constitutes a legitimate case study as the country's agricultural sector accounts for 61% of its gross domestic product with women making half of the country's agricultural labor force, and about two-thirds of the labor force in trade and commerce ((FAO, 2018). Based on this, the UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee of the Reference Group for Gender in Humanitarian Action, recommended that the role of women and girls in the post-crisis recovery will be essential to facilitate an expedited normalization of the social and economic landscape (UN, 2015). It is from this perspective that the role of USAID in international development, and by extension, its role in the post-Ebola recovery process with projects focusing on women's empowerment in Liberia, was critical.

History and Role of USAID in International Development

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) was established on November 3, 1961, under the auspices of President John F. Kennedy, following the enactment of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 into law. This combined the various precursor organizations such as the Mutual Security Agency, the Foreign Operations Administration, and the International Cooperation Administration under one umbrella body of USAID to serve as the primary development agency of the United States government to the world (Zusy, 2014; Knudsen, n.d).

The agency serves as the major implementer of three key and overlapping roles in U. S. foreign policy, namely: development assistance programs that are designed to foster sustainable broad-based economic growth, good governance, and social welfare in developing countries;

humanitarian aid programs that are devoted largely to the immediate alleviation of natural and human made emergencies to reflect the traditional charitable impulse of the American people; and to provide political-strategic aid to address special U.S. economic, political or security interests (Tarnoff, 2015). These roles are encapsulated in the 2014 revised mission statement of the agency which seeks to “... partner to end extreme poverty and to promote resilient, democratic societies while advancing our security and prosperity” (USAID, 2014, p.1).

The USAID, which operates based on the Marshall Plan model and geared towards poverty reduction through overseas investment (Zusy, 2014), is the largest foreign assistance program in the world with an annual budget of over \$200 billion in aid to more than 125 countries, with nearly 40% of funds to countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Of funds attributable to a specific sector in 2013 for instance, 36% went into health programs and 19% for humanitarian efforts (Tarnoff, 2015). The agency continues to prioritize the U.S. government’s mission as the leading investor in the development of health institutions around the world, through the strengthening of public-private partnerships in global health programs to promote better health for development (USAID, 2016).

USAID is driven by strategy and programs, which in the first decade of its establishment, focused on the provision of economic infrastructure and the promotion of policy reforms in the countries in which the agency has operated. Both programs followed from a top-down view of economic development at the time, based on the view that development emanated from government actions and that national wealth would trickle down to the poor (Pillsbury, n.d., cited in Tarnoff, 2013). This approach was replaced with a new bottom-up approach to development in 1973, which emphasizes growth with equity and basic human needs, an ideal that enjoins the

United States development assistance under the management of USAID to help the poor majority in the so-called Third World to satisfy their basic human needs (Tarnoff, 2013).

The United States is the largest donor in foreign development assistance in the world with 52.5 billion foreign aid budgets for 2020 (McConville, 2019). Apart from the U.S. providing the highest funding and logistics in the fight against Ebola in West Africa, the country remains the largest source of foreign direct assistance to Liberia (Baker, 2014). An assessment of the role of USAID in international development in post-Ebola West Africa will focus on the role that the agency has played in terms of its assistance to Liberia, and more specifically on the livelihood empowerment of women in Liberia between 2016 and 2019.

USAID's Historical Development Assistance in Liberia

The USAID's development partnership with Liberia dates to the very founding of the agency in 1961. As the largest bilateral donor in Liberia, the United States plays an influential and vital role in many aspects of Liberia's development and strives to ensure that the agency's strategy for Liberia complements and supports the Government of Liberia's own development vision as articulated in its Agenda for Transformation and other national development strategy documents (Byker, n.d).

The United States, through the USAID, has played a leading role in the fight against Ebola in Liberia between 2014 and 2015. The initial response was when the U.S. Ambassador to Liberia, Deborah Malac, declared a disaster on August 4, 2014, which triggered USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) to activate its Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) which comprised the various U.S. organizations working in Liberia under the auspices of USAID to support intervention in Ebola (USAID, 2014). An Operation United Assistance

(OUA) concept was subsequently formed, which aimed to establish unity with USAID and the international effort to treat and contain the spread of the Ebola virus disease in Liberia. The main tasks of the OUA program were to set the conditions for support to USAID in providing life-saving requirements, and then focus on building, staffing, and training personnel in the fight against the epidemic in Liberia (Boucher, 2018).

After Ebola was officially declared over in Liberia in August 2016, USAID continued to play significant roles in the post-Ebola recovery process through social interventions such as “Feed the Future,” a USAID women’s economic empowerment and equality initiative which aims at reducing the hunger challenges that Ebola has caused to food production and security, especially among women; the continuation of Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy, which the agency had started in 2012 to improve the way the international development community addresses gender equality and female empowerment in Liberia (USAID, 2016).

Other interventions by USAID in the post-Ebola recovery process in Liberia included a global health program, which aims to improve maternal and child health, as well as the Land Governance Support Activity program to promote women’s rights to land. These, the agency believes, constitute the key to furthering Liberia’s post-Ebola development agenda (Doman-Nimley, 2019). The initiatives are supported by the “Community Development Cooperation Strategy” since 2013, which outlines the United States’ support for Liberia in building sustainable local capacity to make a difference in the lives of the Liberian people and move the country towards a shared vision of self-sufficiency and prosperity (Malac, 2017). Achieving the community development cooperation strategy depends on the media environment that stimulates sustainable development.

Media in Liberia in the Context of Development

The media environment in Liberia started to improve in 2005, when a new democratic government led by Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, was elected to end the almost three decades of civil strife. The launch of the country's Poverty Reduction Strategy in 2008 recognized the role of the media in stimulating the national recovery process (Liberia Media Sustainability Index, 2009). Thus, the relatively free media environment resulted in the proliferation of community radio stations as the necessary alternative to the largely nonfunctional state-owned media. However, despite their potential, community radio in Liberia has not been fully utilized as a partner in the development process (Search for Common Ground, 2009).

Among the factors responsible for the challenge are irregular power supplies and rising cost of fuel for generators. More pressing are issues of organizational and financial fragility, resulting from inadequate community management and strategic planning to sustain community radio's role in the development process. Studies show that 84% of Liberian adults use radio for information (e.g., BBC Liberia, 2008). This is attributed to the significant role that development actors such as Mercy Corps, USAID, the Open Society Institute, and others have played in establishing and funding dozens of community radio stations in rural Liberia (Liberia Country Overview, 2014).

A nationwide survey revealed that 86% of Liberia's population consider community radio as the most trusted source of information due to their focus on local stories and local dialects (Mercy Corps, 2016). Although women listen to radio most in many developing countries, community radio is a male-dominated entity that often consigns women's programming to a narrow interpretation of gender issues and seldom addresses the listening needs of women as political and economic actors (Fortune & Chungong, 2013). This has

reflected in the case of Liberia, where women make up only about 16% of media practitioners and almost absent in media management positions (Sulonteh-Brown, 2016). This has been the case, despite establishment of the Liberian Women Democracy Radio, the first women-owned radio in Liberia in 2010 by the United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF), to give women a voice in the development process (World YWCA, 2010).

The critical role that community radio plays in development, given its reach in remote communities in Liberia, culminated in the use of the medium under the FtF initiative to help smallholder farmers, majority of whom are women. Thus, community radio has been used by USAID since 2013, when Ebola started, as a creative solution to rural problems in Liberia to empower women, who often are the most affected, to regain their livelihoods (Parkinson, 2013). This initiative to recognize and empowerment women in the development process, through community radio, appears to demonstrate USAID's commitment to giving practical expressions to the WID and GAD approaches regarding the overarching role of women in national development.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided background on the outbreak of the Ebola epidemic in West Africa. It focused on the profile of Liberia in the context of the country's position as the epicenter of the epidemic in the region. The chapter also examined the role of the international community in the fight against the Ebola outbreak in West, with a focus on USAID as the largest international development agency in the livelihood empowerment of women in the context of Liberia for this study. The chapter concluded with an overview of the media environment in Liberia in the context of development, the role that community radio played as partner in the development process and how USAID leveraged on the potential of community radio as a tool to reinforce the

WID and GAD approaches to the empowerment of women in the development process. This serves as the foundation for the next chapter, which provides the theoretical framework and a review of related studies that underpin the overarching research question of this dissertation project.

CHAPTER III

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter discusses the theoretical frameworks through which the issues of gender and the power relations that characterize the discourse and practice of international development are explained. The chapter begins with a review of two sets of theories. First, it traces the concept of communication for development. It extends the discussion to the dominant paradigm through which the theory of modernization is examined, the case for international development under modernization, the critiques, and the case against modernization through the lens of dependency theory. This is followed by a second set of critical theories, namely: the political economy theory, postcolonial theory, the theory of change, stakeholder/participatory communication theory, the gender approaches to development, and the stakeholder-participatory nexus in development model. Next, I will conclude with a review of related literature upon which the research questions for this dissertation will be set.

Communication for International Development

Development as a concept has been an integral part of human society that is influenced by the quest for qualitative social change. Curie-Alder (2016) situates the drive towards development on the fundamental desire to improve human conditions in the face of poverty. This culminated in the study of development as an academic discipline which focused on the analysis of domestic social problems in the West, particularly in Western Europe and North America. Melkote and Steeves (2015) observed that although development interventions are not new and have occurred throughout history, development in its modern form—or what can be termed as

international development—dates back to World War II and the decades after that witnessed the political emancipation of the Third World from colonization.

This new era of social change, which was referred to as the second wave of development, focused on newly independent but poor countries in the global South that had significantly suffered the consequences of World War II. The modus operandi for this phase of development prioritized reconstruction and decolonization (see, Curie-Alder, 2016). This era of change received impetus with the formation of the United Nations on October 24, 1945, largely because of world consensus based on the assumption that aid was important in the prevention of future wars (see, Melkote & Steeves, 2015). The United States, in its position as leader of the Free World, suggested a global effort to foster development in the developing world (McAnany, 2012), having observed that the poverty of the so-called Third World was an indictment on its moral leadership.

Harry Truman's 1949 inaugural speech articulated a new direction for American foreign policy to initiate a four-point plan to relieve the misery of the under-developed world, amongst which was to “embark on a new program of modernization and capital investment” (Truman, 1949 cited in Melkote & Steeves, 2015, p.45) to kickstart the development of the underdeveloped world. Truman's approach resulted in the deployment of American bureaucrats and experts to share their technical knowledge with countries of the global South to facilitate economic growth and raise standards of living. This marked the era of international development, using the dominant approach and the diffusion of innovations from the so-called developed world to the underdeveloped world.

Scholars have argued that the idea of “development” in the post-1945 era was invented as a geopolitical project to rescue countries in the Global South, recently liberated from the cloak of colonialism, away from the ideological enticement of communism, and to steer them along the path of capitalism to ensure their economic development (Sachs, 1992). The geopolitical motive behind this approach led to Tucker’s (1999) description of “development” as a form of imperialism and the imposition of an idea advanced in the interest of imperial rule.

Other critical scholars from the Marxist theoretical perspective also described the development project of international cooperation as nothing more than a form of imperialism—the velvet glove within which was concealed the iron fist of armed force, namely, the deployment of the state against the forces of popular resistance confronting the incessant and seemingly irresistible advance of capitalism (Petras & Veltmeyer, 2001; Veltmeyer, 2005). Development within the geopolitical context and institutional framework of globalization was also observed to have been “conceived in conditional terms as relative progress in terms of capita incomes and in structural terms as industrialization and modernization” (Veltmeyer & Bowles, 2018, p.3). This ideological enterprise was carried out through the dominant paradigm, otherwise known as the modernization theory, which will be discussed below to explain the dynamics of international development and how this applied to the context of international development in post-Ebola Liberia.

The Modernization Theory

International development as a concept is frequently used as an umbrella term for development research and practice that is often associated with actions designed for, and research relating to, poor countries (Monks, Carbonnier, & Haan, 2017; Sumner & Tribe, 2008). Although the conceptual and policy approaches have varied over the years, the geographic focus

for international development on the Global South and its connotation with foreign aid has given prominence to the inequalities that characterize the developed and the developing world (Brandt, 1980). In this milieu, the modernization approach, which prioritizes economic growth and Western scientific values have constituted key themes in development as a solution to underdevelopment in the Third World and elsewhere with enormous social, cultural, and economic consequences (Melkote & Steeves, 2015).

Whitman Rostow made a case for the modernization theory through economic growth, based on Western capital and technical know-how as the cure to all the ills in the Third World. For any country to have the chance to achieve the same prosperity and political freedom as the United States therefore, the Western capitalist model was the way forward, and that it was the job of America to make that happen (Engerman & Unger, 2009). This buttressed the ideals of Truman's "Point Four" program which reinforced the United States' leadership to revitalize the world economy, and champion the cause to "strengthen freedom-loving peoples around the world against the evils of aggression" (Truman 1949, as cited in Melkote & Steeves, 2015) in line with U.S. foreign policy.

Latham (2000) showed how the ideas of modernization as ideology made their way into the key elements of American foreign policy towards the Third World in a manner that protected its interests in the global economy. Hence, the roots of modernization as a dominant paradigm in international development may be traced to the United States' commitment to embark on a bold new program of making the benefits of its "scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas" (Rist, 2006, p.71). This ideological overture explains the power and influence that international development experts wield in reflecting the ideas about modernization as emanating from the West to the rest of the world and

take place “above the level of the specific encounter between ‘modernizers’ and their subjects” (Engerman & Unger, 2009, p.377).

The idea of international development under modernization was also framed as the grand vision which proposed that changes in newly independent nations in the Global South would be modeled after the pathway of the development process that the Global North had already pioneered (Smith, 1997). This domineering view of the discourse and practice of international development as Western “magic formula” (Escobar, 1995, p.vii) to solve the problems of underdevelopment had failed to a large extent, resulting in an impasse in the concept of development (Schuurman, 2004). The associated historical biases of the modernization paradigm, among which were Western views of Third World women as homemakers, also reflected in institutional practices and interventions that marginalized women in most development projects (see, e.g., Melkote & Steeves, 2015).

The legacy of the development discourse instituted by the modernization approach, which created the perception of the Third World woman as passive and ignorant (Melkote & Steeves, 2015; de Groot, 1991) continues to determine the dynamics of many development programs in the global South. The virtual invisibility of women in leadership positions in the discourse and practice of the USAID interventions which focused on the livelihood empowerment of women in post-Ebola Liberia reflects the enormity of the modernization legacy of international development. Its simmering effects also reinforce the theory of gender and power in the context of international development, which will be discussed next.

The Case for Development under Modernization

Whether or not foreign aid enhances development in the so-called ‘underdeveloped’ part of the world, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, has generated debates among development experts and critics of the industry of international development. On one side of the debate are proponents who argue that the world’s poorest nations are trapped in a cycle of poverty and ill health, and that aid is the way forward in propelling those countries into a cycle of development (e.g., Sachs et al., 2004). The pro-aid argument is predicated on the notion that foreign aid has in many instances been accompanied by rapid economic growth and brisk poverty reduction in recipient countries. It builds on the view that when domestic savings and foreign investments are inadequate, foreign aid plays a key role in the transformation process in national development (Quibria, 2014).

Proponents of international development assistance emphasize the need for development aid on the premise that aid has contributed positively to economic growth in sub-Saharan Africa (e.g., Gomanee, Girma, & Morrissey, 2005). Other areas where aid has proven to be critical, in the view of advocates of aid, is the benefits of effective health aid and the realization of the health benefits that accrue to developing countries over time (Bendavid & Bhattacharya, 2016). This validates the critical role that USAID has been playing before, during, and after the Ebola epidemic in Liberia, and gives relevance to the maternal and child health component of gender-sensitive development interventions that continue to benefit women, many of whom have been adversely impacted by the Ebola epidemic.

A different school of thought exists about the mixed effects of foreign aid in economic growth in developing countries. Scholars in this stream of argument reasoned that whereas aid has positively benefited sub-Saharan Africa between 1980 and 2007, its impact on other regions

of the world had proved negative (Ekanayake & Chatrna, 2010). The case for aid in sub-Saharan Africa in this context, compared to other regions of the developing world, substantiates the argument that to ensure the effectiveness of development aid, recipients need to be given full autonomy over aid allocation, project implementation, and policy formulation (Ranis, 2006; Kanbur, Sandler, & Morrison, 1999). This further supports the need for local ownership in development, where people who are intended targets of development interventions such as the case of USAID's gender-sensitive development interventions in post-Ebola Liberia, will have an active stake in the cycle of the development programs meant for them.

Critiques of the Modernization Theory

The basic premise of the dominant paradigm has been the idea of social change and progress, based on the underlying assumption that society must move from tradition to modernity, and that the Western European and North American societies were the civilized and ideal ones toward that all other societies should aim to emulate (Luintel, 2014). The dominant paradigm's disregard for the cultures and histories of developing countries in the Western enterprise of modernization, where countries in the Global South were considered as net receivers of development assistance (Hewitt, 1995; Crush, 1995), not only accounted for the failures of modernization, but characterized the crisis and stagnation of development theories associated with the modernization paradigm that created the development impasse (see, Luintel, 2014).

Crush (1995) observed how "not only are the objects of development stripped of their history but are then inserted into implicit typologies which define a priori what they are, where they've been and where, with development as guide, they can go" (p.9). The biases that reflect in the modernization paradigm's hierarchical posture and presumptive superiority to cultures and

institutions of people in the Third World have exacerbated the conditions of women when examined from the lens of modernity and gender. This aligns with Hooper's (1996) characterization of modernization from a gendered dichotomy that values masculine traits over feminine ones. The consequences, according to Luintel (2014), is the depiction of women as tradition-bound conservatives and therefore labeled as obstacles to modernization.

Apart from the active marginalization of women under the dominant paradigm, scholars have also assessed the extent to which modernization theory's trickle-down effect of economic development on women have failed and the consequences thereof on women's livelihood empowerment (e.g., Chowdhury, 1995; Luintel, 2014). The consequences of the modernization approach regarding gender and development in the context of this study, has been the subjugating effects of the gender-power relations that characterized the discourses surrounding the age-old land reform program in Liberia, and the ripple effects of that on women's livelihood in the aftermath of the Ebola epidemic. In sum, the dominant paradigm's approach to development, which sought to promote the notion that progress in the Global South could be realized, based on progressive emulation of the Western model, have generally failed.

The earliest case against the modernization theory was by proponents of the dependency theory such as Andre Gunder Frank and Samir Amin, who attributed underdevelopment in the Third World to capitalist international economic and political system. While Frank (1967) blamed modernization theory for capitalism's invasion of the Third World, Amin described capitalism's excessive consideration for export activities as the result of the extraversion of the economies of developing countries (Amin, 1977). From this perspective, dependency has been described as a form of unequal international relationship between two sets of countries—the

metropolitan center which represents developed capitalism one hand, and the periphery of underdeveloped regions on the other (Ghosh, 2012).

Dependency theory's challenge to the Euro-centric perception of development argued for underdevelopment as not the result of internal factors in Third World countries, but rather as those caused by exogenous factors. Thus, from Frank's (1967) perspective, underdevelopment in Africa, Asia, and countries in Latin American was because of colonialism and resource exploitation in the Third World. Amin (1976) corroborates this by attributing the distortions that characterized underdevelopment in the Third World to the introduction of Western capitalism in peripheral countries.

Two solutions had been prescribed for underdevelopment in the Third World. The first was the need for socialism to promote auto-centric accumulation of wealth via local production (Ghosh, 2001). The second was a focus on communication as a field for resistance to the extensive flow of media products from the North to the South to protect local cultures. This Steeves (2003) sees as dependency theorists' preference for policies of cultural dissociation, which emphasized bottom-up forms of communication, the creation of alternative media, and the implementation of policies that align with each country's values.

It is interesting how what appeared to be a critique of the modernization theory itself became a subject of criticism. Nhema and Zinyama (2016) described the dependency theory as more pessimistic than the modernization theory about the possibilities of peaceful development and its view of capitalism as the cause of all evils. Critics of the dependency theory cited the success stories Asian economies such as South Korea, Singapore, and Hong Kong to illustrate the positive side of Western capitalism that does not always underdeveloped countries in the so-called Third World as the dependency theorists perceived.

Although dependency theory emerged as a radical critique of the orthodox, conservative theory of modernization, the former, “in all its tenets, simply reversed the arguments of the mainstream discourse” of development instead of providing real alternative to the limitations of the modernization theory (Munk, 2018, p.58). This development challenge is corroborated by other scholars who observed that despite the differences between the modernization and dependency theories in the spectrum of approaches to international development, both approaches share the conviction about development as essentially a process that can bring about progress and focus on macro-structures in their explication of the concept of development (e.g., Hout, 2016; Nederveen-Pieterse, 2010).

Scholars have highlighted that despite the critiques and perceptions about the death of the modernization theory, its influence on contemporary development thinking is increasing (Marsh, 2014; Bussmann, 2017). The revival of the modernization theory is championed by others who advocate the need for the development process to be sustained by external aid and technology to provide for a smoother transition to modernity of developing countries (e.g., Greig, Hume, & Turner, 2007). This view is emphasized by Jeffrey Sachs, one of the famous proponents of a return to the “big push” through modernization, based his call for greater commitment of the United States and the international community for international assistance. Sachs’ argument is direct—that “...the poorest nations are caught up in the poverty trap” and that “development assistance can close this financing gap” (Sachs, 2005, p85).

The emergence of Ebola in West Africa and the clarion calls by leaders of the affected countries on the international community for assistance appeared to validate the relevance of the modernization theory. This sought to justify Sachs’ support for international aid to developing countries, notably those in Africa. This view has been countered by others who argue against aid

as the solution for underdevelopment, which makes a strong case against both the modernization and the dependency theories.

The Case against Modernization

On the flip side of the aid debate are arguments by opponents of international development aid who contend that despite the injection of more than \$2 trillion of foreign aid from rich countries to poor countries for the past 50 years, with Africa being the highest recipient, by far, aid has failed to deliver on the promise of sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction (Moyo, 2009). This is based on the perceived ineffectiveness of, and possibly damaging effects of aid to recipient countries (Easterly, 2001; Bauer, 2000). The ineffectiveness of foreign aid has been identified as having three roots: the complex nature of the problem of poverty and its related problem of dependence; the nature of government and institutions in the developing countries; and the nature of the aid industry not designed to understand poverty beyond just material condition (Dichter, 2005).

The underlying reason for the ineffectiveness of aid in developing countries is aid's association with delayed development. The failure of aid reaching poor people in developing countries is also largely attributed to questionable and corrupt governments overseeing aid disbursement in developing countries (e.g., Gunning, 2000). Dambisa Moyo, in her harsh criticism of foreign aid, concluded that aid has helped make the poor poorer, and growth slower, hence she described aid as "the single worst decision of modern developmental politics" and the "choice of aid as the optimum solution to the problem of Africa's poverty" (Moyo, 2009, p. xix).

The case against modernization through dependency is further strengthened by calls for a radical reduction in development assistance in that development aid has failed to work because it just cannot work (Dichter, 2016). This is attributed to foreign development experts' isolation from local people in a manner that undermines the idea of "country ownership" in development discourse and practice. While this adds to the view that development aid does not work "because of human nature, the complexity of the development world's problem, and most important, the inevitable structural distortions and contradictions within the development assistance industry" (Dichter, 2009; p.288), it also serves as an indicator to assess USAID's gender-sensitive development program in post-Ebola Liberia, and its impact on women's livelihood empowerment.

The opposition to foreign aid as a case against modernization through dependency strengthens the view that the poor have demonstrated extraordinary creativity and ingenuity in designing innovative solutions to their own problems, for which they appear more competent at poverty reduction than national governments and international agencies (Appadurai, 2001). The alternative for both the modernization and the dependency theories is the need for a new approach to development from the bottom up (Omo-Fadaka, n.d., as cited in Esteva, 2010). Others emphasized that if development aid should be promoted at all, it must consider the assumption that poverty alleviation led by the poor themselves may be a viable alternative to poverty alleviation led by rich (Parameshwar, Srikantia, & Heineman-Pieper, 2009; Freire, 2010).

The fact that in international development discourse and practice, the subaltern is always spoken for, necessitates the need for critical theory that questions the structural marginalization of stakeholders in the development process. The quest to break this impasse in the postulation of

development theory to explain the failures of the modernization and the dependency theories culminated in the emergence of a cohort of critical approaches to development which will be discussed next.

Critical Approaches to Development

Experts in development have questioned the structural marginalization that characterized the erstwhile modernization theory and advocated for a change in policy that promotes the inclusion of stakeholders in development, women for that matter, in the decision-making process in international development (e.g., Boserup, 1970; Wilkins, 2016). Critical theory, out of which other alternative theories to the modernization paradigm arose, is traced back to notable proponents such as Hegel, and Kant, and Marx, resulting in what was called the Frankfurt School. This provided a crucial starting point of critiquing realism and liberal institutionalism, thus marking the start of a growing disenchantment with the dominant paradigm (Roach, 2016). It later evolved to include, for instance, Michel Foucault, critical feminism, and post-colonialism, among other frameworks, that are concerned with the critique of modernity (Munck, 2018). The aim of critical theory has been to critique the dominant status quo and challenge the injustices that reinforce marginalization in society.

Critical theory has found its way into the discourse and practice of development in what has become critical development theory, which refers to those approaches that explain what is wrong with the current social order, identify the agents for social change, and provide practical goals for social transformation (Munck, 2018). The place of critical theory as part of the alternative approaches to development may be situated within political economy theory, based on the premise that capitalism has been unable to provide the necessary conditions for

development, which has been understood as emancipation from structures of economic exploitation and oppression (Melkote & Steeves, 2015; Veltmeyer & Bowles, 2018).

Political Economy Theory

Political economy from a Marxian perspective has been defined in several ways. Key among them have been the study of moral judgements on particular issues (Gilpin, 1997), and as a body of practice and theory offered as advice by counsellors to the leaders of social organizations of varying degrees of complexity at various times and places (Smythe, 1991 cited in Mosco, 2009). Mosco (2009) defines political economy as the study of social relations, particularly the power relations that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources, as well as one which focuses on the concentration of a “specific set of social relations organized around power or the ability to control people, processes, and things, even in the face of resistance” (p.24).

The place of political economy in international development assistance or foreign aid is crucial. This is founded on the view that foreign aid has always been political, and the fact that receiving countries have less control over multilateral aid allocation (Werker, 2012). In discussing the functions of international development assistance or aid within the framework of political economy, Morgenthau (1962) argued how “the transfer of money and services from one government to another performs the function of a price paid for political services rendered or to be rendered” (p.302). This is supported by the view that in certain occasions, the “political services” being rendered by the donor country would also result in some reciprocal “assistance flowing to the donor” (Werker, 2012, p.6).

The political economy of aid based on donor-recipient reciprocity, is in turn influenced by ideological motives where international response and levels of humanitarian assistance were tied to: the level of democracy by recipient countries; the geographical distance of beneficiary countries to donors; whether the affected countries were sources of crude oil; and their potential for natural resource wealth (Raschky & Schwindt, 2012; Neumayer, 2003). Neoliberal critics of development aid emphasize how Overseas Development Agencies (ODAs) use aid as an instrument of donor foreign policy and mechanism through which leaders of Western nations lay their hands on and appropriate the resources of developing nations (e.g., Carbonnier, 2010).

Other studies have shown how, in the scheme of political economy, aid reflects the relatively permanent strategic interests of donor countries, based on the idea that aid is given as a strategic, political move, and not necessarily based on need (e.g., Boon, 1996). This dovetails in the empirical evidence indicating that aid allocation motivation stems partly from potential trade benefits that accrue to donor countries, where recipient countries who import capital goods from their donor counterparts are prioritized in the allocation of foreign aid (Williamson, 2010; Younas, 2008). The obvious reality that donors disburse aid based on political economic motivation, not necessarily based on those who need it most (Trumbull & Wall, 1994), explains the lethargic and insufficient responses to Ebola in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea at the outset of the epidemic. Another justification for the perceived apathy towards these affected countries could be their inability to meet the above political economy criteria to garner the support of the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, except for their respective relationship as the “neocolonial masters” of the former.

Prior studies have also shown how neocolonial relationships define the political economy of aid in humanitarian situations. For example, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs report revealed how the international response to Ebola in West Africa was characterized by neocolonialism (UN, 2014). This is supported by other findings that described how neocolonial dynamics resulted in a situation where financial responses to the Ebola epidemic were negotiated privately through institutional aid relationships between the United States and Liberia, the United Kingdom and Sierra Leone, as well as France and Guinea (e.g., O’Grady, 2014).

The neocolonial lines which defined the West’s development assistance to the three countries most affected by Ebola in West Africa were clearly drawn, for instance, in the call by the United States’ Ambassador to the United Nations, Samantha Power, who challenged France and Belgium to do more in the fight against Ebola in Guinea, just as the United States and the United Kingdom had done to Guinea’s English-speaking neighbors Liberia and Sierra Leone (AFP, 2014). While the U.S. envoy’s call was timely from a humanitarian perspective, it showed how the political economy angle from which the rhetoric was made deepened the ideological markers of difference which further reinforced the West’s neocolonial response to the Ebola epidemic in West Africa.

From a more political economy perspective, the United States’ obligation to intervene in the fight against Ebola in West Africa was two-fold: First, its role as leader and superpower of the world, under which Liberia is a “quasi former colony,” made the United States’ call to leadership a clarion one. This was reinforced by President Barack Obama that, “faced with this outbreak, the world is looking to us, the United States, and it’s a responsibility that we embrace.” Obama reiterated the United States’ preparedness to take leadership on this to provide the kinds

of capabilities that only America has, and to mobilize the world in ways that “only America can do.” Second, the United States’ moral responsibility to focus predominantly on Liberia was more necessary, due to the critical nature of the epidemic in that country, which to date, is politically and ideologically considered the former “colony” of the United States.

The politically motivated nature of international development assistance or aid is validated by the argument that estimates of growth effects of aid that are not politically motivated are hard to identify, largely due to the methodological challenges of finding a suitable instrument (Roodman, 2007). This further validates the popular assumption that once aid has been disbursed to a country, it is by no means free of political economy challenges (Werker, 2012), some of which manifest through implementation of development assistance programs shaped by gender-power relations. The question as to whether and to what extent development aid to the developing world has yielded positive and/or negative impacts remains a controversial debate among development economists and development experts. The next section discusses the case for and against international development aid to the so-called underdeveloped world.

Postcolonial Theory

The origin of “postcolonialism” is traced to the works of Franz Fanon, which began in the 1950s and was devoted to the study of the controlling power of representation in colonized societies. It was said to have been strengthened in the 1970s with Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, and later with contributions from the likes of Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak, to name a few, thereby shaping the trajectory of postcolonial theory with the central focus of analyzing the effects of colonial representation of, and the social, political, and cultural engagements of colonized people (Ashcroft, 2017). A key defining characteristic of postcolonial studies and its development as a theory is its emphasis on revealing the interests behind the production of

knowledge and introducing an oppositional criticism that draws attention to, and in doing so, attempts to retrieve, the wide range of illegitimate, otherwise “disqualified or subjugated knowledge” (Foucault, 1980, p.82).

From a more critical-cultural studies perspective, the subjugated, as described in Foucault’s analysis, emerged as the “subaltern,” which constitutes the unheeded other (Said, 1995) which postcolonial theory has been concerned about, regarding how they cannot be heard in the global imperial system (Spivak, 1988). Postcolonial theory is, by extension, deeply concerned with Eurocentrism as a legacy of European colonialism and advocates for a greater voice for those marginalized out of the West. The theory thus evolved as an interdisciplinary set of critiques of inequality in the global system that is characterized by a hegemonic political agenda (Noxolo, 2016). Much of the debate of postcolonial theory, as it evolved, attempts to move beyond these culturally biased and power-laden formulations of Eurocentric thought to its central focus on exploitation (Mohan, 1997).

The debate of postcolonial theory, therefore, within this shifting trajectory, is not just concerned with increasing the participation of the subaltern in global politics. It is more concerned with their participation in global wealth, thus interrogating the terms of that participation by analyzing what has become of the subaltern in the global wealth participation, and what space the subaltern occupies in the system that reproduces global wealth (Sylvester, 1999). Postcolonial theory’s conceptualizations of power relations in development, which result in the global reproduction of wealth, Sharp and Briggs (2006) argued, “can offer a powerful tool by which to challenge development studies’ notions of empowerment” (p.6). From this perspective, “postcolonial theory has repeatedly engaged in shifting the focus of the development imagination from a range of agents of change and forms of agency to a range of subalterns and

forms of subalternity” (Noxolo, 2016, p.41). This, again, reflects the gender-power relations in the discourse and practice of development which this dissertation question attempts to examine.

Within the shifting framework of postcolonial theory, development has been considered a pervasive cultural discourse with profound consequences for producing social reality in the Third World. And while the discourse and practice of development were the offspring of the European project of colonialism (Omar, 2012), it is also critical in the postcolonial era to revisit and deconstruct the discourse of international development within the framework of globalization. This, the present study contends, should be done in a manner such that groups who are the targets of development programs, for example, women in rural Liberia, have a say in the conception, design, and implementation of development programs that strongly impact their livelihoods.

Scholars have observed the obvious paradoxes of postcolonial theory and its relationships with development studies (Mohan, 2007), resulting in tensions between theorists from these two disparate fields (see, Sharp & Briggs, 2006). Although attempts have been made to bring the two schools together, there still exists an obvious “lack of synthesis or coming together of development and post-structural approaches, especially progressive interpretations of postmodernism and postcolonialism” (Simon, 2006, p.11). This disagreement relates to theoretical objectives and methodological approaches. While the traditional aim of development studies is the transformation of society through socio-economic change in this regard, postcolonial studies question these concepts from a Eurocentric perspective, and are much more concerned with questions of culture, representations, and inequalities (Ziai, 2012).

The tensions between postcolonial theory and development studies in the context of critical theory are evident in attitudes regarding the means by and the extent to which global poverty and inequality should be addressed. In other words, while modernists approaches are structured around eradicating global poverty, postcolonial theory is more structured around the eradication of global inequality with a political anger about the diverse forms of poverty and the discrimination that global inequality perpetuates (Noxolo, 2016). These stark differences in orientation between the two perspectives necessitate what has been described as a challenge in finding useful intersections of development studies and postcolonial studies (see, Sylvester, 2006). This stalemate further calls for a rethinking of development from a postcolonial perspective in the next section.

Rethinking Development from Postcolonial Perspective

Despite the gulf between postcolonial theory and development studies, there have been concerns about the need to rethink development from a postcolonial perspective (e.g., Omar, 2011). This is centered on the perceived commonality between the two traditions in their shared engagement with the poorest and most vulnerable people in the world, as well as their collective insistence that the richest and most powerful engage with the marginalized, with a common goal of tackling the global inequalities that deepen global poverty (Noxolo, 2016). The truce between the two traditions is based on the hope that a dialogue between development studies and postcolonialism offers great potential for an alternative conceptualization of development (Sylvester, 1999).

Several scholars have pointed out the need for a postcolonial approach to development. This is focused on critically identifying what is omitted, what is lost, and what is left unsaid, as well as what cannot be said regarding the Eurocentric approach to development processes and

relationships (see, Raghuram, Noxolo, & Madge, 2014). But more importantly, postcolonial theory concentrates on critiquing the colonial antecedents and continuities of large development organizations (Bell, 2002). It does so by scrutinizing the power relations between development organizations and the communities in which they operate, particularly by exposing the subtle coercion that characterize the power relations inherent in their communication approach (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). There is no disputing the fact that for development programs to sustainably address the challenges of poverty that are steep in underdevelopment, a participatory environment is needed, where local people are actively involved not as beneficiaries of development, but as stakeholders in the development process.

International development programs based on aid continue to face a crisis of confidence, with increasing frustrations among development practitioners about the failures of the development industry in improving the lives of people in the developing world (see, Dichter, 2009). These failures, from a postcolonial perspective, are blamed mainly on development praxis that perpetuates colonialist and Western-centered discourse and power relations, even as it seeks to focus on the marginalized (Sharp & Briggs, 2006). It is this focus on the power relations which describe the discourse and practice of development that postcolonial theory is appropriate for this dissertation. Complementing this theory to critically examine the gender-power relations that characterize the USAID-funded development interventions in post-Ebola Liberia is the stakeholder theory and participatory development, which will be discussed next.

Stakeholder Theory and Participatory Development

The idea of a stakeholder and its usage in corporate America began in the 1970s. Out of this evolved the stakeholder theory, proposed by Edward Freeman with his seminal *strategic management: A stakeholder approach* book in 1984, which according to the author, attempted to

solve the problem of value creation and trade, where there was a great deal of change in business relationships. Freeman was concerned also with the problem of ethics in capitalism, which has become the dominant means of organizing value creation and trade. The concept of stakeholder therefore sought to address these problems by questioning the relationship between capitalism and other institutions in society, and in so doing, find out how the effects of capitalism can be taken into account by decision makers (Freeman, 1984; Freeman et al., 2010). The evolution of the stakeholder theory has resulted in several definitions of stakeholder. One of the popular definitions is provided by Freeman (1984, p.25; Freeman et al., 2010, p.9), who defined stakeholders as “those groups and individuals who can affect or be affected by a corporation’s purpose.”

The stakeholder theory also defines stakeholder in relatively similar terms as “the individuals and groups who depend on the firm in order to achieve their personal goals and on whom the firm is depending for its existence” (Rhenman, as cited in Nasi, 1995, p.22). This explains the extension of the stakeholder theory’s unit of analysis beyond the organizational level to also include the relationships between an organization and its stakeholders (Freeman et al., 2010), which creates a sense of mutual interest between an organization and its stakeholders. Although the stakeholder theory is fundamentally a traditional business concept, it has evolved to entail numerous normative cores (Freeman, 1994), including feminist theory (Dunn, 1996; Wicks, Gilbert, & Freeman, 1994), which explains how critical the concept of stakeholder participation is in organizational decision making, whether as a profit or non-profit.

But more importantly, the applicability of the stakeholder theory in strategic planning at the international level, and in the development of mission statements to create value for all stakeholders involved (see, Freeman et al., 2010), makes appropriate the need to draw on the

stakeholder theory to examine USAID as an international organization and the development programs it carried out to empower rural women in post-Ebola Liberia. Doing so also requires the need to critically assess the organization's relationship with its stakeholders by evaluating the level of participation of rural women in the discourse and practice of development. This calls for discussion of the participatory development approach as an extension of the stakeholder theory in the context of this dissertation.

The concept of participatory development dates back many decades to signify the need for people's participation in decision-making processes, or the type and level of their involvement in development planning, projects, and practices (Agarwal, 2001; Freire, 2007). This concept arose and has become popular, partly because of the profound frustrations with failed development projects experienced by scholars and practitioners in the field of international development (Campbell & Vainio-Mattila, 2003), and about concerns with development agencies' power to control discourses and interpretations of development (Parpart, 2000). Advocates of participatory development argued that the discourse and practice of 'normal' development is characterized by biases of Eurocentrism that disempower the very people that are targets of development programs in the global South (Escobar, 1995; Peet & Watts, 1996).

The concept of participation has thus become a "development orthodoxy" holding out the promise of inclusion, of creating spaces for the less vocal and powerful to exercise their voices and begin to gain more choices (Cornwall, 2003, p.1325). Its definition as the practice of consulting and involving relevant stakeholders in the agenda-setting, decision-making activities, or processes of organizations responsible for policy development (Rowe & Fewer, 2004), makes participation a critical element in the discourse and practice of any successful and sustainable international development program that is driven by a participatory development approach.

Despite its decades of existence, participatory development has gained momentum in the beginning of the 21st century, based on the recognition of international development funders' acknowledgement of the need for participation to sustain development projects. For instance, the German development agency, GTZ, has defined participation as co-determination and power sharing throughout the program cycle (GTZ, 1991 cited in Nelson & Wright, 1995). This aligns with the World Bank's (1994) perspective on participation which involves stakeholders who "influence and share control over development initiatives, decisions, and resources which affect them" (p.6).

This participatory consensus on the discourse and practice of development culminated in calls for a more people-centered approach, one that recognizes the importance of local knowledge, encourages participation, and prioritizes partnership to empower the poor so they could challenge the status quo (e.g., Escobar, 1995). Participatory development as a critical/alternative approach therefore changed development thinking to focus on shifting power relationships within development practice and redefines the roles of external agents in international development (Campbell & Vainio-Mattila, 2003).

With the shift in the participation discourse beyond beneficiary participation to wider questions of citizenship, rights, and governance (e.g., Gaventa, 2002), so has the issue of addressing the challenges of equity and inclusion gained greater importance in participatory development (Cornwall, 2003). It is however concerning that in finding true participation of all stakeholders in development discourse and practice, women tend to be those whose interests are marginalized or overlooked in the participatory process (Guijt & Shah, 1998; Mayoux, 1995) although most development programs in the Global South prioritize the welfare of women and children as the most vulnerable groups of people in conflict and other emergencies. Based on

this, Keough (1998) observed how the emergence of participatory development as an alternative approach has evolved to encompass a confluence of several theoretical shifts spanning feminism, critical pedagogy, and a critique of development itself.

Participatory development has therefore evolved into participation and empowerment—described by scholars as the most radical form of participation, which focuses on the experiences, knowledge, and priorities of those who have been marginalized and oppressed by mainstream development practices (Prokopy & Castelloe, 1999). Since the discourse and practice of development have become gendered and women are often the marginalized in these processes, Cornwall (2003) argued that “problematizing the way in which ‘gender’ is used is essential for addressing the transformatory goals of participatory development” (p.1326). In this vein, participatory development, and its related method of participatory action research (PAR) is considered as the right approach to discern concerns of women who constitute the most marginalized in development (see, Guijt & Shah, 1998).

Melkote and Steeves (2015) consider participation in meaningful activities as the vehicle through which the needs that empower people are fulfilled. They favor the participation that leads to empowerment, where individuals are actively involved in development programs and their processes that enable them to contribute their ideas, take initiatives, articulate their needs and problems. This enables them to “assert their autonomy and take ownership of problems and challenges” (p.374). Emphasis on empowerment of people, using the participation-as-an-end approach as favored by some scholars (e.g., Ascroft & Masilela, 1989; Dervin & Huesca, 1997; Sen, 2000), has given momentum to the concept of PAR.

PAR as a methodology arose from the question as to how the production of responsible knowledge can be privileged, so that victims of capitalist exploitation benefit from the kind of “research and schooling” that will empower them (Fals-Borda, 2006, p.34). Again, PAR becomes the most appropriate method for eliciting the concerns of women who constitute the most marginalized in development (Guijt & Shah, 1998). From this perspective, PAR as a liberatory approach is committed to social transformation for justice (Melkote & Steeves, 2015), and gives voice to the subaltern in the development programs and projects that affect their lives.

Scholars from the feminist perspective have observed how the points of tension between participatory and “gender-aware” approaches to development arise from and produce rather different ways of engaging with issues of gendered power (e.g., Cornwall, 2003). This reinforced calls for alternative approaches to development from people’s self-development to a more recent focus on people’s participation in development as “markers and shapers” rather than as “users and choosers” of development initiatives that affect their lives (Cornwall & Gaventa, 2001). It is from this perspective that the stakeholder theory and participatory development jointly form a major theoretical framework which this dissertation draws on to critically examine the gender-power relations in the discourse and practice of USAID’s approach to international development in post-Ebola Liberia.

Existing research demonstrates from practitioners’ perspectives how participatory development can be a “manipulative tool to engage people in a predetermined process, an expedient way to achieve results, or an attempt to support a democratic, empowering process” (e.g., Keough, 1998, p.187). This is corroborated by extant studies which revealed that although there is an emphasis on a certain percentage of women to be involved on the committees of

development programs, much depends on the goodwill of heads and bureaucrats of such programs, who are usually men (e.g., Mohanty, 2002).

Assessing rural women's participation in this dissertation project has therefore been shaped by the question of who participated in the intervention and at what level they have participated in the discourse and practice of development. This question is critical and supports Cornwall's (2003) position that "bringing a gender perspective to bear on the practice of participation in development must assist in identifying strategies for amplifying voice and access to decision making of those who tend to be marginalized or excluded by mainstream development initiatives" (p.1326).

In giving practical expression to stakeholder theory and participatory development, particularly promoting maternal and child health in post-Ebola Liberia, also requires the use of social marketing. Coreil, Bryant, and Henderson (2000) argue the popularity of social marketing in the design and implementation of programs to promote socially beneficial behavior change within the public health community. Its use by organizations such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS), and other governmental and nonprofit organizations to promote behavior change has proved to be effective.

The various theories discussed under the critical/alternative approaches above are important in addressing the flaws inherent in the erstwhile modernization theory in international development. However, it is also critical that addressing the shortfalls of the modernization theory requires the need to examine the central issue of the status of women in the development process under the dominant paradigm. The next section, therefore, examines the issues of gender,

development, and intersectionality, followed by policy approaches that explain the role of women in development.

Gender, Development, and Intersectionality

Women play important roles in development. And acknowledgment of this had resulted in enormous progress on mainstreaming gender equality concerns into development since the United Nations (UN) Decade for Women between 1975 and 1985. That notwithstanding, development actors have sought to focus on economic development goals to the neglect of rights-based and notions of human well-being and happiness (Chant & Sweetman, 2012). This development has sought to erode the agency of women who constitute not only the main targets of development programs, but also the most affected constituency when development programs fail.

Women first came into focus in the industry of international development as objects of welfare concern (Moser, 1993). This concern was situated in patriarchy and liberal discourses, both at national and international levels, thereby leaving the question of gender relations in society unchallenged, making the welfare approach dominant in the first phase of development practices (Rai, 2011). This status-quo ante was reinforced in the Development Decade declaration as it made no reference to women as separate entities although development problems affect women and men in significantly different ways (Kabeer, 1994).

The injustices that women face in their positions as the so-called objects of development concerns was summed up in Esther Boserup's seminal work on "Women's Role in Economic Development" in 1970, which revealed how development projects rather marginalized women instead of empowering them (Boserup, 1970; Pearson, 2005). Further studies have shown that

although women are estimated to constitute 40% of the global workforce, they earn less than men for the same positions and hold only 1% of global wealth. The quest to tackle the entrenched marginalization of women and empower them in all sectors of society necessitated in the massive reintroduction of development programs in the 1980s, thereby making women more central than ever before to visions of global development (Wilkins, 2016).

Efforts to deepen the active engagement of women in the global development process culminated in the global Platform for Action that advocated for gender equality and equal participation of women policymakers and the need for a gender perspective to run throughout all phases of policy making (Krook & True, 2010). This gave room to the description of the concept of gender equality as “smart economics.” The concept implies that when concerns of women are prioritized regarding access to opportunities, rights, and voice, they result in more efficient economic functioning and better institutions that would enable women to contribute their utmost skills and energies to the project of global economic development (see, World Bank, 2007). In that regard, the gender question is more critical than ever before and reinforces the concerns raised in Boserup’s pioneering research on women’s role in economic development.

The so-called smart economics agenda that advocates for the agency of women in the development process has however been seen as a “far cry from the nuanced and subject-sensitive ideas of what the empowerment of women and the attainment of gender equality actually entails” (Chant & Sweetman, 2012, p. 518). This was due to the continuous marginalization of women in development policy decisions while women were expected under Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) to substitute for the failure of state institutions to provide health, education, and other essential services for their citizens in developing countries (Elson, 1991). As Chant and Sweetman reiterated, the gender lens for critiquing development discourse and practice is crucial

as the gender and development approach “recognizes gender inequality as a rational issue, and as a matter of structural inequality which needs addressing directly and not only by women, but by development institutions, governments, and wider society” (p.518).

Situating this in the Liberian context, where women contribute over 60% of the labor force in food production and play a critical role in transformational economic, environmental, and social changes required for sustainable development, yet have less representation in the decision-making process in agriculture (World Bank, n.d.), makes the case for gender equality in development germane. The increasing importance of gender in international development discourse and practice has necessitated the need to revisit policy approaches to women in development which will be discussed in the next section.

Policy Approaches to Women in Development

Women form the core of development in the global economy yet have constituted the marginalized segment of the global development drive for decades. Although women in the Global South constitute the most affected by the scourge of underdevelopment, “African women experience some of the worst conditions of living in the world” (Uzodike & Onapajo, 2013, p. 27). The enormity of the socio-economic challenges facing women in this part of the world has led to the infamous description of poverty having a female face in Africa (see, World Bank, 2009). The concept of women’s role in development and advocacy for their inclusion in discourses and policy initiatives became an integral part of international development (Pillai, Asalatha, & Ponnuswamy, 2009). The case for women in international development was justified in the initial phase of the advocacy, because “development in the developing countries has, by and large, marginalized women and deprived them of the control over resources and authority

within the household, without lightening the heavy burden of their ‘traditional roles’” (Afshar, 1991, p.15).

The idea of integrating women in Global South countries, particularly women in Africa into development practice, was contingent on Boserup’s study that traced the roots of the marginalization of women in development in Africa to discriminatory policies in education and training by European colonizers, who “created a productivity gap between male and female farmers.” She emphasized how, even after independence, this discriminatory gap created by men had sought to “justify their prejudice against female farmers” (Boserup, 1970, p.45). Since the 1970s, development scholars and practitioners, predominantly women, have criticized the androcentric nature of major development agencies in their marginalization of women in the development process (see, Koczberski, 1998). This gave impetus to the advocacy for women’s role in international development, considering that while women are often the most affected in disaster situations, they also have limited access to positions of leadership in the global humanitarian sector (Domingo, 2013). This development challenge is attributed to historical precedents where the dominant perspectives, research strategies, and guiding questions in disaster and social science research were masculinized to the virtual exclusion of women (Enarson & Phillips, 2003).

Gender advocates in development theory and practice, led by Buvinic (1983), initiated policy approaches to women in development under three main concentrations, namely: “welfare,” “equity,” and “anti-poverty” to push the boundary for the inclusion of women in the mainstream development process. This has been expanded to include “efficiency” and “empowerment” categories as the advocacy intensifies (see, Moser, 1993). These policy approaches have been subsumed under three dominant schools of thought that champion the case

for gender mainstreaming in development namely—Women in Development (WID), Women and Development (WAD), and Gender and Development (GAD) that will be discussed next.

Women in Development (WID)

The welfare approach to women's role in development became popular between the 1950s and 1960s and was modeled after the social welfare policy initiated in the West, particularly Europe, after World War II. Although this policy focused specifically on “vulnerable groups” in society, it considered motherhood as the primary role of women in society under the umbrella of development (Moser, 1993, p.59). Three assumptions thus characterized the welfare approach: that women were by nature passive recipients of development as against their active participation in the development process; that motherhood is the most important social role of women; and that childbearing is the most effective role that women play in all aspects of economic development (Snyder & Tadesse, 1995; Moser, 1993).

The term “women in development,” referenced as WID, was coined in the early 1970s by a Washington-based network of female development professionals (Tinker, 1990, p.30) to challenge the marginalization of women under the modernization paradigm. WID advocates drew on the pioneering findings of Boserup's research to reject the narrow view of women's roles as mothers and wives. More importantly, they sought to advocate against stereotypes of women as recipients of welfare and called for women to be seen as active contributors to economic development (Carrol & Shahra, 1995).

WID advocates consider the welfare approach as one that was easy to implement as the focus was on “what could be done to ensure that women had the conditions which enable them to meet the needs of their children and family” when provided with items such as food, basic

healthcare training and services (Young 1993, p.43). This approach was thought to secure the welfare of women who were largely seen as mothers and caretakers in the household, rather than as economic actors in the larger society (Pillai et al., 2009). The top-down planning and implementation that characterized the welfare approach, which often was used by donor agencies, has become an integral part of national development policies of many countries in the Global South. An exemplar of this approach is the National Social Protection Policy and Strategy instituted by the Government of Liberia in 2013 to “improve protection of the poorest individuals and groups from poverty, deprivation and hunger, and to enhance their resilience to risks and shocks” (Government of Liberia, 2013, p.3).

The WID approach has been lauded for its contributions to the cause of women in two ways. First, in terms of the discussions and research that it generated; and second, the energy that it gave to the growth of institutional machineries within development agencies and governments, resulting in the integration of women into development (Miller & Shahra, 1995). It appeared that WID had achieved its primary goal of advocating for the integration of women into the mainstream development process. However, WID attracted criticisms for its failure to call for changes in the overall structure or economic system that marginalized women (Duffy, 2006). WID’s focus on “women’s problem” was also considered insufficient in the advocacy for women’s role in the development process (Reeves & Baden, 2000).

The critiques of WID extended to criticisms of the welfare approach regarding its failing to include women as agents in development planning (e.g., Reddock, 2000; Tyler, 2002). In other words, the disenchantment with WID and its failure to expose the negative impacts that welfare approach had had on women’s status and agency in the development process culminated in

Women and Development (WAD) approach alternative toward understanding the nature of the development process and women's share in it.

Women and Development (WAD)

The WAD approach emerged in the late 1970s as a critique of the modernization theory that entrenched the marginalization of women in the development process, and the failure of WID. WAD reinforced the equity aspect of women's role in development, which is rooted in the broader Women in Development (WID) approach, created a voice for women at the United Nations and led to the First International Women's Year Conference in Mexico City in 1975. As a harbinger to the 1976-85 United Nations Women's Decade, the equity approach seeks to achieve fairness for women by creating awareness about the critical contributions that women's productive and reproductive roles make to economic growth (Moser, 1993).

As an alternative to the WID approach, WAD advocated for increasing women's share in resources, land, employment, and income. It drew on the theoretical postulates of dependency to expose the limitations of the modernization theory and its earlier exclusion of women from mainstream development process (Rathgeber, 1989). As an alternative to the failures of WID, the WAD approach added a new dimension to feminist theorizing on development by focusing on wage and unpaid labor in the global economy (Coetzee, et al., 2001). As a broader approach, WAD considered both men and women as being disadvantaged by the global economic structures, including class issues and the way wealth was distributed (Duffy, 2006). The approach however did not ignore the fundamental need for development players to acknowledge the negative impact that strategies for development have had on women. It thus advocates for a place for women in the development process, through access to employment and to the marketplace so that women can realize their gender need to earn a livelihood (Pillai et al., 2009).

Unlike limiting women as passive beneficiaries of development, the equity approach supports the call for women's position as agents of development and champions their strategic interests. This entails giving women a fair share and access in all spheres of economic endeavor, which Tyler (2002) contended, should also include access to and control of resources, as well as "strengthening women's rights and their ability to claim rights" (p. 23). Beyond this, WAD advocates have focused on the economic, political, and social structures of developing countries (Podems, 2010). Even though WAD served as an alternative to WID, it did not differ in its approach to the equity approach that focused on the fundamental inequality between men and women, both in public and private spheres, as well as across socio-economic groups (Buvinic, 1986).

Existing studies have found that notwithstanding the rhetoric, the equity approach was beset with problems, including dysfunctional schemes and ambiguous initiatives that sought to promote equity in development. There also were situations where the recognition of equity as a policy principle failed to manifest in practice in many developing countries (e.g., Pillai et al., 2009). The WAD approach provided an alternative to the failures of WID by advocating for policies that prioritized issues of women on national and international platforms. That notwithstanding, it failed to recognize the relations between gender and class, as well as clarify the impact of gender power relations on development (Parpart et al., 2000). These shortfalls led to the emergence of the Gender and Development (GAD) school of thought.

Gender and Development (GAD)

The Gender and Development (GAD) developed in the 1980s as an alternative to the WID and WAD. This approach aimed at the empowerment of women by focusing on the unequal power relations between men and women at all levels of the development process (Mwije, 2014).

The early proponents of this approach consisted of socialist feminists who were critical of the economic growth models of development that exploited women to the benefit of capitalists and male workers (Young, 2002). Advocates of GAD emphasized empowerment through the restructuring of gendered institutions and social relations (Parpart, 1995; Kabeer, 1997). They did so by situating gender domination within broader socio-economic relations and sought to restructure local, national, and international institutions to meet the empowerment agenda (Vavrus & Richey, 2003).

The goal of this approach was to mobilize and galvanize support for women to chart a course of self-reliance through resource mobilization for their collective socio-economic empowerment in developing countries. As an integral part of the Gender and Development (GAD) framework, the empowerment approach sought to address the issue of marginalization of women that the WID and WAD approaches failed to tackle. Snyder and Tadessa (1995) observed the roots of the empowerment approach in activism in developing countries, and how it received impetus from the Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN). This was in turn premised on the lived experiences of poor people in the developing world which reinforced their personal autonomy and the desire to make their own choices in the realms of social, economic, and political life (Pillai et al., 2009).

With reference to the failure of the modernization's top-down development model, empowerment has become one of the most elastic of international development's many buzzwords (Cornwall & Eade, 2011), often used to describe grassroots struggles to confront and transform unjust and unequal power relations that center on discourses surrounding development (see, Cornwall, 2016). Empowerment of women, who often constitute the marginalized in the discourses of development, thus describes the capability of women for self-determination in a

manner that will enable them to take control over their own circumstances and to realize their aspirations (Annas, 2003; Kabeer, 1999). The quest for women's empowerment has been premised on "agency," which according to Kabeer (1999), is the ability to define goals, have meaningful choices, and to act to achieve desired outcomes.

Kabeer (2005) situates "agency" in relation to empowerment as not only the exercise of choice, but also doing so "in ways that challenge power relations" (p.14). Ensuring the agency of women as a policy approach to their contribution to development in Africa requires, therefore, that women have equal voices in policy decisions that affect them. This justifies the agency that women's involvement in the post-Ebola development process in Liberia deserves, based on their contributions to the country's development, vis a vis the aftermath impact of Ebola on their livelihoods. The empowerment of women in the development process in the developing world, therefore, requires the need to revisit the agency of women in community-driven development programs that significantly impact their lives.

The activism that underpinned the GAD approach culminated in the UNDP Gender Related Development Index to evaluate access to health care, education, and the income gap between countries. This was followed by the Gender Empowerment Measure to examine women's participation and leadership in economic and political decision-making (UNDP, 1995). The activism that underpinned the GAD approach culminated in the UNDP Gender Related Development Index to evaluate access to health care, education, and the income gap between countries. This was followed by the Gender Empowerment Measure to examine women's participation and leadership in economic and political decision-making. This, Uzodike and Onapajo (2013) observed from the GAD perspective, became a "defining moment in the debate

on the plight of women in Africa” (p.28). These measures did not fully reflect in the empowerment of women as envisaged.

One criticism for the failure of these measures was their inability to account for the differences between men and women in terms of rural and urban location, ethnicity, the macro and micro-level structural constraints they presented (Melkote & Steeves, 2015). Other scholars also attributed the failures of the GAD approach to its inability to explain the intersection of gender with other differences such as age, status, and wealth, as well as its neglect of the concrete relations that exist between men and women (e.g., Cornwall, 1997; Razavi & Miller, 1995). Solutions to these limitations call for the need to examine these from the perspective of intersectionality.

Intersectionality

The concept of intersectionality was said to have originally evolved by Black feminists in the 1970s to reveal how their multiple categories of identity resulted in unique, intersecting styles of oppression in the United States legal system (hooks, 1981; Kramer, 2015). The coinage of the concept is however attributed largely to the American legal and critical race theorist Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in her 1989 article: *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex* to reveal the neglected intellectual spaces of Black and Latina women (Burnett, 2019). Crenshaw pioneered the application of intersectionality as an analytical tool to demonstrate how Black women were in a disadvantaged position when it came to the way courts framed and interpreted the stories of plaintiffs. Crenshaw used the “interlocking nature of oppression” as an expression to indicate a need to change the scope of previous investigations and examine how systems of oppression are interlinked (Collins, 1989, p.21).

What started as a megaphone to register the injustices against a neglected minority in the United States has become an established, primary analytical tool for theorizing identity and oppression (Nash, 2008). Thus, the concept was later offered as a theoretical and political remedy to what is perhaps the most pressing problem facing contemporary feminism—the long and painful legacy of its exclusions (Davis, 2008). Intersectionality has also evolved as the predominant means of conceptualizing the relations between systems of oppression which construct multiple identities and social locations in hierarchies of power and privilege (Carastathis, 2014).

In behavioral science, intersectionality has been employed as a perspective on research rather than as a theory that drives the research question (Shields, 2008). Apart from providing an alternative understanding to public policy, the goal of intersectionality in policy analysis is to identify “the way specific acts and policies address the inequalities experienced by various social groups” (Bishwakarma, Hunt, & Zajicek, 2007, p.9). Across many academic disciplines, intersectionality has been identified, in practice, as having the potential to illuminate invisible and complex social relations, bringing to light hidden injustices in society (Burnett, 2019).

Apart from the original intent of the metaphor, other scholars have proposed what to them constitutes intersectionality. For instance, some see the concept as one that focuses on people and their experiences, hence on social forces and dynamics, that in monocular vision, are overlooked (MacKinnon, 2013). To ensure justice, there is the need to address the combined effects of practices which discriminate based on race and sex (Crenshaw, 1989). Its association with power and privilege validates the relevance of intersectionality as a tool for evaluating and critiquing the gender-power relations that define the discourse and practice of international development, where elite capture of development initiatives has become the norm.

A more appropriate application of intersectionality from policy and social change perspective as the concepts evolves, perhaps, is Nicole Mason's (n.d.) intersectional approach model for policy and social change. This model advocates for "power sharing across differences and communities with an eye toward creating opportunities for those who have been historically disadvantaged to have a seat at the decision-making table" (p.6). The intersectionality perspective, in the nutshell, challenges policymakers and social change leaders, through research and practice, to identify the ways in which markers of difference such as race, class, gender, ability, status, and more depending on context, influence public policy outcomes at the national, state, and local levels. The case for this approach in informing advocacy efforts aimed at increasing equity and equality in society (see, Mason, n.d.).

Locating intersectionality within development has gained currency as it has not only become an approach to understanding the layered nature of people's identity, as far as differences among women in their post-colonial countries of inquiry are concerned. Intersectionality has become a critical tool for development planning and designing socio-economic interventions (Kramer, 2015). From a more critical perspective, intersectionality has gained recognition among academics in international development studies as a tool to critique the efficacy of development programs aimed at improving conditions of marginalized women in the developing world (Siddiqi, 2010). The purpose of intersectionality, in its unique application and critique of development practice, Kramer argues, "will attempt to come to more thorough understanding of who the objects of development programs are" (p.171).

Critiques of Intersectionality

Even though the concept has gained cross-disciplinary acceptance to open blind spots on issues of marginalization—both as a tool and a framework—and its relevance in development

practice and policy, it also has its drawbacks. For instance, Kramer (2015) pointed out how the use of intersectionality to advocate for and gain recognition for minority women within mainstream feminism was necessary, based on their unique experiences of oppression. But “to suggest a simple translation of intersectional categories onto a multiplicity of foreign cultures and unknowable identity categories is, at its worst, a colonialist endeavor” (p.173). This is akin to what Spivak described as speaking for the subaltern, when Western feminists attempt to homogenize the universal experiences of women.

Others argued that although the term intersectionality was initially important to conceiving the limits of the 1980s feminist thought, it has gained discriminate usage as a shorthand to diagnose differences rather than being able to articulate difference as a conceptual frame arising out of particular historical and activist contexts (e.g., Gunkel & Pitcher, 2008). Kramer contends that thinking within intersectional frameworks forces development practitioners to make judgements about who fits in where and about which aspects of a person will benefit to what degree. He emphasizes that maintaining essentialist identity standpoints as the intersectionality framework primarily sought to do will not be beneficial for long-term development growth.

The way forward in solving the problems of marginalization without preconceived understandings of subjects as a perceived drawback of intersectionality, is the need for a more participatory framework. Thus, in the next section, I discuss how my proposed stakeholder-participatory nexus in development model offers an alternative to the critiques of the various theoretical frameworks discussed in this chapter.

The Stakeholder-Participatory Nexus in Development Model

Scholars and practitioners in development bemoan how, despite the increasing interest in participatory development policy, there is paucity and clarity in research focusing on conceptual framework for participatory development (e.g., Mansuri & Rao, 2013). An attempt to contribute to filling this gap necessitated the need for a stakeholder-participatory nexus in development model, a conceptual framework I proposed to contribute to an understanding of participatory development in the context of gender-power relations in sub-Saharan Africa.

The fieldwork data for this dissertation, which focused on the gender-power relations in the discourse and practice of international development in post-Ebola Liberia, pointed to a phenomenon where although the USAID interventions were focused on rural women, the latter participated less in the development process. Even where some women were involved in the male-dominated, expert-driven development process, they tended to be the “entrepreneurial” ones whose elitist aspirations differed quite markedly from the larger population of women in rural Liberia that the USAID development programs targeted. This phenomenon can best be likened to “elite capture” of participatory initiatives, a concept used by development critics in their evaluation of development programs.

Since the 1990s, many countries in the developing world have implemented reforms that decentralize authority to local governments (Crook, 2003; Bardhan, 2002). This has resulted in the creation of participatory planning institutions in local governments to empower citizens by encouraging their direct participation in planning local government projects (Speer, 2012; Fung & Wright, 2001). There has also been a proliferation in the adoption of participatory approaches within the wide range of governmental and non-governmental development and conservation initiatives, including health, agriculture, irrigation, as well as micro-credit and social funds. This

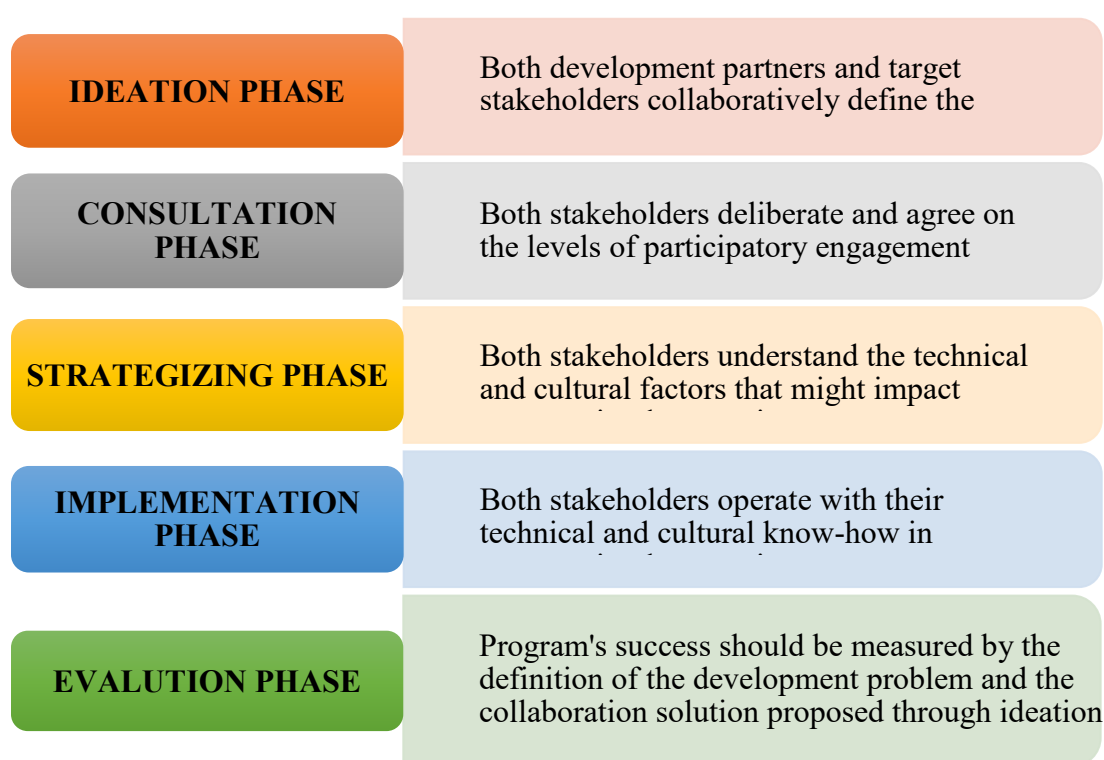
approach often involves the participation of local people in decision making, implementation, and benefit sharing (see, Ribot, 2007).

Although the main objective of participatory approaches is to empower and benefit local people, as well as ensure sustainable management of resources (Agarwal, 2001), participatory approaches have been criticized for promoting elite capture (Labonte, 2011; Mansuri & Rao, 2004; Platteau, 2004). This phenomenon is characterized by stratification of communities along lines of wealth, class, ethnicity, gender, religion, and norms, including other markers of difference, where the elites within them tend to capture participatory initiatives for their own benefits at the expense of non-elites (Lund & Saito-Jensen, 2013). Others have also used the concept of “elite capture” to connote situations where political and economic elites take advantage of their positions in development programs to misappropriate resources (Ribot, 2004; Platteau & Gaspart, 2003).

Despite the negative connotation attached to the concept of “elite capture” of participatory development initiatives, debates abound regarding its pros and cons. For instance, while critics described elite capture as a pernicious problem to participatory initiatives (World Bank, 2008; Platteau, 2004) and is widely associated with failures of many development programs (Warren & Visser, 2016), proponents argued how some form of elite capture of development initiatives can benefit the wider communities they are meant for (e.g., Balooni, Lund, Kumar, & Inoe, 2010). The case for elite capture and domination of decision-making on development initiatives was emphasized with the view that instead of criticizing all forms of elite capture as negative, it also must be evaluated in terms of its nature—benevolent or malevolent, accountability relations, and its distributional outcomes (Dasgupta & Beard, 2007; Fritzen, 2007).

While the case for or against the concept of elite capture of participatory development initiatives may be valid from the perspectives of the various scholars above, there is the need for a middle-ground alternative to the problem of marginalization of non-elites in participatory development initiatives in rural communities. This validates the need for the stakeholder-participatory nexus in development model presented in Figure 2 below:

Fig 2. The Stakeholder-Participatory Nexus in Development Model



Author's Construction, 2022

The changing dynamics of participatory development can be illustrated by the figure above if we assume a descending ladder of stakeholder participation with two end points. It begins with the *ideation phase* where implementers of development programs and local beneficiaries will have to collaboratively define the development problem, and the *evaluation*

phase where the success of the program is assessed by both stakeholders. Along the descending ladder of participation, we can observe several levels of interactions between the stakeholders, three of which are of particular importance: the *consultation phase* in which both stakeholders deliberate and agree on the level of participatory engagement, the *strategizing phase* where both stakeholders understand the technical and cultural factors that might impact the program, and the *implementation phase* where both stakeholders marry their technical and cultural know-hows in running the program.

All five phases along the model in Fig. 2 serve development program sustainability goals that are not necessarily distinct; they all serve the interests of both the program funder and program beneficiaries. As the stakeholders approach the evaluation stage, the dual responsibility—serving the intent of the funding organization and the interests of the project beneficiaries—are evident in how stakeholders take collective responsibility for the success or otherwise of the program. A short review of the five types of stakeholder interactions may help illustrate this model from the standpoint of participatory development that thrives on stakeholder control in decision making and outcomes of development initiatives.

Ideation Phase. The first phase in Fig. 2 marks the development process which requires that the outset of any donor-funded development project should be a collaborative definition of the concept of development. Relative as development is, therefore, demands a common ground between development practitioners and development beneficiaries regarding the former's perceived notion of 'development,' versus the latter's idea of what constitutes development as the solution to their problem. This comes through participatory interactions between development project implementers and project beneficiaries, where the former learns from the

shared experiences and the level of adaptation of the latter, based on which to collaboratively define the development problem and propose solutions.

Many development programs are pre-determined by funding organizations for marginalized populations in developing countries as lasting solutions to their problems. Although the intentions behind these solutions are good, some of these programs tend to be unsustainable because of the missing 'local ownership' component in them. It is also interesting to note that sometimes, development practitioners overlook the socio-cultural dimensions of development problems and assume that technical expertise alone are enough for providing solutions to development problems. This undermines the power of stakeholder participation which further affects sustainability. Leading advocates of participatory development like Freire (1970) have championed PAR as a platform for development beneficiaries to express their needs, and for development experts to gain new insights into the real problems of the people. This environment of learning creates a collaborative space for real solutions that are in sync with the culture and values that influence the development needs and the expectations of the people.

Consultation Phase. Preconceived solutions to development problems will continue to exist so long as the funding, logistics, and expertise are provided by development organizations. What needs to be done, in the face of this inevitability, is the need for preconceived solutions to gain some level of legitimacy from the beneficiary community. Thus, the second phase of the model is where both development stakeholders (i.e., benefactor and beneficiary) redefine the development needs, deliberate on the preconceived versus the actual solutions. This should take into consideration the technical expertise of the development practitioners and the indigenous knowledge of the beneficiaries, based the latter's experiences, and agree on the levels of participatory engagement between the stakeholders.

Again, participation at the consultation phase should focus on consensus building to be able “to find a meeting ground to negotiate terms of collaboration” (Shah, 1997, p.75). This gives the local stakeholders a sense of empowerment when they are invited to contribute to redefining the preconceived development solution and feel satisfied about their inputs at the start of the development process. Apart from facilitating participatory empowerment, consultation creates room for ‘power sharing’ in collaborative decision making, giving both stakeholders collective responsibility to work towards the sustainability of the development project. This phase of the model spells out the levels of participatory engagement between the stakeholders. More importantly, it creates synergy between technical expertise and indigenous knowledge towards a participatory development that Mohan (2014) argues, seeks out diversity rather than treating everybody as uniform objects of development” (p.207).

Strategizing Phase. Despite the financial resources, logistics, and the technical expertise, a development program succeeds when the problems of those it is meant to solve buy into it. Strategizing for sustainable development under the model first requires awareness creation about the local need for the development project. The strategizing phase takes into consideration social intersections such as gender, age, religion, and class that serve as a melting pot of participation whereby everyone embraces the program, knowing what potential benefits will accrue to them. Each of these buys into the goal of the development program by helping to foster a sense of local ownership that gives legitimacy to what all stakeholders agree as a development problem and the collective solution to it.

The second part of the strategizing phase concerns awareness creation about the potential conflict between expert-driven solution versus culture-centered solution and how this could be

resolved. In other words, this phase requires the need to preempt the conflict between ‘modernity’ and ‘tradition’ in terms of the approach to finding sustainable solutions to the development problem. It also requires a culturally nuanced communication strategy for creating awareness about the impact that the marriage between technical expertise and cultural factors can have on the program’s outcomes. The ability to navigate the potential conflict between technical expertise and indigenous knowledge system will encourage trade-offs between the stakeholders to collectively tackle the development problem.

Implementation Phase. The implementation phase of any development program represents the realization of the goals behind the project. While this is crucial, its success is contingent on the extent to which the earlier phases align to create the necessary environment for a development program to be implemented efficiently. The successful implementation of any development program revolves around the level of consensus in the shared definition of what constitutes development problem, the ability of the stakeholders to navigate the potential conflicts in the consultation and strategizing phases, which in turn reflect in the synergy that drives the implementation process. In the end, a development program is successfully implemented when stakeholders operate within their technical and cultural know-hows to produce results whose impact on people should be assessed at the final cycle of the development process.

Evaluation Phase. The final phase is where the success or failure of the program will be measured by what the stakeholders agreed on as the definition of development, and ultimately how the beneficiaries feel about the impact that the intervention has had on their lives. It is legitimate that any participatory development approach that gives voice to the marginalized to express their concerns at the outset of any development intervention should also sustain those

voices to assess the impact of the intervention on their lives. Freire (1970) championed this perspective when he advocated for PRA as a method for allowing local people to have the opportunity to conduct their own appraisal and analysis of any development interventions that affect their lives. Chambers (1997) reinforced this view by challenging outsiders, development agents for that matter, to not impose their reality in the appraisal of any intervention, but rather encourage and enable local people to express their own in the monitoring and evaluation process.

In the nutshell, the stakeholder-participatory nexus in development model contributes to addressing the problems that elite capture of initiatives poses to the sustainability of development interventions. Instead, the model supports the World Bank's community-driven development approach, where communities have power over development projects such that both elites and non-elites can participate equitably to redress the former's capture of the development process when it does occur (see, Dasgupta & Beard, 2007). Giving relevance to the concept of participatory development, using this conceptual model requires a truly participatory development project based on the five phases discussed above to make any development intervention sustainable.

In sum, this model attempts to hem the various theories discussed in this chapter to explain the need for efficient stakeholder participation toward sustainable development in a culturally diverse environment such as Liberia. Next, I review related literature on the overarching role of the media in development, gender representation in the discourse and practice of development, and the case for women's community radio in communication for development and social change in sub-Saharan Africa.

Review of Related Studies

This dissertation is not the first to critically analyze communication campaigns on development projects from a gender perspective in Africa. It rather critiques existing literature on this subject as an empirical foundation of the dissertation, focusing on women's representation in development projects. Particularly, this section examines maternal and child health, the role of the mass media in health communication campaigns, and the political and economic biases that characterize the planning, design, and implementation of international development projects in Africa.

Women's Representation in Development Projects

Studies have shown that globally, women experience disproportionate burden of disease and death due to inequities in access to basic health care, nutrition, and education (Downs, et al., 2014). It is crucial, therefore, that the representation of women is needed when interventions are put in place to tackle the global challenges that directly impact their lives. This supports Snyder's (2003) argument that representation of local people may add benefit of convincing frustrated people, who are targets of development projects, that change is possible, even when the particular development project is viewed as a failure. To buttress this, Steeves (2010) considers development communication important in addressing critical issues of gender in many ways. She emphasizes why "communication projects designed to address social problems, such as health, agriculture, population, nutrition, education, and other development-related topics, may either target women or consider gender as a way of understanding the social context in which these might be best addressed" (p.1).

The reality, however, is that women tend to be marginalized or ignored in many underdeveloped regions. This is traced to the history of early development media projects that had no mention of women's roles or how they might benefit (McPhail, 2009). Other scholars argue the extent to which women are marginalized or ignored almost completely within development programs and initiatives (e.g., Beneria, 2003; Kabeer, 1994). The representation of women as domestic stakeholders instead of as key players in mainstream development projects is commonplace in the Global South. For instance, Elijah and Ogunlade (2006) explain how in many societies in Africa, women are traditionally restricted to family networks, while public and community systems are the male domain.

It is expected that the theoretical transition of underrepresentation of women in mainstream development will reflect in a more practical inclusion of women in development initiatives, particularly in Africa. The reality, again, is that while adding women to development has helped address an affirmative-action problem, it has not necessarily improved women's lives as they remain poorer than men in countries where gender disparities increase (Steeves, 2010; UNDP, 2007). This reflects the case in sub-Saharan Africa, where Braun's (2011) study of large-scale development projects has found that in Lesotho, for instance, "gender order is largely maintained by excluding women from the 'privileges' of development through keeping women second-class citizens" (p.281).

The above observation corroborates prior findings by other gender and development scholars that show that although large-scale international development has the potential to transform unequal gender relations, they rather tend to deepen gender inequality (e.g., Beneria, 2003; Moghadam, 2005). Besides the gendered social inequalities that manifest in international development programs like the Lesotho Highlands Water Project, Braun's (2005) study shows

that women shoulder the costs of the challenges associated with such projects such as “the need to find alternative economic strategies to maintain their households” (p.285). Thus, representation, from the perspective of gender and development proponents, is supposed to ensure that women, who mostly are targets of development programs, are empowered in the decision-making process of development initiatives that impact their livelihoods. Instead, Wilkins (1999) observes that development agencies such as USAID have done little to reflect the rhetoric of women’s empowerment in practice.

Concerns over the continuous underrepresentation of women in decision-making on development projects in Africa has taken a center stage in international discourse. For instance, Weah (2012) finds that although women and men are afforded the same rights under the laws of Liberia, including land and forest policy, policymakers often ignore concerns of women’s participation in the forest sector. In the case of Burkina Faso, Takang’s (2012) study has found that despite the theoretical existence of women’s rights in the forest and land policy, there is low level of representation of women in decision-making in these sectors, which hamper their access to land and forest resources.

Takang’s (2012) extensive study regarding women’s rights and representation in decision-making on development projects related to forest and land in Cameroon and Mali reinforce the acute marginalization of women. For example, she notes the extent to which Cameroon’s forest and land policies are silent on gender questions, although women form 51% of the population and 56% of the agricultural labor force. In Mali, although the central government has acknowledged that women’s access to land and the extent to which women are engaged in the development process are crucial for their empowerment, less is done to give practical expression to that rhetoric.

Feminist scholars argue that despite the assumption about empowerment of women as a ‘smart economics’ has gained popularity among development agencies, the concept has failed to reflect its intent on women’s empowerment (Chant, 2012). This aligns with the problematic nature of the concept based on its instrumentalization of gender and how it reduces the use of women as conduits of policy (Molyneux, 2006). Based on these, scholars observe the way that on a more global stage, development discourse creates knowledge about women as a marginalized population, which is then processed into institutional justifications and intervention strategies deployed by development agencies (e.g., Wilkins, 1999).

Gender inequalities play a critical role in allowing men and women differential access to participation in development activities (Moser, 1993; Arku & Arku, 2011). From this perspective, other development critics assert that gender is not merely an equity concern. Rather, it is cross-cutting and in-built into the need for equity, efficiency, and sustainability as the major pillars of development (Ghosh & Gupta, 2020). This supports the view that promoting women’s visibility in Africa should go beyond just adding gender lens to development to that of actively engaging women in decision-making processes in Africa (Ilesanmi, 2018), including health policy decisions that directly affect them.

Maternal and Child Health in Africa

Maternal health has become a concern for governments and civil-society organizations globally. This concern has been demonstrated by the mainstreaming of maternal health improvement as an integral part of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Notwithstanding the marked improvements of governments, assisted by development partners, sub-Saharan Africa has maternal mortality ratio of 533 per 100,000 live births, and is considered the highest in the world (UNICEF, 2019; who, 2019). Evidence exists, for example, that women

are 14 times more likely to die because of childbirth in a developing country than in a developed one (e.g., UNFPA, 2016).

For example, maternal mortality in Tanzania remains among the world's highest at 454 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births. This is attributed to obvious factors such as lack of attendance at antenatal care services and low rates of delivery at a health facility with skilled providers (Kaufman et al, 2017). Nigeria, the largest economy in Africa that is expected to record significant improvements in primary healthcare facilities, is listed among 15 countries in the world to be fragile in terms of maternal health (WHO, 2019). Despite a 44% decline in maternal mortality worldwide from 1990 to 2015, South Africa, the second largest economy and arguably the most developed country in Africa, still has a high rate of maternal mortality (U.N., 2015).

Global equity principles require that women and men have equal opportunities to realize their potential for health (Doyal, Payne, & Cameron, 2003). This emphasizes the United Nation's 2000 Millennium Declaration on the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women as strategies to combat poverty, hunger, and disease, which will ultimately stimulate sustainable development. To that end, a country's development progress as a defining factor of good governance is measured in terms of the health and well-being, as well as the quality of life of its citizens (Kickbusch & Gleicher, 2014). This makes maternal mortality a crucial issue in the 21st century and forms a key indicator of a country's progress towards development.

The emergence of the Ebola epidemic in West Africa in 2013 has compounded the already debilitating maternal health situation in sub-Saharan Africa, where in the space of 18 months, the outbreak in Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia led to a 75% increase in maternal mortality across the three most-affected countries (Mullan, 2015). As earlier discussed in

Chapter II, empirical studies predicted a long-term effect that will be significantly deeper than the morbidity and mortality caused directly by the Ebola disease in West Africa (see, Evans et al., 2015). It is for this reason that USAID's M&CH initiative to improve maternal health in post-Ebola Liberia, through communication for development and social change, requires the need to critically assess the role that the media play in health communication campaigns.

Media's Role in Health Communication Campaigns

Morris (2003) considers communication as a key component of many international development aid programs. Thus, efforts to improve living conditions in the world's poorer areas through social services and infrastructure development are often accompanied by communication campaigns aimed at the general population. Atkin and Rice (2013) define communication campaigns broadly as purposive attempts to inform or influence behaviors in large audiences within a specified period. This includes using an organized set of communication activities and featuring an array of mediated messages in multiple channels generally to produce noncommercial benefits to individuals and society.

Zhao (2020) situates health communication campaigns in the contexts of health education interventions to promote behavior change. Because information is considered a key product in any campaign, Wilkins (2006) suggests that communication researchers behind health communication campaigns towards HIV/AIDS awareness "provide their best expertise, given that information campaigns are the only immunization possible until a vaccine is invented" (p.387). To maximize communication campaigns to promote utilization of maternal health care services in rural Malawi, for example, Zamawe et al. (2016) note the critical need for mass media in disseminating public health information, improving health knowledge, and changing health behaviors. This corroborates Noar's (2006) view of mass media campaigns as tool for

promoting public health, citing early examples of campaigns to promote inoculation for smallpox in the United States in the early 1700s.

Studies have also found the extent to which health communication campaigns utilizing radio, video, and television have greater effects than those employing print media (e.g., Derzon & Lipsey, 2002). Others observe the importance that the WHO attached to health communication campaigns since the 1970s to promote health for all by the year 2000. This, studies have found, helped set priorities with donor organizations, followed by emphasis on heart disease prevention campaigns in the United States in the 1970s that convinced USAID that health campaigns were the viable strategy for other health topics (Snyder, 2003). During the spread of the Ebola epidemic in West Africa, Thompson (2017) observed how the failure of top-down approach to crisis communication in Liberia gave way to participatory approach. This, she noted, necessitated in the involvement of community and religious leaders, as well as local opinion leaders in the media campaigns to stem the spread of the disease in that country.

The influential role that the radio plays in health campaigns, due to its ubiquity, was evident in Burkina Faso. A study by Sarrassat et al. (2015) shows that 75% of women in that country recognized radio as the most important medium for accessing the behavior change campaign to address lifesaving family behaviors for child survival. This, again, attests to earlier findings regarding the significant impact that health communication campaigns, using traditional media, have on behavior change of target audiences (see, Derzon & Lipsey, 2002).

Concerns about the need to promote global maternal health culminated in emphasis on *SDG 3* to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages. This resulted in studies that show that every day, approximately 830 women die from pregnancy and childbirth-related causes with 99% of the deaths in low-middle income countries, while more than half of the

deaths occur in sub-Saharan Africa (WHO, 2016). Analyses of this phenomenon have revealed the extent to which family planning could help avert approximately 7 million under-5 deaths and prevent 450,000 maternal deaths in 22 priority countries on the list of USAID (Starbird, Norton, & Marcus, 2016).

Studies have shown the extent to which the success of health communication campaigns on family planning in rural communities in sub-Saharan Africa depends on the creative use of community-driven mass media that the audiences identify with. This, again, explains the critical role that community radio plays in health campaigns. For example, a study by Gupta, Katende, and Bessinger (2004) has found that in Uganda, behavior change campaign that utilized community media improved knowledge for six months as the ideal period for exclusive breastfeeding. In Ghana, the appropriate media usage, and the exposure to mass media such as radio is a crucial predictor of the likelihood that a woman would accept antenatal care and choose childbirth assisted by a skilled provider (Asmah et al., 2013).

Extant empirical studies also point to the extent to which evaluations of well-designed mass media campaigns reveal the positive impact of communication on behavior change, including maternal health choice and utilization (e.g., Shefner-Rogers & Sood, 2004; Gross et al., 2011; Asp et al., 2014). These notwithstanding, studies show that apart from the crucial role that radio plays, the medium has still not been used systematically to help fight poverty, malnutrition, and poor health in the developing world (e.g., Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada, 2002). Others have found that most of the mass media public health interventions do not sufficiently engage the local people or fully appreciate locally instigated mass media promotion (e.g., Zamawe et al., 2016).

Snyder (2003) sees this as a challenge to health communication campaigns in developing countries. She argues that “problems arise when campaign planners target general populations, stick to predetermined communication channels, skip essential research steps, or ignore research findings about audience needs, preferences, and communication styles” (p.172). Critics of international development advocate for participatory approach to development to give voice to local people in the development process. This also includes local participation in the design and implementation of health communication campaigns.

Atkin and Salmon (2010) argue that despite growing recognition of the importance of local participation in the design of communication campaigns for health initiatives, the dominant top- down campaign process is still considered “fairly universal across topics and venues, using a systematic framework and fundamental strategic principles developed over the past few decades” (p.420). What this implies is the extent to which development implementers ignore the agency of local stakeholders regarding their needs and preferences for indigenous forms of media and communication through which they best appreciate messages targeted at them.

Deane (2007) notes that despite the long history and wealth of experience that indigenous forms of communication within alternative media have contributed to empowering people, these approaches are poorly recognized by mainstream development organizations. This is corroborated by Melkote and Steeves (2015) who observe that in situations where they are accepted, these “indigenous media are used to disseminate the advice of a dominant class and, thus, maintain the status quo in an unequal society” (p.273). They emphasize that although participation is important in campaigns for strategic social change, large or powerful organizations, rather than recipients of innovations, usually have the opportunity and the power to frame social problems in campaigns.

The above observations align with Salmon's (1989) view about the legitimacy and social power that corporations and other development institutions have, the resources at their disposal, and their "access to the mass media" (p.25). This unequal power relations between donors and recipients of development projects creates a kind of inequality where, according to Melkote and Steeves (2015), marginalized groups such as women, the poor, and ethnic minorities lack the social power to frame issues that affect them, thereby "reducing them to targets of campaigns organized by paternalistic sources" (p.273). Empowering women as active stakeholders in development has culminated in the need to critically assess the role of community radio as an enabler for women to actively participate in the development process.

Community Radio, Women, and Development

The earliest experiences of community radio go back more than half a century, to the Miners' Radios in Bolivia, which played an instrumental role in pressing for better working conditions for tin miners. This community initiative sought to address the scourge of poverty and injustice in society (Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada, 2002). Since this experience, community radio has evolved as global alternative media, characterized as "a radio by the people and radio for the people" (Aderinoye & Ojuade, 2013, p.315). This implies that women also have critical stakes in the use of radio as a tool for their empowerment through access to information.

One uniqueness of community radio is the power of localism, utilizing appropriate indigenous materials and resources that are important in creating and maintaining group's identity (Kur & Meliadu, 2013, as cited in Oduaran & Nelson, 2019). Community radio stations, by their characteristics, are supposed to promote social development agendas, respond to the expressed needs and priorities of the communities they serve, and be accountable to their stakeholders through ongoing interactive and consultative process (Megwa, 2007). As a tool for

development, the primary objectives of community radios, therefore, are to empower the marginalized to enable them to participate in determining their own destiny through community systems (Muswede, 2015). This defines community radios as a site to center the experience of disenfranchised communities that include women, if they must be seen as stakeholders in national development (Fombad & Jiyane, 2019).

Listening to radio serves as a process of learning and working together, and that finding a voice to produce radio is analogous to development processes (e.g., Ledwith, 2011). These findings make the case for community radio as one that treats people not as passive consumers but an alternative medium that is committed to human rights, social justice, and sustainable approaches to development (Fuller, 2007). It is concerning that although women in rural Africa contribute significantly to the development process, they remain uninformed and lack access to appropriate information that is critical to all aspects of their development (Mulauzi & Sitali, 2010). Studies have described the silence of women in community radio as a reflection of a deeper malady of their inaudible presence in society (Mitchell, 2000; Curry et al., 2011; Rimmer, 2020). Community radio has become a model of empowerment of women in many parts of the developing world. This, Ellison and Pol (2015) revealed, triggered the recommendation by the Carter Center in Guatemala for gender equity and the need to increase the use of community radio as a means of effectively reaching women.

Pavarala (2015) observed the extent to which “community radio produced, controlled and owned by the people can empower the marginalized and address voice poverty” (p.14). This aligns with the view that giving women the opportunity to create their own media can “effect personal, local and global change” (e.g., Dunbar-Hester, 2014, p.49). To marginalize the voices of women in community radio, therefore, amounts to denying them a role in the development

process. It is important to note that the critical roles that women in sub-Saharan Africa play in community and national development have evolved beyond what hitherto, was domestic, which Boresup (1970) observed, often went without pay.

To withhold information from women in sub-Saharan Africa in the 21st century, as Fombad & Jiyane (2019, p.47) assert, is to “hold back the potential for rural development.” This validates Mitchell’s (2000) view that harnessing the flair, creativity, and energy of women through the platform of women’s radio creates new voices and perspectives for underrepresented women to become the subject, not the object of media. This also calls for the need to examine the concept of women’s community radio in Africa as a platform for women’s empowerment in development.

The Case of Women’s Community Radio in Africa

Scholars have called for an interdisciplinary work across the boundaries of women’s history and media by arguing that the study of media should form an integral part of the study of women (e.g., Andrews & McNamara, 2014). This call has been heeded by other researchers who advocate for a focus on an understanding of radio as a vital source of historical analysis and by doing so, expand the scope of sources for doing women’s history (e.g., Skoog & Badenoch, 2019). The critical focus on radio in this endeavor is because of its role as a valuable repository for investigating women’s experiences and agency, as well as the longevity of radio and its intimate relationship to women (Hilmes, 1997; Lacey, 2018).

Although radio’s role in the process of modernization and democratization has contributed to the integration of women in the public sphere in the Western world (Lacey, 2018), the challenge faced by women in participating in radio programming in the developing world is

daunting. This is attributed partly to the pervasive patriarchy that silences women from accessing and telling their true stories through radio (Sharma, 2008), a medium which permeates women's lives more than other media (Karf, 1980). In the context of development communication, community communications are important for addressing the problem of creating self-awareness, boosting morale, and conscientizing people towards achieving development goals (Freire, 2005). Access to radio serves as the first means of empowerment. The lack of this medium, unfortunately, has excluded many African women from participating in mainstream development process.

The Fourth Conference on Women in Beijing, China, in 1995, ostensibly paved the way for the emergence of women's community radio in Africa. The conference emphasized the need to enhance women's access to information and communication technologies, and by extension, promote gender sensitivity content in mass media to counter the negative representation and gender stereotypes as part of the Beijing Platform for Action (Sow, 2014). The concept of women's community radio as part of women's alternative media has since been highlighted by researchers. This culminated in the characterization of women's alternative media as those owned and mostly run by women; that seek to articulate the concerns of women and empower them to challenge unequal gender-power relations; and one that facilitates women's access and participation in all levels of media structure, among others (Mitchell, 2006).

There has since been models of women's radio in many African countries. In Mali, Radio Guitan was founded in 1995 to give women and the youth the platform to freely voice their concerns. The medium is also dedicated to the education and empowerment of women through variety of programs, using a GAD approach in recruiting both men and women in its programming (see, Sow, 2014). Mama FM is reputed as the first women's radio station in

Kampala, Uganda, created by Uganda Media Women Association (UMWA) to serve as a voice to ordinary women, youth, not excluding ordinary men. An impact assessment of its role in society has described the medium to have been successful in broadcasting gender-sensitive issues and women's leadership in local councils in the country (Bakirya, 2008).

In Mozambique, an association of women journalists created the Muthiyana FM in a poor and marginalized part of the country's capital, Maputo, to give voice to the large population of the urban poor, particularly women and children. The medium also seeks to increase awareness about the plight of women in Mozambique through livelihood empowerment, promote community awareness about HIV/AIDS and their treatment, and contribute to the overall national development of the country (Jallov, 2012).

The Moutse Community Radio Station was established by members of the Rural Women's Movement (RWM) in 1997 in South Africa to bolster community development, women's rights, and women's leadership at local and national levels, as well as develop the potential of young people (Naughton, 1996). A common feature of all these women's radio stations is their intersectional focus on social change whereby the interests of different populations—women, youth, children, and those of marginalized men in society, are served. It is common knowledge that community radio operated by women in the developing world, particularly Africa, appears to increase women's participation in the development process. The reality, however, is that there exist power relations that reinforce organizations' control of the media in decision making. This phenomenon reflects in the political economic and gender biases in development projects in Africa.

Political Economic and Gender Biases in Development Projects

Studies has found that over the past three decades, stakeholder participation in development policymaking has increased substantially in Africa. This trend has been promoted by both international development organizations and domestic development partners, a situation made possible by the rise of democracy and the emergence of civil-society organizations (e.g., Resnick & Birner, 2010; World Bank, 2003). However, the gendered nature of development discourse illustrates another dimension in which power structures condition the generation of knowledge in development policy that obviously marginalize women (Wilkins, 2006). In Africa, for instance, the World Bank and other international development agencies have supported participatory strategies for agricultural and rural development, and have agreed that all stakeholders, including rural women, would have a say in the development process (GDPRD, 2006).

There were concerns about the need to address the inequities that women face regarding access to productive resources to make their participation in the development process more meaningful (Anunobi, 2002). Thus, the Pery Amendment passed by the US Congress, for example, has required a “women’s impact statement” in every USAID project in African countries to measure sustainable development, particularly of women, on the continent (Safilios-Rothchild, 1990). This aligns with the WID initiative to advocate for women’s role in mainstream development. On the contrary, Wilkins (1999) contends that more often, development agencies, including USAID, have done little to reflect the rhetoric of women’s empowerment in practice.

Although participatory approaches have been identified as prominent techniques for designing agricultural strategies in sub-Saharan Africa (see, Resnick & Birner, 2010), these

techniques have been criticized for not involving enough stakeholders, including women, in the subregion. For example, while Booth (2003) observes that stakeholder participation in agriculture on the continent has not engaged civil society enough, Leal (2007) maintains that development organizations have often used the idea and discourse of ‘participation’ to promote policies that are decidedly neoliberal. Anunobi (2002) attributes the political economic nature of development, and the gender biases that characterize it in Africa, to the economic and political structural changes introduced by colonial powers, and later imposed by international development agencies. She posits that:

Western gender ideology and practices that promote male dominance and female dependency have been superimposed on Africa. Since independence, Africa’s male leaders have continued to add laminations to the patriarchal structures they inherited from their colonial masters, often so with the support of Western international investors and donors whose “development” assistance mostly goes to men (p.43).

Enabulele (1985) connects the historical gender biases that characterize development projects in Africa to the establishment of commercial agriculture, resulting in the transfer of farmlands controlled by women to men, as a contributory factor to the loss of women’s economic power. Freeman (1993) confirms the ‘masculinization’ of commercial agriculture under colonialism and the impact that it had on women in Africa. For instance, although cotton cultivation in Uganda started with women, the British administrator in charge of agriculture declared in 1923 that “cotton growing cannot be left to the women and old people (Freeman, 1993, p.21). What followed that declaration was the introduction of new technologies for cotton growing that was taught exclusively to male farmers in Uganda (Cutrufelli, 1983).

At the center of the political economic and the gender biases in development projects in Africa, a critical review of literature in this study has shown, is the issue of power relations. Peet

and Watts (2004) examine how power affects decision-making in their concern about the manner political economic interests affect development projects. Wilkins (2001) emphasizes this and argues that if power is a central concern in critical approach, it is necessary to ask as to “who has the capacity to select and frame social conditions and groups as problematic, legitimizing particular approaches to their resolution” (p.393). Other feminist scholars situate power in ‘empowerment’ by arguing that while many positive impacts of social protection on women are irrefutable, the extent to which it is ‘empowering’ is however debatable, particularly if it does not address the unequal gender relations undermining women’s disadvantage (e.g., Newton, 2016; Molyneux, 2009).

Boon (1996) emphasizes from political economic perspective the extent to which development assistance reflects the relatively permanent strategic interests of donor countries, based on the idea that development aid is given as a strategic, political move, and not necessarily based on need. Thus, Wilkins (2001) contends that recognizing development as a political activity calls for the need to foreground power dimensions more clearly in analysis of the “role of power in development practice” (p.389).

Research Questions

Findings based on empirical studies, as earlier discussed in this chapter, suggest that since the 1970s, development projects have focused on women and other marginalized groups. However, women tend to be sidelined from the power structures and seen as a target more often than a participant in the production of development communication (Wilkins, 1999). This status quo is reinforced by the influence that powerful organizations have in controlling the social change process to frame their own problems and solutions in development communication campaigns (Melkote & Steeves, 2015). This appears to be a common practice, where

governments and their development partners often replicate communication models from the developed world in local environments in Africa that are unique (Mushengyezi, 2003).

Besides investigating the motivation behind the disproportionate power relations in development communication, it is also important to examine how institutional construction of gender play out in the communication strategies for social change. I situate these questions in the context of the gender-power relations that characterized the role that USAID played in the post-Ebola development process in Liberia between 2015 and 2019. This study is based on the following research questions:

RQ1: (a) To what extent are modernist political economic assumptions evident in Liberia as the United States' priority in response to Ebola?

(b) To what extent did USAID consider women's socio-economic roles in the post-Ebola development process in Liberia between 2015 and 2019?

This question concerned the critical issue of women's role in economic development. Studies show that strategic interests tie the United States to Liberia, which explains why USAID had to prioritize Liberia in the fight against Ebola and continue to help in the post-Ebola development process. McPhail (2009) argued the extent to which the history of early development media projects under the modernization paradigm "had no mention of women's roles or how they might benefit" (p1). Based on this and other empirical findings on the continuous marginalization of women in development, this question employed document analysis to examine the extent to which USAID considered women's socio-economic interests in the post-Ebola development process.

RQ2: What communication strategies did USAID employ in its post-Ebola development campaign in Liberia between 2015 and 2019? To what extent were participatory strategies employed?

Studies show that the ability of people to understand issues that shape their lives, and their capacity to communicate their perspectives on them, depend on the media used. This validates the role that the mass media play in development communication campaigns for social and behavior change. This is reinforced by Melkote and Steeves (2015) who argue that in addition to mass media, indigenous media are used to disseminate the advice of the dominant class to maintain the status quo in an unequal society. Thus, the second question was relevant in assessing the communication strategies used in the development communication process, and how participatory they have been.

RQ3: How was gender represented in the design and implementation of the communication strategies employed by USAID between 2015 and 2019?

Prior research has shown how gender, particularly as a way of distinguishing beneficiaries of development discourse, often becomes institutionalized (Staudt, 1990). Thus, development discourse creates knowledge about women, which is then processed into institutional justifications and intervention strategies (Wilkins, 1999). Achieving the *SDG 5* on gender equity, as far as development policy is concerned, goes beyond merely adding a gender lens to development to giving women voices in the development communication process. This research question is grounded in the concept of participatory development championed by Freire, which advocates for people's participation in policy decisions that directly affect their lives.

RQ4: How did USAID's communication strategies enhance women's participation and empowerment in the development process in post-Ebola Liberia?

Concerns about the marginalization of women in policymaking in Africa has dominated recent international development discourse. These are partly attributed to restrictive laws, customs and traditions, as well as institutional barriers that reduce women to beneficiaries of welfare as targets of development policy decisions. As recent literature shows, the power to frame development problems and design solutions to them still resides with development organizations with resources and control over the mass media to effect social change. The USAID has brought to the fore the concerns of WID and GAD advocates by establishing WID divisions to promote gender sensitivity and empowerment in its development programs. This research question examines the extent to which the communication strategies used by USAID has empowered women in Liberia. The data collected via focus groups will be discussed, first, using Kabeer's concept of empowerment, and second, through the stakeholder-participatory nexus in development model.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH METHODS

This dissertation employed a qualitative case study approach based on its appropriateness in exploring participants' views, observing a process in-depth, and deriving meanings from social phenomena (Green & Thorogood, 2004). It is suitable for studying behaviors in their natural environments, enable the researcher to adopt an expanded focus, which examines the breadth and depth of phenomena, and arrive at findings that illuminate the phenomenon under study though are less generalizable (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Qualitative approach in social research also aims to “capture the lived experiences of the social world and the meanings people give these experiences from their own perspectives” (Corti & Thompson, 2004, p.326).

Apart from the meaning that characterize the interpretive and flexible nature of qualitative approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Liamputtong, 2007), the data collected through it are generally deemed reliable because they document the world from the points of view of the people studied, rather than presenting it from the perspective of the researcher (Hammersley, 1992). This chapter describes in detail the qualitative data collection methods used and their suitability to the study, how the study population was sampled, and the methods by which the data collected were analyzed.

Case Study Research

Case study as a research approach has been defined as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 2003). There is an increasing popularity of the case study method among qualitative researchers (Thomas, 2011), based on its appropriateness in exploring real-life, contemporary bounded systems or a case, and

most often described as a qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The inherent value of the case study as an approach in qualitative research can better be understood from interpretive or social constructionist viewpoint of other authors (e.g., Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995), which justifies its suitability for this dissertation that examines the gender-power relations in international development discourse and practice in post-Ebola Liberia.

While the purpose of case study as a research approach is to help generate an in-depth, multifaceted understanding of a complex issue in its real-life setting, its central tenet is to explore an event or phenomenon in depth and in its natural context (Crowe et al., 2011). The application of case study as a research approach has been categorized into three perspectives—an intrinsic standpoint that is typically undertaken to learn about a unique phenomenon; an instrumental approach that uses a particular case to gain a broader appreciation of an issue or phenomenon; and from a collective angle for studying multiple cases simultaneously or sequentially to generate a still broader appreciation of a particular issue (Stake, 1995).

Case study as a research method has evolved, resulting in its classification into two main approaches by researchers. The first is the interpretivist or social constructionist approach, where the researcher has a personal interaction with a case which they develop in a relationship with their research informants (see, Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995). The second approach to case study is advanced from a post-positivist viewpoint of scholars which involves an exploration or pilot phase, as well as the need for measurement and systematic description of the case (e.g., Yin, 2012; Flyvbjerg, 2011).

The case study approach, in the nutshell, is considered as a comprehensive description of an individual case and its analysis, which involves the characterization of the case and the events, as well as a description of the discovery process of these features (Mesec, 1998). Its

relevance as a research approach is its ability to explain, describe, or explore events or phenomena in the everyday contexts in which they occur (Yin, 2003). Case study as a research approach lends itself well to capturing information and offers explanations regarding “how,” “what” and “why” certain phenomena occur. It helps explain how interventions are being implemented and received on the ground, and more specifically, “offers additional insights into what gaps exist in its delivery or why one implementation strategy might be chosen over another” (see, Crowe, 2011, p.4). Questions that are worth asking, using a case study approach in critical studies such as this dissertation, validates its appropriateness in a research design that points out the agency of women as far as power relations are concerned in the discourse and practice of international development.

Yin (2014) emphasized the distinctive need for case study research that arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena, and “allows investigators to focus on a case and retain a holistic real-world perspective—such as in studying individual life cycles, small group behaviors...” amongst others (p.4). This is reinforced by what other scholars have argued about the fundamental goal of case study research, seeking to conduct an in-depth analysis of an issue, within its context with a view to understanding the issue from the perspectives of participants (Merriam, 2009; Simons, 2009; Stake, 2006). These arguments validate the need for a case study approach to explore the gender-power relations that characterized the discourse of international development in post-Ebola Liberia, and attempt to assess how women, who were the focus of development interventions, were involved in the design and implementation of policy decisions that strongly affected them.

While some scholars have proposed a multi-case study of social phenomena to ensure comparison of two more data points or cases (e.g., Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2002; Kaarbo &

Baseley, 1999), others argued for a case study to capture the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances, and its use as a methodology which enables it to develop within the social sciences (Ebneyamini & Moghadam, 2018; Stake, 1995). Its application as a suitable approach in qualitative research in helping the researcher to explore, understand, and present participants' perspectives by getting close to them in their natural setting (Creswell, 2013), further justifies its appropriateness for this research.

In other words, the use of a case study as a research method has proven relevant to explain, describe, or explore events in everyday contexts in which they occur, and help to understand as well as explain causal links and pathways resulting from a new policy initiative or service development (Yin, 2014; Crowe et al., 2011). Its use as a research method has also proven to be relevant to examining how certain interventions are implemented and received on the ground, as well as offers insights into what gaps exist in the delivery of such interventions, or why one implementation strategy is chosen over another (Pearson et al., 2010; King, Keohane & Verba, 1996). Viewing case study as a research method from this angle further justifies its appropriateness in assessing the suitability of the kind of communication strategies employed by international development organizations like USAID in interventions such as the post-Ebola recovery process in Liberia.

Scholars have observed how “case studies may be approached in different ways depending on the epistemological standpoint of the researcher, that is, whether they take a critical, interpretivist or positivist approach” (Crowe et al., 2011, p.4). Others consider the case study as a qualitative methodology that involves an exploration of a time- and space-bound phenomenon, which requires much more from researchers who act as instruments within the inquiry process (Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2009). The recommendations that scholars offer to

budding researchers who employ case study to focus on the commonality and particularity of the case, which involves careful and in-depth consideration of the nature of the case, the historical background, the physical setting, as well as other institutional and political contextual factors (Stake, 1998), justifies the appropriateness of the qualitative case study approach.

The choice of a qualitative method for this dissertation research has been to explore, understand, and present the participants' perspectives (e.g., Creswell, 2013) on the research problem. It sought to do so by using an interpretive or social constructionist perspective that supports a transactional method of inquiry, where the phenomenon under study is explored by the researcher in relationship with the research informants (see, Stake, 1995). Additionally, the study employed a critical case study lens to interpret the limiting conditions in relation to power and control that are thought to influence behavior in the discourse and practice of development in a patrilineal environment such as post-Ebola Liberia that is gender, culture, and power sensitive. (e.g., Crowe et al., 2011; Doolin, 2004). This dissertation adopted a critical epistemological approach to question and interpret the limiting conditions of power relations, and how they played out in international development discourse and practice in USAID's interventions in post-Ebola Liberia.

Phases in Data Collection Process

The first phase of the data gathering process began by accessing the Web site of USAID to collect and review documents related to the various development interventions the organization rolled out between 2015 and 2019 in post-Ebola Liberia. This comprised close reading and analysis of documents which outlined the communication strategy deployed by USAID in their campaign on the various development interventions targeted at the beneficiaries, including newsletters that provided updates on the success of the program, monitoring and

evaluation reports on the targeted development interventions in the study sites, and annual reports on the overall program for the entire duration. The goal was to give me a broader understanding of the development programs that formed the focus of the study.

In the second phase, I conducted in-depth interviews with stakeholders of the USAID-sponsored development interventions such as the Land Governance Support Activity; Feed the Future Program; and the Global and Maternal Health Program. Other participants were drawn from USAID country office in Liberia; the Liberia Lands Authority; and women groups in Liberia. The participants were made up of communication and programs specialists, monitoring and evaluation specialists, as well as gender specialists, who were purposively selected for their expert views on what communication strategy was adopted and how it was deployed in creating awareness about the program; how gender was represented in the design and implementation of the communication strategy; as well as how the push backs that stem from customary practices that marginalize women's rights to land, even after the passage of the Liberian land bill into law in 2018, was navigated in the intervention process.

The third and final phase of the data-gathering process employed focus group discussions with women who were beneficiaries of the various USAID-sponsored development interventions in selected districts in two counties, namely: Salayea District in the Lofa County located in the north, and Todee District in Montserrado County in the south of Liberia. The goal of the focus groups was to find out how these rural women understood the communication campaigns that were used to create awareness about the importance of the development interventions, and the impact that the projects had on their livelihood.

Research Sites

As earlier indicated, the dissertation research was conducted in the Todee District (one of the four districts considered the epicenters of the virus) in the Montserrado County in the northwestern part of Liberia, and the Salayea District (one of the six districts in which the earliest cases of Ebola were reported in 2014) in the Lofa County in northern Liberia (Figure 3). The two districts were selected based on background research on the impact of the Ebola epidemic on the livelihood of rural women who formed the backbone of the rural agricultural economies that characterize them, and due to their statuses as beneficiary districts of the USAID-sponsored women-centered development interventions.

Montserrado County, in which the Todee District is located, was one of the first three counties to sign the Declaration of Independence in Liberia on 26 July 1847. Although the smallest county by size, it has the largest population of approximately 33% of Liberia's total population according to the 2008 National Census, with inhabitants represented by all ethnic groups and dialects, as well as hosting Monrovia, the capital city of the West African nation. Montserrado is bordered by Bomi County on the west, Bong County on the north, Margibi on the east, with the Atlantic Ocean making up the county's southern border (Montserrado Development County Agenda, 2008).

The Todee District, in which Pleemu, Markoi, and Nyehn, the three communities which formed the sites of the study, is located, is the most rural district in Montserrado County with a population of 33,998 inhabitants. It is home to many 'indigenous' communities detached from motorable roads, with inhabitants having to walk hours to access basic services such as health and education. The district's mountain and river valleys provide fertile grounds in the interior, making vegetables, rice, and cassava cultivation the primary economic activities (Liberia

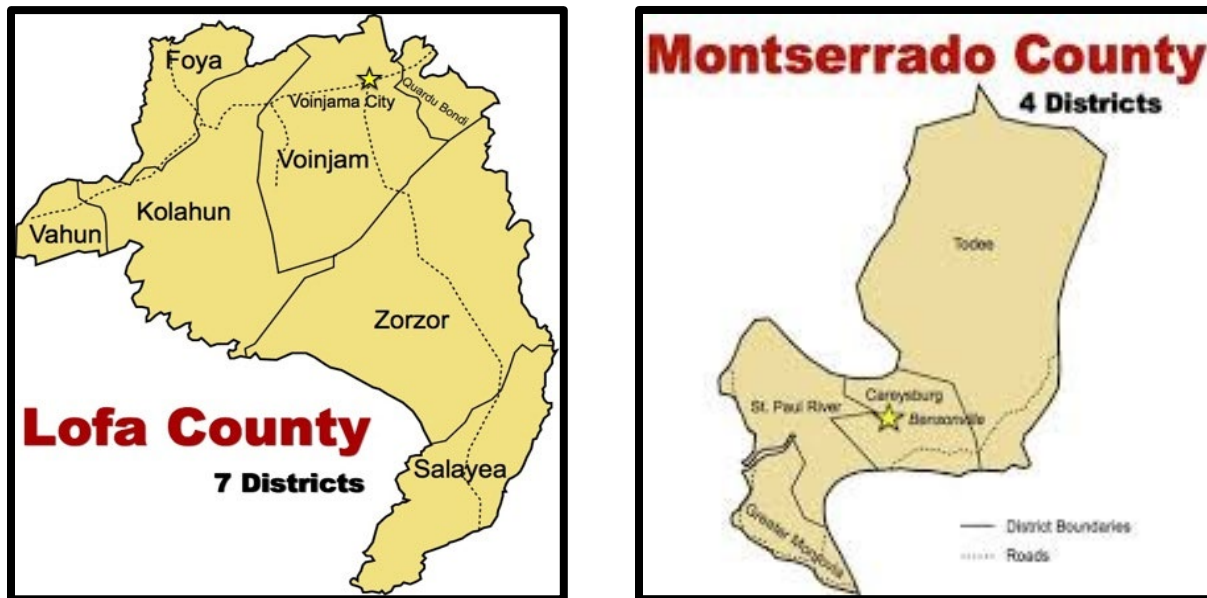
Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services, 2009). The district also has private rubber plantations which offer tapping as an alternative source of livelihood for the predominantly locales, majority being women (Montserrado County Development Agenda, 2008).

Lofa County, in the northernmost part of Liberia, was established from the former Western Province in 1964. It is bordered by Bong County to the south and Gbarpolu County to the west. It is also bordered by Sierra Leone on the northwest and Guinea on the northeast, by which the earliest cases of Ebola spread into Liberia. As of the 2008 Census, Lofa County had a population of 276, 863, making it the third most populous county after Montserrado and Nimba counties. Lofa was considered one of the most affected counties as it became the battle ground during the Liberian civil war between 1999 and early 2003, resulting in an already dilapidated health system prior to the Ebola outbreak. Lofa County is however considered the “breadbasket” of Liberia with its plains attracting a very high rainfall and sunshine throughout the year that are conducive for agriculture. It is also home to the Foya Afforestation Project of about 2, 234 acres, which is designated as the National Plantation area. Apart from the tropical rainforest and low bush, plus the clay and sandy loam soils that maximize food and cash crops production, the county also harbors gold and diamond mining sectors that augment the predominantly agricultural economy of the county.

Among female-headed farms and households in Liberia, Lofa female farmers constitute the most active and diversified farming population and work with the highest number of hired labor (Ahn et al., 2019). Although Lofa County has seven districts, namely: Foya, Kolahun, Quradu Gbondi, Vahun, Voinjama, Zorzor, and Salayea, the study focused on Salayea District, in which Ganglota, Beyan, and Gorlu communities are located within the district were selected. Another justification for the choice was because the two communities were identified as

constituting some of the most affected by the Ebola epidemic in Liberia between 2014 and 2015, thus attracting the USAID-sponsored development interventions which formed the focus of this study.

Fig. 3 Maps of Lofa and Montserrado Counties in Liberia



Source: Worldmaps.com

Data Collection Methods

To investigate the overarching research questions that shaped the focus of this dissertation project, the researcher employed a qualitative approach as indicated earlier, based on its appropriateness in dealing with the subjective experience of human beings for an understanding of reality that can change over time and in different social contexts. To give voice to people who constituted the subjects of research study, hear their own personal narrative, and use the language of the participants in research (Munhall, 2006), the researcher employed a multimodal approach to data collection. This encompassed techniques such as in-depth

interviews and focus groups to elicit and assess the views of stakeholders regarding their observation of the gender-power relations that characterized the discourse and practice of international development in post-Ebola Liberia, the socio-cultural meanings that they ascribed to the phenomenon, and the impact of that on the livelihood empowerment of women who constituted the targets of the USAID development interventions. The study also employed triangulation, using document analysis to supplement the other data collection methods. The detailed systematic processes involved in each of the data collection techniques are explained below.

Triangulation of Methods

To guard against any biases or inaccuracies that may arise from the use of one data collection technique procedure as a stand-alone, I adopted triangulation, which in the context of qualitative research refers to use of multiple methodological resources, research techniques, or practices (Natow, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Triangulation in this dissertation involved a combination of three data collection instruments such as in-depth interviews, focus groups discussions, and document review—described by scholars as “triangulation by method” (Meijer, Verloop, & Beijaard, 2002, p. 146).

The purpose of triangulation from a post-positivist perspective as in this dissertation was to enhance the validity of the study by ensuring that each of the varied techniques “serves as a check on the biases and inaccuracies that any one data source, method, or analysis of protocol may have” (Natow, 2019, p.163). A triangulation of methods also provides demonstration of various conceptions and understandings of reality (Golafshani, 2003), gives insight into other perspectives (Kezar, 2003), and ultimately, help to ensure that the findings of the study make sense, are credible to the people being studied and unto the academic and readership community,

as well as ensure that the researcher provides an authentic portrait of what they set out to look for in the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Document Reviews

One of the goals of this dissertation was to assess what communication campaign was used by USAID in creating awareness about its development interventions, and how the campaign enhanced the participation and livelihood empowerment of women in the post-Ebola recovery process. The USAID's Web site served as a primary source of information on the mission and goals of the organization, where press releases, annual reports, and other relevant documents were accessed and treated as data. The researcher also collected and reviewed communication campaign materials such as brochures and video documentaries on the USAID-funded, gender-sensitive development interventions between 2015 and 2019 as data for analysis (Appendix E).

Atkinson and Coffey (1997) consider documents as “social facts” that are produced, shared, and used in socially organized ways (p.47). Documents are useful as data in qualitative research as their review help to gather background information on the history, philosophy, and operation of a program under evaluation; help in determining if implementation of the program reflects program plans; and provide information to develop other data tools for evaluation (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). Documents also provide a means of tracking change and development, as well as present a clear picture of how an organization or a program has fared over time (Bowen, 2009; Yin, 1994).

Sourcing of documents were tied to the context of the research topic, using inclusionary and exclusionary criteria to facilitate systematic document selection and content relevance. The

researcher later narrowed the list of potential documents down to the final sample to ensure that they were appropriate to the study and reasonable for addressing the research questions (Gross, 2018). The choice of this data collection method was justified as thorough and systematic review of documents provided information on the political economy of USAID's development assistance in Liberia. A review of documents was also helpful in the data collection process as the background information it provided helped enrich the interview guide (Appendix C).

Document Analysis

To ascertain the communication strategy employed by USAID in its campaign and how women were involved at the various stages of the post-Ebola recovery process, I engaged in close reading of the synthesized documents, using both inclusionary and exclusionary criteria (see, Gross, 2018). The procedure continued with finding, selecting, and making sense of the raw data after which the analysis progressed through thematic analysis by identifying the patterns recognized within the documents, where the most appropriate codes to use in the analysis were deductively derived. Following Fereday and Muir-Cochrane's (2006) lead, the codes were categorized under overarching themes that captured the phenomenon under study.

The data collected through analysis of the documents were buttressed by excerpts and quotations derived from recurring statements which were organized into case examples (see, Labuschagne, 2003). The data were also examined via interpretive analysis to assess the gender-power dynamics that characterized the communication approach used by USAID in its development interventions in line with the missions and goals of the agency. This process of the data analysis was closely done in line with the research question and purpose of the study.

Bowen (2009) observed that apart from documents' usefulness in augmenting interviewing and focus groups, they provide contextual richness in research and are useful in pre- and post-interview situations as documents supply "leads for asking additional, probing questions" (p.36). Document analysis has also proven to be a useful research method in qualitative case study due to its appropriateness in producing rich descriptions of a single phenomenon, event, organization under study, or a development program such as USAID's gender-sensitive interventions in post-Ebola Liberia which formed the focus of this dissertation project (see, Bowen, 2009; Stake, 1995). To arrive at data saturation for this study, the researcher also employed critical discourse analysis, which will be discussed later, to enrich the analysis of the data collected from both interviews and focus group discussions.

In-depth Interviews

The researcher started the data collection process by scheduling appointments to conduct in-person in-depth interviews with stakeholders of the USAID-sponsored gender empowerment interventions, such as the Land Governance Support Activity; the Feed the Future Initiative; as well as the Maternal and Child Health Program. These development stakeholders comprised foreign and local personnel who were drawn from the Country Office of USAID in Liberia; experts from the Liberia Lands Authority who were partners in the land and agricultural components of the program; and leadership of women groups who have been involved in agriculture and women's empowerment in Liberia. These interviews answered RQs 2 and 3.

The in-depth interviews provided an opportunity for the researcher to understand the roles played by the various stakeholders associated with USAID-sponsored gender sensitive development interventions in post-Ebola Liberia. For instance, the semi-structured interactions with officials of the Country Office of USAID in Liberia provided insights into the strategic

roles played by USAID in Liberia during the crisis and what it has been between 2015 and 2019. The in-depth interview approach with key stakeholders behind the various development interventions also offered the researcher an opportunity to ascertain the communication campaign strategies that were deployed to create awareness about its development interventions during the period, and how they navigated the pushbacks that stemmed from customary practices that marginalize women's rights to land, even after the passage of the land bill into law in 2018. It also received deep insights from the perspectives of women leaders regarding gender representation in the design and implementation of the USAID development communication strategies, and the impact that they had on women's active participation and empowerment in the post-Ebola recovery process.

Qualitative in-depth interviewing in social science research is defined as special conversations (Liamputtong, 2011) and a means of collecting empirical data about the social worlds of individuals by inviting them to talk about their lives in great depth (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). It is also a process through which knowledge is constructed in the interaction process between the interviewer and the interviewee (Kvale, 2007), and allows the researcher to step into the minds of the interviewees to experience and see the world as they do themselves (McCracken, 1988). Additionally, interviewing as a data collection technique is central to qualitative research as it provides the researcher with rich and detailed qualitative data for understanding participants' lived experiences, how they describe those experiences, and the meaning they make of those experiences (Seidman, 2013; Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

The justification for using in-depth interviews as a complementary data collection technique for this dissertation is based on its ability to help the researcher explore experiences, ideas, perspectives, views, and situations with a small group of respondents (Esch & Esch,

2013). This also creates the opportunity for the researcher to interact, listen to, and gain an understanding of people's stories and experiences (Bolderston, 2012). While at the heart of interviewing lays the researcher's interest in other individuals' stories because of their worth (Seidman, 2013), the in-depth nature of the process also builds intimacy between the interviewer and the interviewee for mutual disclosure (Johnson, 2002). This interviewer-interviewee "intimacy" aligns with the interpretive constructivist approach of this study, through which the data collected from the experiences shared by participants were analyzed.

Sampling Strategy

A total of 22 in-person, in-depth interviews were conducted on participants representing the Land Governance Support Activity; Feed the Future Program; the Maternal and Child Health Program; Country Office of USAID in Liberia; as well as the Liberia Lands Authority and the leadership of women's groups in Liberia. This comprised 5 Communications and Outreach Specialists, 5 Monitoring and Evaluation Specialists, 5 Program Managers, 4 Gender Specialists, and 3 representatives of women's groups in Liberia. All participants had to have been involved as active stakeholders in the USAID-sponsored gender-sensitive development interventions.

Participants in the interviews were purposively sampled based on criteria ensuring that each of them fell within professional qualification for USAID indicated above. They had to have been associated with the USAID-sponsored program under study between 2015 and 2019 and must have experienced the impact that the Ebola epidemic had on the Liberian population, particularly women who constituted the most affected by the epidemic and for whom the post-Ebola gender-sensitive development interventions were rolled out.

Apart from interviews with professionals and development experts associated with the USAID-sponsored program as indicated earlier, the researcher also conducted another set of interviews with leaders of women's groups such as the Women and Children Development Association in Liberia (WOCDAL), the Cultivating Network Frontiers in Agriculture (CNFA), and Christian Women in Agriculture in Liberia (CWIA) to: understand their experiences with the challenges facing women in post-Ebola Liberia; get their assessment of the various development programs being rolled out by USAID to empowerment rural women in Liberia; and also find out their perspectives on the involvement of women in the design and implementation of the communication campaign, as well as the impact of that on women's livelihood empowerment in the post-Ebola recovery process.

As Englander (2012) proposed, the researcher sampled the participants based on their social experiences about the phenomenon under study, as well as their professional involvements and knowledge about the gender-power relations in the discourse and practice of development, and how they have employed or observed the way that the communication strategies used in the development process in post-Ebola Liberia had affected the women beneficiaries. The participants were also selected based on their willingness to talk about the issues that formed the focus of the interview (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Another justification for the purposive sampling technique was to ensure that selected participants were knowledgeable about the cultural arena or setting of the study, and that their professional experiences and perspectives were appropriate in eliciting the needed data for the study (e.g., Lindloff & Taylor, 2011).

In-depth Interview Guide

The researcher-designed interview protocols were predominantly open-ended, conversational in nature, and inquiry-driven, as well as ensured that they aligned with the study's

overarching research questions and purpose (see, Appendix C). Following Kosenko's (2010) lead, the researcher piloted the interview protocols to ensure the clarity and answerability of the questions in collecting the needed data. This provided an opportunity for the researcher to revise and fine-tune some of the questions to make them intelligible and answerable to the participants before embarking on the field trip to Liberia in December 2019.

Before the interview, each participant was briefed on the purpose of the interview. Their willingness to participate in the study was followed by signing of the consent form by those who could read and write. In the case of those who could not read and write, verbal consent was sought from them to confirm their voluntary participation. The face-to-face interviews, all of which were tape-recorded based on consent, lasted generally between 45 and 70 minutes. The interviews were conducted with each participant at their offices and at other venues decided upon by participants and agreed upon by the researcher in order to create an appropriate atmosphere for the participants to feel comfortable to talk about the issues under study (see, Alshengeeti, 2014). The conversational nature of the interviews enabled me to ask follow-up questions to confirm, as well as seek clarifications and details from participants during the interactions.

Interviews Data Analysis

I transcribed the interviews with professionals and development experts associated with the USAID-sponsored program, as well as with the leaders of women's groups in Liberia, by myself. Following Braun and Clark's (2006), I did thematic analysis of the qualitative data set, using a code sheet I developed to identify, organize, describe, and report themes found within the data. Since the processes of qualitative data collection, data analysis, and reporting are not always distinct steps but often interrelated and occur simultaneously throughout the research process (Creswell, 2007), I embarked on concurrent collection and analysis of data. This started

with an earlier “in-process writing” proposed by Wimmer and Dominick (2014) and critical review of responses from the beginning of the fieldwork, using recurring issues and themes that ran through the various interviews as a data set for analysis. The actual analysis was done using Braun and Clark’s (2006) process of close reading of the texts to familiarize with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining, and naming themes, as well as producing the final report.

The purpose of thematic analysis was to examine the perspectives of different research participants, highlighting similarities and differences, and generating anticipated insights (King, 2004). Although Braun and Clark’s (2006) approach to thematic analysis in the “search for, and examination of, patterning across language does not require adherence to any particular theory of language, or explanatory meaning framework for human beings, experiences or practices” (p.120), I approached the analysis of data from the perspective of interpretivist constructionism to understand the lived experiences from the participants’ points of view, and elucidate the process of meaning construction and clarify what and how meanings are embodied in the language and actions of social actors (Schwandt, 1998).

The above approach to analyzing the interview data, focusing on both the latent and manifest responses, was to ascertain the socio-cultural meanings that respondents attached to the limiting conditions of gender-power relations that are thought to influence decision making in the discourse and practice of international development. This approach is congruent with the theory of gender and power, which explains the gender imbalances that characterize power and the affective component of the relationship between men and women in relation to power in society (Connell, 1987). The above procedure was also applied in analyzing the data from the focus group discussion to address the Research Questions 3 and 5 which sought to examine

gender representation in the design and implementation of development communication campaigns, and how they impacted women's active participation and empowerment in the post-Ebola development process.

Focus Group Discussions

The third data collection method involved focus group discussions—a qualitative method which aims to describe and understand perceptions, interpretations, and beliefs of a select population to gain an insight into an issue from the perspectives of the group participants (Khan & Manderson, 1992). This method involves the gathering of participants to discuss specific issues with the help of a moderator in a setting where participants feel comfortable enough to engage in dynamic discussion for one or two hours (Krueger & Casey, 2009; Babour, 2007). As observed by Liamputtong (2009), focus groups are used to “examine research questions from the perspectives of participants and to explore new research areas” (p.68).

The researcher conducted six focus groups with women in rural communities in the Salayea District in Lofa County and in the Todee District located in Montserrado County. My goal was to examine the impact of the Ebola epidemic on their livelihood as peasant farmers, as well as explore the diverse perspectives of the participants regarding the issue of empowerment and the level of participation of women in the discourse and practice of the development interventions rolled out by the USAID post-Ebola Liberia. The justification for the use of focus group discussions as a supplementary method is based on its specific area of interest that allows participants to discuss the topic in greater detail (Liamputtong, 2009) and to also ensure “the diversity of opinion on the topic, the collaborative process of meaning construction, and the cultural performance of communication” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p.183).

Sampling Strategy

Focus groups make explicit the use of group interactions to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in group (Morgan, 2002). Guided by this, the researcher purposely sampled the sites and participants for the focus groups based on geographical, cultural, and demographic considerations. As indicated earlier in this chapter, Lofa County in the nethermost part was selected because it was the entry point of the first case of the Ebola virus into Liberia from neighboring Guinea. The choice of the Salayea District, within which the three communities: Ganglota, Beyan, and Gorlu, were selected for each of the three focus groups, was due to the impact of the epidemic on the livelihood of women who constitute the backbone of Liberia's agricultural sector. The other three communities: Pleemu, Markoi, and Nyehn in the Todee District of the Montserrado County were selected for the three respective focus groups because of their rural agricultural economy. The second reason for selecting these communities was because they were among the communities most affected by the Ebola epidemic due to their proximity to Monrovia, the capital of Liberia, which was considered as the epicenter of the epidemic in that country.

Four research assistants, who acted as interviewers/supervisors (2 males and 2 females) with experience in field research and some background in gender and development issues, were enlisted by the researcher from the Department of Home Science and Community Development, University of Liberia. The research team was taken through a 3-day comprehensive training program by the researcher to enable the members to familiarize themselves with the various items on the focus groups discussion guide, to understand the ethical issues guiding the study, learn how to seek permission from participants, and to learn their individual and collective responsibilities in the data collection process. The research team also visited all the study sites

and met with relevant local authorities to introduce itself as well as seek their permission and support, where necessary, prior to the actual field work.

The actual focus group discussions, which occurred between December 20, 2019, and January 15, 2020, were undertaken with the help of local volunteers in the selected communities, using snowball sampling techniques to identify, brief, and recruit participants who agreed to take part in the exercise. Participation in the focus groups was based on criteria such as getting respondents who were women within the age range of 18 and 70 and who had benefited from the various USAID gender-sensitive development programs.

Each of the focus groups was composed of eight participants from similar social and cultural backgrounds with the goal of creating an atmosphere where participants were comfortable talking to each other, allowing for free-flowing conversations among the participants (Barbour, 2007). Four of the focus groups were held in community centers and two in classrooms arranged for the meetings. The focus groups were moderated by two University of Liberia graduate students who I hired and trained, while I observed and took notes about the context and group dynamics of participants. Each of the focus groups, which lasted between 50 and 90 minutes, was conducted in pidgin English, the lingua franca in Liberia, after I had explained the purpose of the meetings and respondents had provided verbal consents to participate in the discussion and have the conversation audio recorded for academic research purposes.

Participants were each given 3,500 Liberian dollars, equivalent to US\$25 after every session as compensation for taking time off their daily schedules to be part of the focus group discussion. This was in line with what some scholars propose should be made to poor people who need the money for their survival (e.g., Liamputtong, 2011; Krueger & Casey, 2000).

Unlike the face-to-face interviews, the multiple voices in the focus group audio recordings were transcribed directly into English by “tagging” each voice (e.g., Voice A, Voice B etc.) to facilitate the coding process and tell the participants’ stories using exemplars from their own narratives (see, Sutton & Austin, n.d.).

Focus Group Discussion Guide

Just like the qualitative interviewing, the focus groups discussion was guided by eight core questions that were backed by probing and follow-up questions (Appendix D). The questions on the focus groups discussion guide were shaped by information gathered through review of documents on the Web site of USAID on the various gender-sensitive development interventions in post-Ebola Liberia; review of literature on the role of USAID and its approach to development in Liberia; as well as secondary data on what the role of gender in development before, during, and after Ebola in Liberia. The first focus group discussion and its related follow-up questions centered on participants’ experiences of the Ebola epidemic in society. This dovetailed into the second substantive question on the impact on the outbreak on women’s livelihoods and how they negotiated their socio-economic roles as breadwinners of their families.

The third question investigated participants’ perspectives on the role of USAID in the post-Ebola development process and the benefits they derived from the various gender-sensitive development interventions which were targeted at the livelihood empowerment of rural women in post-Ebola Liberia. The fourth and fifth questions steered the discussion toward the concept of development to elicit responses on how respondents understood participatory development in line with USAID interventions, whether they played any roles, or had observed the involvement of women involved in the design and implementation of the development intervention aimed at their livelihood empowerment. The sixth question examined the extent to which participants

understood the communication campaigns employed by USAID in creating awareness about the various development interventions.

The last two questions assessed the gender-power relations that characterized the discourse and practice of development in post-Ebola Liberia. These questions probed how participants understood empowerment, the challenges they faced that hindered their socio-economic empowerment regarding access to and ownership of land, and the extent to which the USAID's gender-sensitive interventions have impacted their livelihood empowerment. Participants provided feedback on what they observed characterized the top-down, patriarchal approach to the operation of the various interventions that positioned rural women mainly as beneficiaries. I contracted a professional in Liberia to translate and transcribe the data collected via focus group discussions with the rural women from Liberian pidgin into standard English for analysis.

Critical Discourse Analysis

This dissertation sought to critically examine the gender-power relations that characterized the communication approach adopted by USAID in its international development goal of livelihood empowerment of women in post-Ebola Liberia. It did so by drawing on critical discourse analysis to augment interviewing, focus group discussion, and document analysis to provide a nuanced analysis and interpretation of data. Mautner (2009) defines discourse analysis as the systematic analysis of patterns in text, in reference to the context and manner that the texts are derived and used. Willig (2014) also discusses discourse analysis as the careful examination of talk and texts to trace the ways in which discourses bring into being the objects and subjects of which they speak.

Doing discourse analysis therefore requires understanding the processes of discursive construction and their social consequences (see, Willig, 2014). And to do so critically in the context of international development, for example, is to be particularly concerned with the manner and ways that institutional and corporate discourses characterize power relations in society, in ways that obscure power inequalities in social policy decision making (Wodak, 1996; Fairclough, 1995). Another way to assess the role of discourse involves analysis of lived experiences, social practices, and cultural representations, which are considered in their network-like or intertextual links, from the viewpoint of power, difference, and human agency (Winter, 2014).

Discourse analysis in cultural representation as discussed by Winter (2014) above, finds expression in the institution of cultural norms and beliefs in many a patriarchal Liberian society, where women (considered the property of men) cannot own land, thus the marginalization of women and the muting of their voices in land governance in Liberia (Personal Communication, 2019). This justified the use of critical discourse analysis (CDA) as an appropriate method of data analysis for this dissertation, due to its focus on power, discourse, and the subject (Buchanan, 2008). With this, I was interested in critically analyzing the consequences that the communication campaign behind USAID's gender-sensitive development interventions, predominantly executed by men, had had on women's livelihood empowerment in patriarchal-post-Ebola Liberia.

CDA incorporate a variety of approaches towards the social analysis of discourse Wodak & Meyer, 2001; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). This justified the use of CDA to complement the other methods of data analysis for this dissertation to advocate for social change, which according to Fairclough (2012), "includes change in social practices and in the network of social

practices, how social practices are articulated together in the constitution of social fields, institutions and organizations, and in the relations between fields, institutions and organizations” (p.457). Applying CDA for social change thus calls for its use in critical policy analysis, which “allows a detailed investigation of the relationship of language to other social processes, and of how language works within power relations...” using systematic analysis to demonstrate how policy texts work (Taylor, 2004, p.436).

This notion of policy text corresponds with the assumption that discourses constructed and practiced through organizational communication are deliberate (McPhee & Zaug, 2009). This validates the need for critical discourse analysis of USAID’s communication campaign texts, vis-à-vis the gender dynamics that characterized their implementation. Lazar (2007) approached CDA from a feminist perspective to not only explain how hegemonic power relations are discursively produced, sustained, negotiated, and challenged in different contexts and communities. It also focuses not only on how academic deconstruction of texts and talk occur, but also how issues that warrant social change have material and phenomenological consequences for groups of women and men in specific communities.

In conclusion, the application of CDA as a research method with a gender focus is to adopt a more critical feminist view of gender relations, motivated by the need to change substantively the existing conditions of these relations (see, Lazar, 2007). Its application as a method of data analysis, using the epistemological orientation of social constructionism, was to deepen understanding of the social dimension of the meanings that research participants, and the documents reviewed in this dissertation, attached to the communicative practices involving USAID’s development interventions in post-Ebola Liberia.

As indicated earlier in this chapter, I adopted interpretative constructionism to analyze the data collected through triangulation. This was done after I had employed an inductive orientation by analyzing the emerging themes and drawing findings out of the data. The goal of the dissertation, from a critical perspective, was to expose the social inequities that characterized the gender-power relations in the discourse and practice of international development in post-Ebola Liberia. To achieve this, I considered Hesse-Biber's (2012, p.144) view of triangulation in critical-feminist research as an appropriate approach for discovering "new" or "subjugated knowledge" that this dissertation hopes to contribute to literature and scholarship on critical research on gender and international development.

Human Subjects Research and Institutional Review Board

All interactions with human subjects strictly adhered to the regulations and the ethical considerations set forth by the Research Compliance Services (RCS) at the University of Oregon. The RCS reviewed all data collection methods that involved contacts with human subjects (i.e., the interviews, focus group discussions). The IRB approval was granted by the University of Oregon Institutional Review Board with protocol number RCS #11132019.016. The protocol was granted an exempt status effective November 27, 2019, through to November 26, 2020. Elinam Amevor, the primary and sole investigator for the study, passed the necessary Collaborative IRB Training Initiative (CITI) on February 10, 2018, with an expiry date of February 9, 2020.

Based on the approved IRB protocol, research participants were purposively selected, and the Informed Consent form was provided or read to them. The Informed Consent form (Appendix B) summarized the research, its risks, and benefits, as well as participants' right to decline participation and/ or withdraw completely from the study at any point in time. The

subjects were then informed that participating in the interview or focus group discussions administration constituted their informed consent.

Reflexivity and Positionality of Researcher

Reflexivity in qualitative research involves a continuous process of reflection by researchers on their values while recognizing, examining, and understanding how their social background, location, and assumptions affect their research practice (Parahoo, 2006, Hesse-Biber, 2007). Being reflexive also constitutes a self-awareness by the researcher, knowing that they form an integral part of the social world that they study (Frank, 1997). I practiced as a development journalist for four years and another two years as a volunteer social worker with Liberians at the Buduburam Refugee Camp in Ghana. An additional research project on “Communication as Currency in the Moral Economy of Healthcare for Liberian Refugees in Ghana” in 2019 exposed me to cultural practices that influence decision-making in participatory development.

With a hindsight on how cultural practices and norms can marginalize women in social policy decisions, I deemed it necessary to examine the gender-power relations that characterized the discourse and practice of development in post-Ebola Liberia. This aimed to ascertain how rural Liberian women, who were the targets of the development interventions sponsored by USAID, were involved in the design and implementation of the very development policies that were aimed at their livelihood empowerment. This study was guided by calls for reflexivity in feminist research, and the need to identify with the women participants by being cognizant of how their lived experiences, values, beliefs, and perceptions do shape the research process (Palaganas et al., 2017; Dowling, 2006). Despite my male gender, I am passionately interested in gender inequity. This is due to my background growing up with 14 sisters in rural Ghana.

Chapter Summary

To address the overarching question regarding the gender-power relations that explained the context of the study, the chapter discussed how data was collected and analyzed. The chapter employed triangulation of methods, which involved a combination of document analysis, interviews data analysis, focus group discussions, and critical discourse analysis to ensure validity and provide an “authentic portrait” of what the researcher set out to look for in the study. My reflexivity and positionality, as well as my knowledge of the socio-cultural factors that could shape the research process. In the next chapter, I present data from the first phase of the data collection process in response to RQ1 which examined the role of USAID in Liberia during the crisis and what it had been between 2015 and 2019. It also examines the extent to which USAID considered women’s socio-economic roles in the post-Ebola development process in the intervening years. The documents analyzed answered RQ 1.

CHAPTER V

HEGEMONIZING UNITED STATES' LEADERSHIP IN INTERNATIONAL

DEVELOPMENT

The idea of international development as an industry continues to evolve despite theoretical postulations about an obvious end to the concept of “development age” in the 1960s. And the fact that “development either leaves behind, or in some ways even creates, large areas of poverty, stagnation, marginality, and actual exclusion from social and economic progress is too obvious and too urgent to be overlooked” (UN, 1969 as cited in Esteva, 2020, p.9). Notwithstanding the persistent criticisms of the concept, the idea of development continues to exist as an aspiration for countries in the global South after their independence from colonial subordination and as many continue to emerge from their journey through post-war history (Sachs, 2010). The invention of “underdevelopment” as a euphemism for poverty was described as a ploy by the United States to make entirely explicit their new position in the world, as well as consolidate their political campaign and perpetuate their global hegemony (Esteva, 2010).

To achieve that objective, the United States found an opportunity to globalize the mission that their founding fathers had bequeathed: to be the “beacon on the hill,” which gave impetus to the American idea of development “with a call to every nation to follow their footsteps” (Sachs, 2020, p.xv). Thus, the United States chose the opportunity to launch its global agenda through Harry Truman’s 20 January 1949 doctrine that sparked the campaign to embark on a mission of making the benefits of America’s scientific advances and industrial progress available to improve the conditions of the so-called underdeveloped world.

Truman postulated the United States' obligation as leader of the Free World to offer financial and economic aid beyond its borders to ensure global stability and orderly political development. This hegemonic overture culminated in the threefold nature of the motives of transnational help, which, according to Gronemeyer (2010), set the stage for the First Development Decade in 1960, which would later "guide international development aid to the Third World" (p.66). Previous studies on the history of international development revealed how the 1949 Truman doctrine, which sparked the United States' moral obligation to lead the 'Free World' in the postcolonial era, resulted in the establishment of USAID in 1963 (Goldwin, 1963). In that regard, the United States' burden of responsibility was echoed by John F. Kennedy's 1963 address to Congress which charged American people to deem it their obligation to promote the cause of the sick, the poor, and the hungry, wherever they may live.

While Africa has become a lasting beneficiary of USAID development assistance, borne out of "the deep American urge to extend a generous hand to those working toward a better life for themselves and their children " (see, J. F. Kennedy's Speech to Congress, 1963), Liberia occupies a more critical place in the United States' development assistance. Three factors account for the priority of Liberia in US foreign policy and development assistance. The first was the historical formation of the Liberian state by the United States as home for freed slaves, making Liberia a bona fide responsibility of the United States (see, Ciment, 2003). The second and third factors respectively, was the strategic benefit of Liberia to the United States in World War II, and its alliance with the US in the Cold War era, resulting in President Samuel Doe of Liberia's expulsion of the Soviet and Libyans influence in the country at the request of the United States (Calcagno, 2016).

As extant research has shown, help (in the form of development assistance) “is offered for reasons of the helper’s own national security, for the purposes of maintaining its own prosperity and for the sake of moral obligation, to convey to others the good that has come to a nation in the course of history” (Gronemeyer, 2010, p.66). It is for this reason that the U.S. was the most prominent actor in the Ebola crisis responses in Liberia and did so through a collaborative effort across agencies in the U.S. foreign policy apparatus (see, Calcagno, 2016). In the situation when Liberia was overwhelmed by Ebola in 2014, where Liberians, particularly those living in the capital of Monrovia suffered a rate of near-death with a survival rate of only six percent at its worst point (WHO, 2016), the USAID has played an instrumental role during and after the epidemic in the country.

In this chapter, I present the first phase of data collected through review of selected documents to examine Research Question 1 which focuses on the role of USAID in Liberia during the Ebola crisis, and what it has been between 2015 and 2019. This phase of data analysis serves as the basis for the framing Research Question 1 through which the analysis of the documents was answered. This is augmented with in-depth interviews and focus group discussions that will be discussed in subsequent chapters. In line with the study’s focus, the documents reviewed were purposely selected to provide understanding of the gender-power dynamics that characterized the discourse and practice of international development in post-Ebola Liberia. In other words, this chapter provides the results of the emphasis that USAID has placed on the livelihood empowerment of women in Liberia. This is contingent on empirical research that points to the disproportionate impact of the Ebola epidemic on women in Liberia as earlier discussed in Chapter III of this study. The selected materials from which the results of this document review were as follows:

- Council on US Foreign Relations discussions on crises in Liberia (2003).
- USAID's Local Systems Framework for Supporting Sustained Development (2012).
- President of Liberia, Ellen Sirleaf Johnson's SOS letter to the US president (2014).
- USAID Country Development Cooperation Strategy for Liberia (2013-2017).
- USAID Gender Equity and Female Empowerment Policy (2012).
- USAID Liberia Feed the Future Population-based Survey Final Report
- Remarks of USAID Mission Director to Liberia during the Ebola Crisis
- Office of the Inspector General's Audited Report on USAID's Ebola Disaster Assistance to Liberia (2015).
- Beyond the Outbreak: USAID Strategies for Post-Ebola Recovery in West Africa
- The Aftermath of Ebola: Strengthening Health Systems in Liberia (USAID & CDC).
- USAID Gender Assessment Report on Liberia (2018).
- USAID-sponsored Liberia Land Governance Support Activity Quarterly Report (January-March 2017).
- Lessons from USAID's Ebola Response Highlight on the Need for Public Health Emergency Policy Framework (2018).
- USAID Collaborative Support for Health (CSH) Program Document (2015).
- Liberia: Background and United States Relations
- U.S. Embassy in Liberia's Statement on US-Liberia Relations
- USAID Feed the Future-Funded Agriculture Program in Liberia
- USAID's Ebola Recovery to Self-Reliance Campaign Report on West Africa (2014-2015).

- Press Releases on USAID's commitment to a stronger post-Ebola health system in Liberia.

A critical review of the documents listed above resulted in the creation of themes under which the role of USAID, during the outbreak of the Ebola epidemic in Liberia and the period after, were analyzed. The preliminary findings from the review of the documents are presented next to explain why the United States is morally obligated to Liberia. This will be discussed in the context of the role of USAID in post-Ebola Liberia and the gender dynamics that influenced the various development programs the agency initiated and funded in the country. The chapter concludes by drawing on theories previously reviewed to explain the historical relations between the United States and Liberia. This focuses on understanding of the United States' commitment to the West African country within the period under study, particularly through the lens of the political economy of international development assistance.

Why the United States is Morally Obligated to Liberia

As indicated earlier in the background of this study, the United States' enduring interest in Liberia dates to the 19th century, when the U.S. Congress appropriated the small West African coast as a destination for repatriated freed slaves from North America (Global Security.org, n.d.). Further studies have shown that beyond the moral imperative of giving freedom to the freed slaves from religious perspective and repair the wounds of indignity inflicted on them by slavery, a significant driver in the relationship between the United States and Liberia has been U.S. commercial interests at the expense of the majority Liberians (Cook, 2003). Chief among these commercial interests, apart from the strategic importance of Liberia's Firestone rubber to the American auto industry since the 1920s, has been the decades of benefits of Liberia's mineral wealth and its maritime registry to U.S. corporate interests (Gberie, 2004).

Findings from the critical review of documents show that apart from commercial benefits, the height of U.S. involvement in Liberia was chiefly for military and foreign policy expediency. This justifies the global perception of Liberia as the responsibility of the United States (see, Crocker, 2003). And as morally appropriate, it holds, therefore, that the United States' absence in the Liberian civil wars, despite Liberians' reference to the former as their "motherland," amount to an indictment on the United States' moral leadership and social responsibility to a world it holds itself to in principle as the doyen of freedom.

In reference to the United States' position as leader of the world, Chester Crocker, a pre-eminent U.S. expert on Africa and a professor of strategic studies, noted that "since the deaths of 18 American soldiers in Somalia in 1993, the United States has turned away from African crises...and it explains the catastrophe that occurred in Rwanda in 1994 and the debacle in the Congo in 1996" (Personal Communication, cited in Gwertzman, 2003, p.1). This was in response to the United States' apathy toward the 1989-2003 civil war in Liberia which claimed approximately 250,000 lives, when he noted that "everybody, except us (Americans), understands that Liberia is an American responsibility," and added that most Africans have been looking up to the United States for leadership in crisis in Liberia. Crocker reiterated that in principle:

Liberia considers itself the 51st state of the union and Liberians have in many ways looked to the United States as their primary external partner and friend over many, many years. They are very close to us in cultural terms. There are many Liberian-Americans in the United States.

This is a place that really wants us there...there are some in the administration who have argued publicly that this is a failed state that produced a regional cancer and instability and had some links to people associated with international terrorism and so we should damn well do something about it for humanitarian and strategic reasons... it matters because everybody except us understands that Liberia is America's responsibility.

Gesture of Humanitarian Solidarity

In 2004 when the Ebola struck in West Africa and Liberia was overwhelmed by the outbreak, the then President of Liberia, Ellen Sirleaf Johnson, appealed to U.S. President Barack Obama for urgent aid in tackling the worst recorded outbreak of the deadly Ebola virus, stressing that without U.S. intervention, her country would lose the fight against the disease (see, Cooper, 2014). Sirleaf's appeal to Obama to build and operate at least one Ebola treatment unit in the capital Monrovia, convinced that U.S. civilian and military teams had experience in dealing with biological hazards. The former Liberian president pleaded with her U.S. counterpart at a time when hospitals in the country's capital were full and patients were being turned away, that:

We are sending them home where they are a risk to their families and the communities. I am being honest with you when I say that at this rate, we will never break the transmission chain and the virus will overwhelm us.

The above excerpt in the Liberian leader's letter to the U.S. president, in the researcher's in-depth interviews with some stakeholders in the Liberian health and development sectors, which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter of this study, reinforced the expectations of Liberians about the role that the U.S. ought to play in the developmental affairs of Liberia. This, by extension, supports the default, long-held perceptions in Africa and the international community about Liberia as the responsibility of the U.S. in crises such as conflicts and global epidemics. The response of the United States government to the clarion call by Liberia, and in fulfilment of a mother's moral duty to her "step-child" in crisis, culminated in what Calcagno (2016) described as "a whole-of-government approach" to the militarization of U.S. aid in Liberia, whose "implementation was forged predominantly by the U.S. President's command that several thousand troops would be deployed" (p.88).

The results of the U.S. military overture in the fight against the Ebola epidemic in Liberia led to the deployment of 3000 American troops, a commitment to build 17 treatment facilities, and the training of up to 500 medical personnel to staff them, all amounting to \$750 million. An additional \$17 million was sent to Liberia as a response to the outbreak (O’Grady, 2014). The United States’ commitment was necessary, due to Liberia’s historic ties to America’s antebellum era (Cooper, 2014), and as a country founded by former American slaves, thus making the United States a surrogate mother for a “stepchild” in crisis. Former President Barack Obama, in his address to the American people at the CDC Headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia, on 25 September 2014, indicated that “in an era where regional crises can quickly become global threats, stopping Ebola is in the interest of all of us” (Obama, 2014).

Obama’s response to Ellen Sirleaf Johnson’s appeal for help from the United States culminated in the former’s task to the USAID’s Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), to lead an interagency intervention in Liberia. Thus, from early August 2014 to January 2016, an OFDA Disaster Assistance Response Team was deployed to Liberia to help coordinate efforts to stop the spread of infection (Widner, 2018). This reinforced the renewed responsibility of the United States to a country whose needs the global community has always looked up to. Inherent in the United States’ moral responsibility to Liberia in the Ebola response were also ideological and strategic motivations which would be discussed next.

Ideological and Strategic Motivations

The study has also found how ideological and strategic motivations positioned Liberia as the topmost priority of the United States in response to Ebola in West Africa, for which the role of USAID in the Ebola recovery process in the country was paramount. As discussed in Chapter III, the West’s response to the epidemic in West Africa was characterized by neocolonial

dynamics, where financial commitments were negotiated privately through institutional aid relationships between the United States and Liberia, the United Kingdom and Sierra Leone, and France and Guinea (see, O’Grady, 2014). Samantha Power, former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, justified her country’s commitment to Liberia in the fight against the Ebola epidemic by openly calling out France and Belgium to focus on Guinea, just as the United States and Britain had done for Liberia and Sierra Leone respectively (see, AFP, 2014). The ideological and strategic agenda behind the United States’ response to the Ebola outbreak in Liberia was succinctly captured by Widner (2018), who contested that:

Although the initial focus was on Liberia, the plan was to support all three affected countries if asked to do so, for which the heads of the U.S. diplomatic missions in Sierra Leone and Guinea would soon follow Malac (then U.S. Ambassador to Liberia) in issuing disaster declarations (p.6).

Previous studies have found how the United States’ long-standing relations with Liberia has been premised chiefly on the former’s interest in the latter as a strategic navigational station for the landing and refueling of its military aircrafts and ships during World War I (e.g., Krauss, 1990). There were other ideological and economic interests, such as the strategic relations with Liberia as a frontline country for the United States’ fight against socialism in Africa, the strategic benefits that the ports of Liberia offered the United States as a favorable business environment in the West African coast, and the political economy of Firestone in relation to U.S. government’s goal of breaking the British rubber monopoly (Hahn, 2020). All these coalesced around the United States’ objective of using Liberia as a launchpad to maintain its dominance in the geopolitics of the world.

Liberia’s acquiescence in the geopolitical mix, to the extent of declaring war on Germany during World War I to appease the United States (see, Duva, 2018), obviously was to attract aid

from the latter. This is congruent with Tisch and Wallace's (1994) view that "politically motivated aid is usually tied to donors' foreign policy concerns and may be given for ideological purposes" (p.57). Beyond the ideological and strategic motivations for which Liberia was useful to the United States during the inter-war periods, the latter has a moral responsibility to a "colony" it created for whatever reason. It is for this reason that giving expression to Truman's (1949) emphasis on the United States' obligation as leader of the Free World to offer financial and economic aid beyond its borders to ensure global stability, also requires that it prioritize critical issues such as post-Ebola recovery in its backyard in Liberia.

USAID and Post-Ebola Recovery in Liberia

In fulfillment of its moral duty to humanity, USAID, the largest international development arm of the United States government, has continued to lead the agenda for post-Ebola development in Liberia. The United States' role in the post-Ebola recovery and development process in Liberia could be seen as both a mandate and a moral obligation. It was a mandate because of the former's creation of the latter as its colony, and a moral obligation due to the United States' ideological role in the historical trajectory in Liberia, whether positive or negative. Thus, there was no legitimate alternative in leadership in the recovery process in Liberia than the one offered by the United States as "everybody understands that Liberia is America's responsibility" (Crocker, 2003, p.1). Therefore, in discharging its moral obligation in the Ebola recovery and development investments, the U.S. Embassy in Liberia intimated in a press statement in 2014, how:

The United States is committed to working with Liberians to rebuild and recover from the devastating impact of the Ebola epidemic on their livelihoods, health, and families... ensuring that the new capabilities drawn from the response efforts, including laboratory systems, surveillance, and health care workers trained in infection prevention and control,

remain and bolster the Liberian capacity to implement the Global Health Security Agenda to prevent, detect, and respond to future threats.

The Embassy emphasized how critical the United States' investments in the economic recovery and development of Liberia were in mitigating the impact of the Ebola epidemic on livelihoods. Key USAID-funded development programs with gender components which focused on the livelihood empowerment of women in post-Ebola Liberia included: the Land Governance Support Activity; Feed the Future Agricultural Program; and the Global Maternal and Child Health Program. Preliminary findings from the review of documents on each of these programs, through the lens of the role of USAID in the post-Ebola development process in Liberia, are discussed respectively below.

Operationalizing Gender Equality and Empowerment

USAID champions the view that gender equality and female empowerment are core development objectives that are fundamental for the realization of human rights and are key to effective and sustainable development outcomes (USAID, 2012). These align with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 5 and 10 (U.N., 2019), based on the assumption that society develops only when males and females are provided with equitable opportunities and resources so that they can shape their own lives, as well as contribute to their families and communities (e.g., Lee & Chin, 2019). Notwithstanding the global success in bridging the gender gaps in all sectors of society, substantial inequalities against women persist, particularly in many parts of the developing world. One example in Liberia has been the century-old gender dimension of land, sustained by cultural practices that bars women from access to and ownership of land, whether through inheritance or purchase.

USAID describes its development vision as a world in which everyone, regardless of gender, enjoys economic, social, cultural, civil, and political rights and are equally empowered to secure better lives for themselves, their families, and their communities. This promotes the rights of women to accumulate and control their own economic assets and resources, based on the view that global development demands accelerated efforts to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment (USAID, 2012). Thus, in giving expression to its gender equality and female empowerment policy, USAID initiated and funded the Land Governance Support Activity (LGSA) program in 2015 to support the Government of Liberia's land rights reform. USAID, in its cross-sectional deliberations with stakeholders in land governance in Liberia, made this observation:

There is significant variation in perceptions and understanding of land rights among rural and urban women, which is further widened between literate and illiterate women. To tackle this, the LGSA program is working to address the deep inequalities in access to land that limits Liberian women's potential to contribute to economic growth in the agriculture sector.

USAID's collaboration with the Government of Liberia thus focused on four primary components of the LGSA program, which included demand-driven support to the land reform agenda; strengthening the policy, legal, and regulatory framework for land governance; development of a recognized customary land rights model based on the national Land Rights Policy; and support of stakeholder engagement in land governance through communication and local capacity building (USAID, 2015). The LGSA program's gender focus sought to increase women's representation by bolstering the strong desire among Liberian women to have an active voice in the land governance process. The impact of this USAID advocacy for women's representation is obvious in giving impetus to what appears to galvanize women's civil society

groups in achieving some level of representation and engagement in the land governance process.

The evidence of USAID's role in promoting women's representation in land governance in the post-Ebola development process in Liberia can be seen in the gender responsive strategy adopted by the agency. This translated into what today appears to be an active Women's Land Rights Taskforce in Liberia, which in collaboration with other civil society organizations in 2017, participated in a joint review of the Liberian Lands Rights Bill that culminated in its passage into law in 2018. What appeared to be another significant achievement of USAID in the sustainability of women's engagement in the land governance in the post-Ebola development process in Liberia has been the establishment of a Women's Lands Rights Secretariat, which in conjunction with other organizations funded by USAID, engages in women's land rights research to inform public policy on gender issues regarding land rights in Liberia.

Studies have shown how USAID has actualized its Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy to increase the capability of women and girls to realize their rights, determine their life outcomes, and influence decision-making in households, communities, and societies in the case of Liberia. This is revealed in a research report that points to the extent to which USAID has worked with the government of Liberia and its partners to address the gender dimensions that characterized land governance and provide full rights for women to access and own land (see, Uvuza & Nagbe, 2018). A comprehensive review of selected documents for this study corroborates the success of USAID in operationalizing gender equality and empowerment of women in land governance in Liberia. Preliminary results however reveal some challenges in the extent to which the agency of women in the post-Ebola development process has been achieved through the LGSA program.

First, that although the new land reform law gives right to women to inherit, access, and own land, thanks to the advocacy of the USAID's LGSA program, the age-old practice in Liberia, where documents providing evidence of land and property rights are issued in the name of men only will linger (Advocates for Human Rights and Women's Solidarity, 2015). This is partly due to the low level of literacy among women compared to men who wield control over land in the traditional culture. Second, USAID could not influence much, and to a large extent, the proportionate gender composition of stakeholder representation in the decision-making process. This may also be due to two reasons: in order not to appear to be interfering in the politics of the country, and because of the seemingly conservative and patriarchal structure of Liberian institutions. These preliminary findings reflect the gender-power relations that influence the design and implementation of development programs in many parts of the global South. These also align with what USAID reiterates in its Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy:

Gender integration involves identifying, and then addressing gender inequalities during strategy and project design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation... therefore since the roles and power relations between men and women affect how activity is implemented, it is essential that project managers address these issues on an ongoing basis (USAID, 2012, p.3).

A triangulation of methods in this study will determine whether current findings corroborate others in the next chapter, which assesses the communication strategies employed by USAID regarding the participation of women in the discourse and practice of development, which addresses the Research Question 2 of this dissertation.

Maternal and Child Health System Reforms

The outbreak of the Ebola virus disease in West Africa between 2013 and 2016 was unprecedented, resulting in approximately 28,000 cases, 16,000 deaths, and 12,000 survivors (Mayrhuber, Niederkröthler, & Kutalek, 2017). Liberia's case as the worst hit among the three West African countries and women who constituted the most affected in that country (U.N. Women, 2014). Additionally, Liberia has a history of severe dysfunction in its health system resulting in high maternal mortality rates. Although high rates of poverty, low literacy, and poor access to quality health services have contributed to the high infant and maternal mortality rates (WHO, 2006), the Ebola epidemic has exacerbated the already acute health challenges facing Liberia.

Apart from the sociocultural impact of Ebola on women in West Africa, studies have also shown the biological effect on the reproductive health of Ebola-infected pregnant women with high rates of miscarriage and 100% neonatal mortality (Menendez, Lucas, Munguabe, & Langer, 2015; Mupapa et al., 1999). The increasing evidence of spontaneous abortion among Ebola survivors in Liberia gives cause to researchers to worry whether the uterus may be another sanctuary site for Ebola, offering the virus a safe place to hide. There have also been suspicions about “whether the stress of being an Ebola survivor can cause a woman to give birth to a stillborn baby in the street with people watching but no one helping” (Personal Communication as cited in Yasmin, 2016, p.10). The assumption that global maternal health is a basic human right, and the fact that women constituted the most affected by Ebola in Liberia strengthened USAID's resolve to improve the country's health system to reduce maternal and child mortality, it thus aimed to:

Prioritize the issue of maternal mortality and the recent requirement to deliver in health facilities and explore ways to better utilize trained birth attendants and midwives; tackle the problem of malnutrition and its continued legacy for future generations as an essential challenge to address, to ensure both healthy Liberians and a more secure nation (USAID, 2018).

The above objective is contingent on USAID's overarching "One Health" platform and "Global Health Security Agenda" across sub-Saharan Africa to ensure Ebola-affected countries and others in the region are better prepared to sustain critical health services; address the threats that new and emerging diseases might pose; and prevent the loss of development gains and build sustainable systems to better withstand future shocks (USAID, 2018).

A critical review of documents regarding the role of USAID in its Maternal and Child Health program to increase access and availability of essential services, thereby reducing maternal and child mortality in Liberia, revealed some initial resistance from the target audience. This has to do with the entrenched mistrust in the Liberian health system by citizens (UN Women/OXFAM, 2016), coupled with low antenatal visits prior to the emergence of the Ebola outbreak in the country in 2014. This rendered USAID's awareness campaigns, albeit with some gender-specific information, somewhat ineffective in increasing the percentage of live births attended by skilled health personnel in the country as expected. This notwithstanding, the USAID has played a critical role in spearheading the improvement of the healthcare system in Liberia that has seen a corresponding impact on maternal and child health in post-Ebola Liberia.

USAID's agenda to "build back better than before" the three West African countries affected by Ebola, culminated in its set of longer-term Pillar II recovery programs. The goal, as earlier indicated, has been to prevent the loss of development gains and build sustainable systems that would enable the economies of the three Ebola-hit countries to better withstand future

shocks. This led to the restructuring of the agency’s global Feed the Future (FtF) initiative in the three West African countries, based on the primary goal of sustainably reducing poverty and hunger through regional and national programs. I focus next on the gender component of this program in line with USAID’s role in post-Ebola Liberia under the theme of self-reliance through agriculture and food security.

Self-Reliance through Food Security

Food insecurity is a major challenge facing sub-Saharan Africa. This phenomenon is exacerbated by seasonal draughts as the agricultural sectors in many countries in the subregion are predominantly subsistence and rain-fed. In the case of Liberia, the failure to tackle food insecurity has resulted in several socio-economic and political ramifications. Key among these was the Tolbert government’s decision to increase the price of rice despite protests and widespread looting in Monrovia, which sparked Liberia’s first military coup in 1980 (Werker & Beganovic, 2011). The prolonged civil wars in Liberia have worsened the country’s food security, despite its abundant reserve of natural resources, enormous supply of fresh water, and a climate conducive for food production, although Liberia reportedly amasses 42% of West Africa’s remaining rainforests (Tarr et al., 2013).

Table 2: Social and Economic Conditions in Liberia under the Taylor Regime, 2000-2001

Indicator		
2000	Life expectancy	47.7 years
2000	Child mortality (under 5) per 1000 population	196
2000	Maternal mortality rate (%) per 100,000 population	578
2001	Poverty rate (living on less than U.S. \$1a day (%))	76.2

2001	Extreme poverty rate (living on less than U.S. \$0.50 a day (%))	52.0
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Source: United Nations Development Program, Liberia: National Human Development Report, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p.1

The historical instability in Liberia and the attendant socio-economic conditions that ensued with the protracted civil wars culminated in the Economist’s description of Liberia in 2003 as the “worst place to live in the world” (*The Economist*, 2003, cited in Kieh, 2009). Liberia thus retrogressed from a breadbasket and a major exporter of food in West Africa to a failed state with all characteristics of social and economic conditions as presented in Table 2, making Liberia one of the highest recipients of foreign aid. The role of the United States as the largest donor of foreign aid in the world, for that matter in Liberia, culminated in the rolling out of the global Feed the Future (FtF) initiative in Liberia and the subsequent restructuring of the program in concert with the country’s post-Ebola development agenda to promote food security. USAID stated:

As a national program, the Liberian Feed the Future (FtF) Multi-Year-Strategy (MYS) has two main objectives: (1) Support equitable growth in Liberia’s agricultural sector and (2) improve nutritional status of Liberians. To reach the most vulnerable communities, the FtF initiative focuses on smallholder farmers, particularly women... (USAID, 2013).

The objectives of the FtF program couched in the excerpt above created a glimmer of hope for food security in Liberia, considering the program’s focus on helping an “estimated 332,000 vulnerable Liberian women, children, and family members escape hunger and poverty” (USAID, 2013). The FtF initiative revolves around the other programs discussed in this chapter. It prioritizes smallholder women farmers to help USAID to operationalize its gender equity and empowerment goal. A more critical and timely need for the FtF initiative has been its importance in boosting nutrition to improve maternal and child mortality, at a crucial moment such as the

outbreak of Ebola in West Africa and the unparalleled damage that the epidemic has caused to the already deplorable maternal and child health record of Liberia.

The overarching goal of the USAID-funded FtF program has been to “combat global hunger, poverty and malnutrition,” which ultimately aims to catalyze agriculture-led economic growth and advance self-reliance in beneficiary countries (FtF Progress Snapshot, 2019, p.1). Achieving this critical goal is based on the recognition of women as key to this transformation, when investment in agriculture must be considered as a transformative power to uplift millions of people out of hunger and poverty in the developing world. To that end, the resolution behind the implementation of the program is contingent on USAID’s (2019) belief that:

When women are economically empowered, they reinvest in their families and communities and create a multiplier effect that promotes global benefits and stability. (In this regard) Feed the Future breaks down barriers that hold women back from participating fully in society to unleash their full economic potential.

The above extract supports the need to question the gender inequalities that permeate the Liberian labor force, particularly the agricultural sector which makes up 61% of the country’s GDP and involves 70% of the workforce that is traditionally dominated by women (OECD, 2012). It is more concerning that women constitute 90% of what are considered to be “vulnerable employment” positions, particularly in the agricultural sector (e.g., DHS, 2013 cited in USAID, 2018), posing grave danger to food security in post-Ebola Liberia. Alleviating this danger further validates the need to examine the demographic factors that influenced the siting of the initiative, such as the largest number of people living in poverty, the gender make-up of program beneficiaries, and the potential for agricultural development in Liberia, where the role of women is ever more crucial in achieving food security. Also important in the analysis of the economic impact of the program were the six administrative counties in Liberia, which included the study

sites for this dissertation, and accounted for 68% of Liberia’s farmers and 69% of its poor population that is predominantly women (USAID, 2018).

Extant research points to the role that women play in female-headed farm households, as well as constituting the most active and diversified population in terms of food production in the agricultural sector in Liberia (see, Ahn et al., 2019). The crucial role that the trade in food crops plays in the agricultural value chain in rural Liberia gave hope to some participants in one of the focus groups for this dissertation, who indicated how the \$25 given to each of them would empower them to “start a business.” This further highlights the depth of poverty among women in rural Liberia, and how the Ebola outbreak in 2014 has worsened their already debilitating economic conditions.

The Liberia FtF program revolves around three core investment areas such as the ‘change agent’ model that relies on lead farmers, lead processors, and traders to “implement the program’s singular strategy of removing or transforming constraints in the value chain to improve agricultural productivity and income” (USAID, 2013, p.11). This aligns with the program’s global objective of prioritizing smallholder women farmers. It is legitimate, therefore, that the Liberia FtF program would concentrate more on female-headed farm households. Preliminary findings from a review of available documents on the administration of the program however paints a picture that reflects the virtual absence of rural Liberian women in the ‘change agent’ model.

Masculinizing Liberia’s FtF Program

The FtF program focused predominantly on improving product quality and yields for Liberia’s two principal staple foods: rice and cassava. This was expected to be accomplished

through the production and distribution of seeds and plants, as well as provision of technical assistance via public and private extensions to equip lead farmers and producer organizations amongst others (USAID, 2013). Revamping the agricultural sector in Liberia around the two principal food staples that are mainly cultivated by women, and the application of change agent models to improve agricultural productivity and income requires that women, by default, should be the focus of the new era of sustainable agriculture in Liberia. Actualizing this would reinforce the place of women as the key to the transformation of agriculture in Liberia, in line with the FtF program. The paradox, from critical analysis of documents is that the FtF agriculture program in Liberia remains virtually masculinized.

The “masculinization” of agriculture was conspicuous in the program implementation of the Liberian Agribusiness Development Activity (LADA), an organization contracted by USAID to manage the FtF program in that country. The success story of the organization’s agro-dealer strengthening program, called the “Face of LADA,” was seen to have featured testimonies from predominantly male beneficiaries of the agribusiness component of the FtF program to the neglect of their women counterparts in Liberia. This gendered- ‘change-agent’ approach to the transformation of agriculture in Liberia appeared to be a total departure from the FtF program’s goal to “break down the barriers that hold women back from participating fully in society to unleash their full economic potential” (see, Feed the Future Progress Snapshot, 2019, p.2).

The conspicuous masculinization of agriculture in post-Ebola Liberia under the auspices of the USAID FtF program could be traced to the modernization paradigm on which the concept of international development was built. Development under the modernization paradigm assumed a patriarchal orientation that has marginalized women for decades in access to new

productive opportunities. At best, development projects where women have been included were on sex-specific terms such as housewives, mothers, and at-risk producers (e.g., Kabeer, 1996).

This has been long evident in female farming systems in the Third World, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, where women were deprived of access to training, land rights, education and technologies by colonial and post-colonial administrators who favored male farmers over their female counterparts (Boserup, 1970). This vestige of patriarchy inherent in international development practice under the modernization approach is evident in USAID's role in post-Ebola Liberia. From this perspective, the masculinization of agriculture has been to probably ensure a trickle-down effect on those at the bottom of the agricultural value chain, who predominantly are women in Liberia.

My analysis of documents on the FtF program in post-Ebola Liberia also expected that in USAID's Global 2019 Feed the Future Progress Snapshot, for example, Liberia would have been part of the success stories of the four countries in Africa showcasing women 'change agents' in sustainable agriculture. This is necessary in assessing whether the FtF program in post-Ebola Liberia has substantially empowered women. The outcome, however, has been the opposite as neither Liberia, Sierra Leone, nor Guinea, the three countries most affected by Ebola and substantially benefitting from the USAID FtF agricultural program made the list. This, again, reinforces the gendered nature of agriculture in Africa, for that matter, a legacy of the modernization approach to development which appeared to typify USAID's development approach in the post-Ebola recovery process in Liberia.

In highlighting the role of women in development, the USAID's Feed the Future Progress Snapshot (2019) emphasized how "when they are economically empowered, they reinvest in their families and communities and create a multiplier effect that promotes global benefits and

stability” (p.2). However, despite this rhetoric and good intentions, female recipients of the so-called development projects in the global South experience less improvements (Sharp & Briggs, 2006). This fits the argument from a radical perspective that development is charged as being little more than a neo-colonial project in the service of political and economic power (Escobar, 1995), and thus can digress from its stated intention or aims. This helps explain the contradiction between USAID’s stated priority on women, and the marginalization that the latter face in the development process in post-Ebola Liberia, and also validates the postcolonial perspective that “development praxis may perpetuate colonialist and western-centered discourse and power relations, even as it seeks to focus attention on the marginalized” (Sharp & Briggs, 2006, p.7).

Political Economy of Liberia as U.S.’ Geopolitical Priority

The critical extent to which post-Ebola development in Liberia has become a top priority for the United States in West Africa can be analyzed through political economy and geopolitical perspectives. This analysis is contingent on political economy as the study of social relations, particularly the power relations that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources, as well as a “specific set of social relations organized around power or the ability to control people, processes, and things, even in the face of resistance” (Mosco, 2009, p.24). This extends the discussion of political economy of aid as one that is based chiefly on donor-recipient reciprocity and ideological motives (Raschky & Schwindt, 2012; Neumayer, 2003).

How Liberia has become a geopolitical interest of the United States is traced to the Cold War era where the former became a strategic location for the latter to ward off the Soviet presence in Africa (e.g., Krauss, 1990). The continuous importance of Liberia goes beyond the historical benefits that its ports provided the United States as a favorable business environment in

the West African coast (Hahn, 2020), to a future ally in the United States' power struggle with China in Africa (Bah, 2015). This explains the strategic dynamics that define the political economy of development assistance in humanitarian situations, to the extent that beyond the United States' leadership in fighting Ebola in West Africa, the former prioritized its commitment to Liberia through a private negotiation of additional financial aid due to the historical relations between the two countries (O'Grady, 2014).

The longstanding refrain about Liberia as “the responsibility of America” (e.g., Gwertzman, 2003; Hodge, 2002) was reinforced by Samantha Power, former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, who dared France and Belgium to prioritize Guinea in the fight against Ebola in West Africa as the U.S. had with Liberia (see, AFP, 2014). This further explains why the United States' leadership to “provide the kinds of capabilities that only America has, and to mobilize the world in ways that only America can do” (Obama, 2014, n.p.) in the fight against Ebola and the further reconstruction of the affected countries, prioritized Liberia. The excerpt below, in a President Obama's speech about the U.S. government's leadership in the fight against Ebola in West Africa, corroborates this claim:

At the request of the Liberian government, we're going to establish a military command center in Liberia to support civilian efforts across the region -- similar to our response after the Haiti earthquake ... And our forces are going to bring their expertise in command and control, in logistics, in engineering. And our Department of Defense is better at that, our Armed Services are better at that than any organization on Earth (Obama, 2014).

Other documentary evidence attests to the extent to which Liberia was almost synonymous with West Africa in the U.S. government's fight against Ebola in Africa. This can be seen in the situation where “More than 50 personnel from U.S. Army Africa are on the ground in Liberia responding to a request from President Barack Obama to assist in the fight against an

Ebola outbreak in the region” (Bartell, 2014, n.p.). This was buttressed by the then U.S. Ambassador to Liberia, Deborah Malac, who reiterated President Obama’s address on the U.S. government’s commitment to “all governments in the (West African) region,” but emphasized the extent to which “Liberia has the full backing of U.S.” (see, Malac, 2014). Further documentary reports on the U.S. response to West Africa’s Ebola crisis between 2014 and 2015 revealed the former’s affinity to Liberia. Jennifer Widner (2018), in her analysis of the strategic response to the West African region, revealed how the U.S. ranked Liberia as its topmost priority with the extract below:

Establishing geographical scope was a third issue. In consultation with the National Security Council and USAID Administrator Raj Shah, Konyndyk decided to focus on Liberia, where the outbreak was most serious, ... and because the country’s president had reached out for help, and the U.S. government had the deepest relationship.

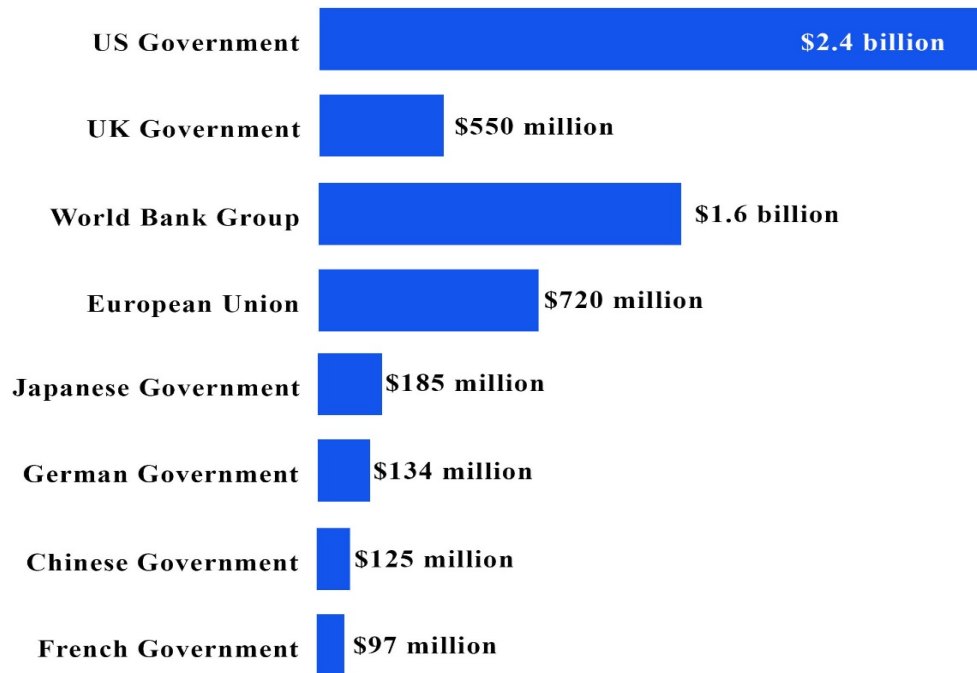
Widner (2018) revealed how the Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART), the elite response specialists charged with coordinating with the United States’ response to disaster overseas, in collaboration with USAID, decided that smaller teams would work in Guinea and Sierra Leone as a secondary consideration. This was based on the expectation that the United Kingdom and France would lead the anti-Ebola efforts in the two other Ebola-affected countries. Thus, in their scheme, DART could expand its scope if the spread of the epidemic was severe in Sierra Leone and Guinea. The argument concluded that “although the initial focus was Liberia, the plan was to support all three affected countries if asked to do so” (Widner, 2018, p.6). These strategic overtures revealed how colonial lines were drawn in the fight against Ebola in West Africa and subsequent international aid toward reconstruction of affected countries. (O’Grady, 2014).

Addressing Research Question 1

Research Question 1 sought to examine what accounted for Liberia as the United States' priority in response to Ebola in West Africa. It also assessed the extent to which USAID considered women's socio-economic roles in the post-Ebola development process in Liberia between 2015 and 2019.

As I have narrated above, the United States' leadership in fighting Ebola in West Africa between 2014 and 2016 was evident in the responses of the various U.S. agencies in the region. The U.S. Department of State led diplomatic engagements with the West African countries under the siege of Ebola, while the Department of Defense coordinated support for foreign armed forces, in collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDD), which headed the public health and medical response activities. All these agencies were in turn coordinated by USAID, including the provision of financial and material support (see, Salaam-Blyther, 2014). This amounted to US\$2.4billion being the U.S. government's funding, compared to contributions by other countries and multilateral organizations as represented in Figure 4.

Fig. 4: Global Funding for Ebola Response in West Africa, 2014-2016

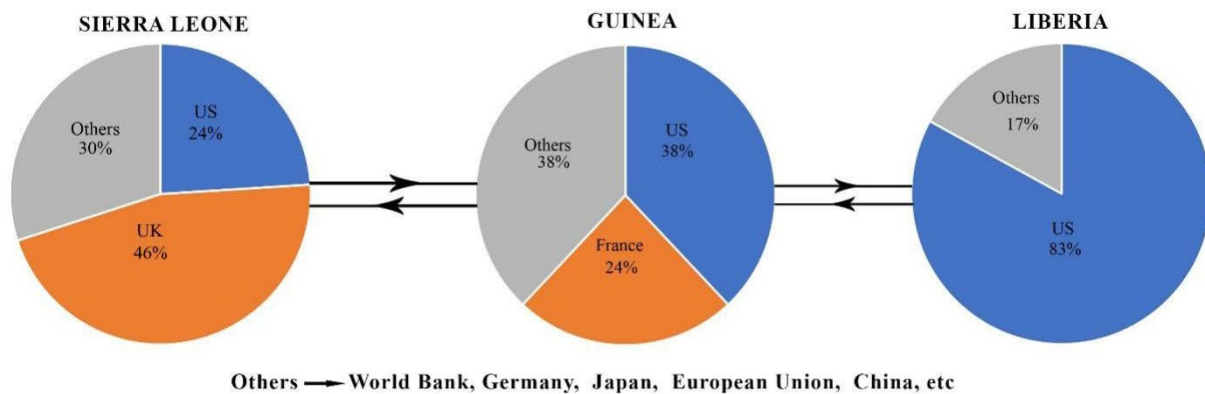


Source: Adapted from USAID 2016

The United States' substantial financial and technical support in the fight against Ebola in West Africa, an outbreak described as a "public health emergency of international concern" (see, WHO, 2014a), is significant. This, again, can be interpreted as a worthy adventure which gives practical expression to the American idea of development which enjoins all nations to "follow their footsteps" (see, Sachs, 2020, p.xv) in making the benefits of America's scientific advances available to improve the conditions of peoples around the world. While this global leadership constitutes a clarion call to action to stem potential global epidemics such as Ebola, it is also worth examining how colonial dynamics influenced the major donors' response to Ebola in the three most-affected countries in West Africa. And it is when this issue is interrogated from this

perspective, Figure 5 that Research Question 1 as to what accounted for Liberia as a topmost priority for the U.S. in response to Ebola in West Africa, can be addressed.

Fig. 5: Colonial Dimension of Donor Funding for Ebola in West Africa



Author's Construction, 2022

The (post)colonial undercurrent that determined the urgency and amount of funding provided by the United Kingdom, France, and the United States —the three largest donors to the fight against Ebola in Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Liberia respectively, is explained in detail in Figure 5. The UK government's significant contribution of 46%, constituting the largest amount of funding in stemming the spread of Ebola in Sierra Leone, is obviously traced to the colonial ties between the former and the latter. It reinforces the UK government's responsibility for a former colony in crisis in the spirit of the Commonwealth. The significant role that the US played as the second largest contributor to the same cause in Sierra Leone, despite not having any colonial ties with the latter, reinforces the leadership of the US in the committee of nations as far as international development is concerned. The invisibility of the French government in

the league of funders in Sierra Leone, might explain the colonial disconnect between the two countries.

The popular expectation, based on colonial considerations, was the need for the French government to lead the way in the fight against Ebola in Guinea in terms of percentage funding distribution, just as the UK government did in Sierra Leone. The largest burden of responsibility in Guinea was however borne by the US government with a significant 38% of funding compared to France's 24%, with other sources of funding making up the 38% of funding to a 'colonial territory' with strong attachment to France. This 'financial aloofness' constitutes a clear indictment on France regarding its responsibility to Guinea, which further validates earlier calls by former US Ambassador to the UN, Samantha Power, on France to step up its commitment to Guinea in the fight against Ebola (see, AFP, 2014).

The United States government's contribution to the fight against Ebola in Liberia, in the same "colonial" vein, represented a significant 83% share of the financial burden, compared to 17% contributions from other donor countries, as well as bilateral and multilateral organizations combined. This translated into the provision of a 25-bed hospital, 17 Ebola treatment units each with 100-bed capacity in Monrovia, Liberia's capital among other provisions to stem the spread of the deadly epidemic in the country (see, O'Gara, 2014). The US government, under the auspices of USAID, also embarked on significant development programs such as the Land Governance Support Activity, the Feed the Future initiative, and the Maternal and Child Health program—all geared towards the livelihood empowerment of the affected population, particularly women, in post-Ebola Liberia.

The outstanding show of support for Liberia can be ultimately traced to the role of the US government in the formation of Liberia in the 19th century in the antebellum era as previously

discussed. Apart from that, the security of Liberia as America's priority in the fight against Ebola in West Africa and after, is a critical demonstration of its moral responsibility for a country it helped found, and for the strategic importance of Liberia in reinforcing its ideological and military influence in the region. These factors, among others, help answer the Research Question 1 about the pivotal role that the US has played in Liberia as far as international development assistance is concerned.

Chapter Summary

This chapter addressed Research Question 1, which examined USAID's focus on Liberia in the fight against Ebola in West Africa. The chapter employed a method of document analysis to also assess the critical role USAID has played in the post-Ebola development process in Liberia, such as Women and Land Governance; Maternal and Child Health System Reforms; and Feed the Future initiatives, which focused on the livelihood empowerment of women. Women formed a critical constituency in the post-Ebola development process in Liberia. Thus, the chapter examined this question through the policy approaches to women in development and postcolonial theory's conceptualizations of power relations in development as a tool by which to challenge development studies' notions of empowerment. The next chapter analyzes the mode of engagement with local stakeholders in development in post-Ebola Liberia. This will be based on results from in-depth interviews to answer Research Question 2, which investigates the communication strategies USAID employed in its post-Ebola development campaign in Liberia between 2015 and 2019.

CHAPTER VI

MODES OF ENGAGEMENT WITH LOCAL SYSTEMS IN THE POST-EBOLA DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Development support is carried out through engagement between development partners—in this regard—donor agencies and local systems in the recipients' communities. The USAID (2014) expressly defines local systems as a tool in development practice that to consider and involve the "roles of a broad range of actors and their contributions to sustainability," based on a commitment towards inclusivity to ensure the effectiveness of localized aid (p.6). This ties to the role of communication in creating awareness about development projects in post-disaster situations, based on a shared engagement of different stakeholders within the local system in sustaining their attention and commitment to the development process (OECD, 2008).

Hence, it is important for USAID in post-Ebola Liberia to develop communication strategies that outline program objectives that build relationships with audiences throughout the project (South, 2009). While the role of donor agencies such as USAID in the context of this study, is important in the development process, there is also the need for them to realize that public awareness of, and support for, development cooperation is fundamental, as strong public support is the best guarantee for broad-based support for development programs (Manning, 2008). This reinforces not just the need for communication, but communication strategies as critical drivers of development and social change programs in the developing world. This dovetails with USAID's use of system thinking as a tool to examine how local actors are influenced by their environment and vice versa to devise communication strategies that are appropriate in creating awareness about development programs (USAID, 2014).

The importance of communication for aid effectiveness occasioned the 3rd High-Level Forum for Aid Effectiveness in Ghana in 2008, christened the "Accra Agenda for Action," which emphasized the need for strategic communication in the development aid industry. This resulted in consensus among DevCom members on the need to intensify communication, reframe the development narrative, and make a better case for why it is now more important than ever for collaboration amongst development stakeholders (OECD, 2014). This underscores the critical nature of communication strategies to explain how aid works; harness communication as a tool and a process for effective delivery of aid programs; and stimulate or deepen the general public's interest in development and development-related issues (da Costa, 2008; Zimmerman, 2009). In the nutshell, the underlying logic of messaging as part of communication strategies is to ensure behavior change toward development programs. It is against this background that the communication strategies that drive international development programs in the global South are worth examining.

In this chapter, I present results for Research Question 2, which examines the communication strategies deployed by USAID in its post-Ebola development programs in Liberia between 2015 and 2019. The findings are based on a review of documents on the communication strategies employed by the agency within the period under study. This is supplemented by results from in-depth interviews with communications and outreach specialists, monitoring and evaluation specialists, programs managers, and gender specialists drawn from organizations implementing the various USAID development programs in post-Ebola Liberia. The selected documents and data from the in-depth interviews were coded thematically. The analysis of the dominant themes was interspersed with direct quotes from key participants to address Research Question 2.

USAID's Development Communication and Outreach Strategy

The status of USAID as the largest development assistance agency in the world corresponds with its response to an average of 65 disasters in more than 50 countries annually. The USAID, in the discharge of its international humanitarian aid activities, is assisted by the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance and the Office of Food for Peace, which lead communications in times of crisis. This is done in close collaboration with the Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs (BLPA) and the development outreach and communications (DOCs) specialists in the various USAID missions internationally (USAID Post-Disaster Response and Action Guide, n.d.). Thus, as a matter of urgency, the missions abroad must take note that:

When USAID's disaster response ends, there are additional opportunities to ensure that USAID'S assistance and partnership with the host country are highlighted to audiences, especially when USAID is helping disaster-affected communities' transition from crisis toward prosperity and self-reliance (USAID, n.d., p.2).

In this vein, USAID branding must be visible during all stages of disaster response, including airlifts of USAID-branded products such as plastic sheets, food, hygiene kits, and other critical commodities meant for distribution among disaster victims. As part of the strategic communications goal, USAID-branded products, such as "food sacks and oil cans are used for household storage, as well as USAID-branded heavy-duty plastic sheeting, used to reinforce latrines, showers, and temporary shelters." Thus, USAID missions abroad, led by their development outreach communications specialists, are to develop post-disaster response and communications plans to help identify the most effective approach to ensure that USAID's response is "memorialized to local stakeholders" (USAID Post-Disaster Response and Action Guide, n. d, p.2).

In improving development outcomes through social and behavior change communication, USAID found that its traditional approach, using top-down, unilateral messaging from system actors—public officials, health officials amongst others is often ineffective and backfire in crisis communication. On the other hand, “when system actors express empathy, concern, and compassion, the effectiveness of their communication is improved” (see, Pirio, n.d). This informed USAID's local systems approach to understanding how local actors interact with their environment and are influenced by it. The outcome is the promotion of empathy, using culturally appropriate communication formats, as an integral part of the agency's development communication strategies.

In line with USAID’s strategic approach to social and behavior change communication is an emphasis on systems and on sustainability, considered an essential component of development and a core commitment of USAID and for that matter every international development agency. In that regard, the agency’s renewed strategic approach to development is based on the basic idea that:

Development investments in poor countries, whatever form, should catalyze the economic, political, and social processes within those countries that yield ever-improving lives of their citizens... This is based on the important nuance, that effective and sustainable development is inclusive development, where development priorities are established in ways that are broadly responsive to citizen needs and aspirations (USAID Local Systems Framework, 2014, p.6).

USAID’s local systems approach for supporting sustained development in its missions abroad has also focused on recognizing and tapping into local knowledge of development stakeholders. This is contingent on the acknowledgment that “local people understand their situations far better than external actors; that local people understand the ways that multiple

layers of history, politics, interests as well as formal and informal rules shape the current situation and what is possible for change” (USAID Local Systems Framework, 2014, p.8). Thus, USAID has combined mass media communication with culturally appropriate communication formats that are relevant to respective communities. And in further acknowledgment of local people’s ability to “know what works and what does not” in the development process, USAID insists on its mission to:

Regularly seek out local perspectives, paying attention to the voices of marginalized populations, as well as map local systems and plan, design, implement, monitor, and evaluate our interventions (USAID, 2014).

In the West African region where Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea were the most affected by the epidemic, USAID adopted post-Ebola communication and outreach strategies which included: outdoor branding in the form of infographics, banners, and print publications; external and internal communications via frontpages of the agency's newsletters and Web site; outreach and public engagement events organized by the agency; and social media stories for distribution across official Facebook and Twitter handles to create awareness about USAID's post-Ebola development programs in the affected countries. The goal of the communication strategies, according to the (USAID Post-Ebola Disaster Response Branding and Communications Guide, 2017, p.6), focused on:

- Influencing action, changing behavior and perceptions;
- Increasing press coverage of USAID recovery activities and progress;
- Engaging new constituencies, stakeholders, and audiences;
- Identifying timely strategic outreach opportunities; and
- Demonstrating the success of USAID work and its impact in the developing world to American taxpayers

In Liberia, the communication strategies deployed by USAID officials in creating awareness about the three dominant gender-sensitive post-Ebola development projects in that country encompassed those strategies identified earlier in this section and other traditional media. These were coded from a review of selected documents and interviews with informants under dominant themes, community-based traditional media; public information campaigns; gender integration strategy; rural outreach and community mobilization; the Jehovah's Witnesses approach; and male champions. These communication strategies are analyzed under the three dominant USAID-funded post-Ebola recovery programs in the next sub-sections.

Communication Strategies for the Three USAID Development Programs

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Land Governance Support Activity (LGSA), was created by USAID to support the Government of Liberia's land rights reform process. At the heart of this program was a gender strategy that provided practical guidance to the LGSA project team and its partners for ensuring a strong gender lens through which the design and implementation of the program would be based. The objective of the gender strategy was to:

Enable LGSA to apply an approach that ensured that both project processes and actual implementation account for existing gender inequalities, seek out opportunities to redress such inequalities, and result in outcomes that endeavor to benefit men and women equally (LGSA Gender Strategy, 2015).

The critical disadvantage that women face regarding the patrilineal Liberian land tenure system, "where land rights issues limit women's productivity in the agriculture sector" (USAID Gender Assessment, 2018), gave impetus to civic society organizations, including women's task force for land rights to advocate for land reforms in Liberia. This further resulted in calls for the passage of the Draft Land Rights Act of Liberia to prevent a pervasive situation where "only a few people have had full rights over land, including the right to say what to do and what not to

do with the land..." (CSO Working Group on Land Rights Reform in Liberia, n.d., n.p.). Thus, in assessing the communication strategies for this program, participants in the interviews were officials of the USAID-funded program, Liberia Lands Authority, and Women Taskforce on Land in Liberia. The findings are discussed under several themes below.

Community-based traditional media. In a predominantly rural setting like Liberia, with a high level of illiteracy among women, adopting a communication strategy to tackle a critical issue such as land, requires not just tact, but the right medium for the target audience. The communication specialists interviewed were cognizant of the most appropriate media to employ. This, they emphasized, was crucial in not just creating awareness about the existence of a gender-sensitive component of a development intervention such as the LGSA program that was aimed at the livelihood empowerment of rural women. Thus, although the interviewees acknowledged the predominant impact of commercial and government radio in rural Liberia, there was the need to also consider community-based radio stations that served as the first point of news to the people. With this, a key participant asserted:

Apart from urban Monrovia, which is the capital of Liberia, the entire country is rural, where agriculture is the largest source of employment. You travel to all the 15 counties and find that community radio is the soul of the people. Radio is ubiquitous in rural Liberia such that households tune to community radios to get informed, educated, and entertained. So, there is no better alternative to community radio if you want to reach a population like rural women with any development intervention.

The interviews alluded to a common practice in rural Liberia, where every farmer one meets on their way to the farm carries a radio set like a "handbag" for news that is broadcast from one community radio station to another. This justifies the inevitability of traditional mass media as an important means of information dissemination on development programs in rural communities. In development and social change, where there is a multiplicity of choices

regarding access to one radio set for example, and where audiences have different radio genres, formats, and stations to listen to, there is a need for strategic communication on the part of practitioners in the design of development messages. In this milieu, Pirio (n.d.) suggested that to improve development outcomes through social and behavior change communication on USAID projects, a strategic choice of mass media is critical, where:

Optimizing the use of local radio stations, whether community, religious, or commercial, typically have a strong impact on audiences because community members normally perceive local stations as their own, thus increasing the trust factor and giving credibility to the messages (p.6).

Hence via contextual knowledge and professional experience, the communication specialists on this program emphasized community radio stations whose format, programming, and the predominant use of local dialects were significant in the program's communication strategy. The informants explained how radio talk shows featured prominently in community-based traditional media, where the program was broadcast live via selected community radios that could spread the message wide and far to the target audiences. These radio talk shows on the LGSA program were influenced by the communication strategy to ensure that discussants were more than experts on the issue under discussion. Other critical factors were discussants' mastery of the local dialects and knowledge of the culturally appropriate communication formats through which the message was deployed to the people. One study informant reiterated how this was realized:

In our communication strategy, we value the messages and the audiences they are meant for. Therefore, we think about our audiences before we go on these radio talk shows. And we consciously make sure we do not take our "books" there. By books I mean we don't go with English; we go colloquial. We communicate in the local languages to audiences who are the people that we are there to serve.

There is no better strategic alternative to evangelize rural folks like these to buy into your message than in a medium that they identify with and in a dialect they understand. This is the success of our program.

Prioritizing the mass medium and the dialects that the target audiences used, in the excerpts above, is key in determining the success of development communication strategies. This aligns with the popular adage inherent in African cultural values that dictates the impact that a message has on an audience requires not only through a medium that they speak, but also one that the people understand. This further justifies the strategic and demographic considerations behind USAID's (2017) choice of community radio stations such as Radio Kpogbarn in Margibi County, Radio Dukpa in Grand Bassa County, Radio Saclepea in Nimba County, and Vahun Community Radio in Lofa County, for example, in public education on land issues under its LGSA program in Liberia.

The focus on community radio by USAID is supported by findings that suggest that 86% of Liberia's population listens to radio, particularly community radio, for news and information. The reason is not only its ubiquity, but the trust that citizens have in the genre as a credible source of information (e.g., Mercy Corps, 2016). The stronghold that community radio has as a leading source of information in rural Africa is also traced to its advantage of accessing both literate and illiterate audiences, and its ability to give the marginalized a voice (Fortune & Chungong, 2013).

The FtF initiative in Liberia was also predicated on the need to support equitable growth in Liberia's agricultural sector to reduce hunger, poverty, malnutrition, and improve the nutritional status of Liberians. The program implementers realized that if investment in agriculture must be considered essential to uplift the most vulnerable population of Liberians, the

initiative must focus on smallholder farmers, particularly women, who constitute the backbone of the country's agricultural sector. The rural nature of the initiative and its focus on women, also required community radio as the most appropriate medium through which the potential benefits of the program could be communicated to the target audience. Harnessing the power of community radio to inform and educate farmers became an integral part of the FtF program in Liberia. A key informant emphasized why:

There certainly cannot be a more appropriate means of reaching out to our audience about a development project that is tailored to them than radio. And this is due to the ubiquitous nature of radio in rural folks. When you eliminate radio, you have no media for communicating to rural folks because it is their second nature.

Emphasis on radio as the most appropriate medium within the communication strategies for creating awareness about the USAID-funded FtF initiative in Liberia reinforces the critical role of radio in development. The communication specialists reiterated the strategic means by which interactive programs were hosted on local radio stations in designated communities, where community people were engaged as discussants to drive home the benefit that the FtF program offered to the community members. Putting opinion leaders in the driver's seat of the community radio discussions, a key informant revealed, "reinforced the participatory nature of USAID's communication approach which encouraged local stakeholders to accept the initiative, own it, and help to ensure its sustainability."

There is no disputing the fact that rural radio addresses the needs of audiences when informative and educational programs are broadcast in the local vernacular. The interviewees indicated how this played a central role in the communication strategies, using community radios for implementing the FtF development initiative. In assessing the appropriateness of community-based traditional media, the study found how, in the words of one interviewee, community radio

was “effective as a tool in introducing a livelihood empowerment program such as the Feed the Future agricultural program to the people.” Another key informant reiterated the significance of community radio in driving development. They noted:

It is not for nothing that radio is an asset in every rural household. The trust for radio in rural communities is such a marvel that no matter who says what, so long as it is said on the radio, it is the gospel truth. This makes radio an inevitable and impactful medium for creating awareness about an empowering project such as the Feed the Future program for women in the selected counties where the program was implemented.

The overwhelming reliance on community radio as a strategic communication tool for implementing this development program aligns with common observations about the crucial role that radio plays in the agricultural sector in the developing world. Chapman et al. (2003) validate the strength of rural radio as an extension tool, based on its ability to reach illiterate farmers with a gamut of information on all aspects of agricultural production in local languages that they understand. This dovetails into the role of radio in the diffusion of innovations under modernization, where the emphasis is placed on communication effects. In this paradigm, particular attention is paid to "the ability of media messages and opinion leaders to create knowledge of new practices and ideas and persuade the target to adopt the exogenously introduced innovations" (Melkote & Steeves, 2015, p.137).

Community radio was used as part of the communication strategies for implementing the USAID-funded FtF program from a more participatory perspective, unlike the modernization approach which tends to consider the target audience as the depository of innovations. This, a key informant explained, was to "draw rural Liberian women into the implementation of the Feed the Future initiative and empower them to transform agriculture in Liberia." Thus, public consultation was considered as a complementary approach in giving expression to the quest to

empower women to achieve the FtF initiative's goal of achieving food security in post-Ebola Liberia. Next is a discussion of how the public consultation approach was adopted in the implementation of the initiative.

The third project—the USAID’s M&CH program in Liberia—dates back several decades and spans most administrations in the country. For example, after 14 years of conflict had decimated Liberia’s health system, USAID assisted the Sirleaf Administration in 2005 to provide primary healthcare clinics and obstetric care services in six counties, and outreach immunization services in all the 15 counties of the country. Additionally, the Agency provided financial and technical resources to train nurses, midwives, and physician assistants in a bid to strengthen maternal and child health in all parts of the country (see, USAID Report to Congress, 2008). Due to the impact of the Ebola epidemic on women and children in the three most affected countries in West Africa, USAID modified and adopted a more strategic approach for its Maternal and Child Health program in the region. The goal was to provide leadership to governments and stakeholders in the health sectors of the affected countries on the need to address the basic health and nutrition needs of the most vulnerable women, children, and families (see, USAID Action on the Call, 2017).

Prior research has shown that only 56% of births take place in a healthcare facility, and that children born in rural Liberia are twice as likely to be delivered by traditional birth attendants (DHS, 2013). This was exacerbated by the upsurge of the Ebola epidemic, where access to healthcare facilities has become more challenging for many rural Liberians, especially mothers who are ready to give birth (USAID Gender Assessment, 2018). The M&CH program under the post-Ebola development process, therefore, adopted community-based traditional media within its communication strategy to rally women in rural Liberia to access maternal

health and reproductive services that could improve their health. Education on this program involved hosting live reproductive health sessions on community radio stations.

The community radio stations for that matter helped to create awareness about the program and its reproductive health benefits to women within the catchment areas where it was implemented. Additionally, the community radio stations' announcement of the impending programs also served as reminders for women in the communities ahead of schedule. As a key informant indicated, this channel of information dissemination not only assured the audience of the value of the program to women's health but also helped to reinforce the authenticity of the program in meeting the needs of the women. In other words, the confidence that the people in rural areas have in the community radio stations served as a springboard to reach them and propagate the program to them. In that regard, a key informant said:

There was no need to reinvent the wheel when the confidence that our local stakeholders have in community radios was advantageous in getting them to embrace the maternal and child health program that they needed to mitigate the impact of Ebola on their lives and improve their conditions.

The community-based traditional media were also crucial in providing education on the maternal and child health program because of the nuances involved in communicating delicate issues through the vernaculars that characterize such media. The use of the community-based traditional media as an effective communication strategy was also seen through their ability to easily rally stakeholders in the rural communities together for face-to-face interactions related to the program and offered us the opportunity to elicit and address concerns among the stakeholders in a participatory manner that would not have been possible. It was apparent, based on the communication experts' satisfaction of the effectiveness of community radio in promoting the Maternal and Child Health program, that a key informant described the medium as "a trusted

voice and an authoritative source of education at the grassroots.” Another key informant emphasized the strategic importance of community radio in the campaign thus:

We virtually could not have achieved what we did by navigating a culturally sensitive subject like reproductive health in rural settings in Liberia. That said, community radio helped to soften the ground and invited women to avail themselves to the program, as well as the products and services that would continue to improve their reproductive health and the health of their newborn children.

Public consultation approach. Along with reliance on community-based traditional media was the public consultation approach by USAID-contracted communication specialists in collaboration with the Liberia Lands Authority to deepen awareness on the LGSA program in that country. The public consultation approach was based on face-to-face interactions with audiences in rural communities where the development program was implemented. While this approach was considered more appropriate in “facilitating personal encounters with the audiences, who hitherto, could not have the opportunity to directly interface with development practitioners through community-based radio talk show segments,” a key informant justified the need for it from the perspective below:

You know, we are talking about a critical issue such as land rights in Liberia. And this is more controversial because of the gender angle to it, where tradition has become a tool for oppression and denial. Imagine your sister being driven out of her matrimonial home because tradition says she cannot inherit land after the death of her husband.

These are people we need to foster empathetic face-to-face interactions with, to listen to them, know their stories better... This is where public consultations are necessary to let them know that they matter.

It is concerning that despite the passage of the gender-sensitive Land Rights Act into law in 2018 with lots of provisions in it for women, thanks to the advocacy of the Women's Land

Rights Taskforce, many women in rural Liberia remain oblivious of their rights under the new law. This finding, based on a unanimous response from the interview participants, was due to low public education and therefore awareness of citizens' rights to land under the new law. The USAID-funded LGSA program was intended to fill the yawning gap in the education and awareness-creation process and give practical expression to the land rights component of the law.

As a key informant emphasized, the public consultation approach was a “proactive step” aimed at complementing the efforts of the Liberia Lands Authority to see how they can “merge the customary laws and the statutory laws to avoid future confusions” in implementing the law. Thus, the public consultation involved engaging with women leaders from the policy perspective, and with their marginalized counterparts in rural Liberia, who were direct beneficiaries of the program.

One of the methods we employ for our communication first is public consultations. okay? Along with our gender colleagues, we hold several public meetings with women groups, women leaders, and influential women in the communities—we meet with and dialogue with them on some of the issues.

The interview participants explained how in rural communities, the public consultations usually assumed the form of town hall meetings, which normally were held under big trees in village settings, at the convenience of the rural folks who were the targets of the development program. The difference in the approach for the two audience categories in the public consultative meetings was apparent. While those for women leaders centered predominantly on eliciting their views on policy perspectives in the implementation of the law in line with the LGSA program, those for rural counterparts focused on informing and educating them on the new land rights law and its associated development program. A key informant from the Liberia

Lands Authority put the public consultation with stakeholders in rural Liberia as succinctly as it ought to be:

I think that the USAID town hall meetings for public information on the land reform process are good. I have participated in many of them where we go and read relevant provisions of the law and try to impress on them that now it is a new day in Liberia, where women have equal participation in land governance.

The public consultation approach to this program appears to promote some elements of participation in planning and decision making, and somewhat aligns with community-driven development, which seeks to empower the poor and the marginalized by putting them in the driver's seat of development (Jakimow, 2018; Baker et al., 2004). While the approach also reflects some semblance of stakeholder involvement in the way that women leaders were actively involved in the public consultation process, there were criticisms by women leaders and land rights advocates in Liberia about the inclusiveness of the very approach that claimed to have actively engaged them. As a key informant lamented thus:

There is always a problem when it comes to stating the fact about women's leadership in the land reform process in Liberia. I have been fighting in this land rights terrain for so many years. Women are less represented, and in situations where women are brought to the table, many of these male-dominated development organizations already have in mind what they want to do. Our voices do not echo much as stakeholders in pushing for the implementation of the law.

The LGSA communication specialists admitted, nonetheless, some bottlenecks associated with the public consultation approach. This explains why this method, despite its challenges, complemented other approaches to create awareness about the development program. These challenges were buttressed by the interviewees who attributed pushbacks to age-old traditions and customs that reinforce the negative perception about women's rights to land, even after the

passage of the land rights act into law. “You know, changing the mindset of people and removing this custom that they were born with is not easy. It takes work, it has been difficult,” a key participant stated and further emphasized the ordeal by recounting some incidents:

There are numerous occasions where some men rise and say “no, that won’t happen,” and this requires skills to calm them down, explain to them in detail, provide the law that has signed in Liberia concerning land and women’s land rights, quote these laws and show them how important their wives or sisters are before you get them on board.

Scholars from a feminist perspective have observed how the points of tension between participatory and "gender-aware" approaches to development arise from and produce rather different ways of engaging with issues of gendered power (e.g., Cornwall, 2003). This concern is buttressed by Pirio (n.d.) who observed how top-down, unilateral messaging from system actors, in this case, policymakers and practitioners in the development process, are often ineffective. Instead, he argued how, “when system actors express empathy, concern, and compassion, the effectiveness of their communication is improved” (p.6).

The FtF initiative used public consultation approach to create awareness and empower women in rural Liberia, based on USAID’s local systems framework for supporting sustained development. The interviewees noted how USAID’s revised approach prioritized stakeholder consultation and engagement with local participants across the development process. In this regard, a key informant underscored the importance of a strategic communication approach to the Liberian version of the FtF program that was “in sync with the ten principles of engaging local systems to boost global agricultural productivity.” This entailed the adoption of an inclusive development strategy through engagement with local systems. Justifying the need for a public consultation approach in promoting the initiative, a key informant argued how:

It makes good development sense not to only think systematically from a donor perspective but to act strategically by seeking out opportunities to engage with local stakeholders in all situations. And this must be done through consultation with local people and seeking their perspectives, instead of seeing them as just beneficiaries of our interventions.

The public consultation approach to the FtF development campaign was implemented in a somewhat holistic manner. This involved engagement with diverse local actors such as community opinion leaders, chiefs, and local women to address the development challenges facing stakeholders in the agricultural sector, particularly at the grassroots. Interview participants provided a consensus view on the importance of the communication strategy, which aimed to ensure the sustainability of the FtF program, where women farmers' livelihoods in post-Ebola Liberia would, in turn, be sustained. In the end, the interviewees believed that the measure of the success and sustainability of the program, in line with the USAID goal of gender empowerment through agriculture, was contingent on the level of engagement of local stakeholders. As a key informant indicated:

Employing this communication strategy in line with the framework of the local system has been an intentional one because we recognize local knowledge and expertise within the broader development community where we operate. We wanted to use this approach to gather diverse views that coalesce around a consensus for promoting a peaceful environment for this initiative to thrive.

The excerpt above regarding the application of public consultation in the implementation of development programs is congruent with the concept of participatory development in advocating for grassroots participation in decision-making processes (e.g., Agarwal, 2001). The absence of stakeholder engagement in development is traced to the biases of Eurocentrism, which characterize much of the discourse and practice of international development, resulting in the marginalization of target populations of development programs in the global South (e.g., Peet

& Watts, 1996). As a departure from this traditional approach to development, interviewees of the FtF initiative collectively acknowledged the essential role that public consultation plays in development campaigns. In that regard, a key informant indicated:

At the end of the day, we need to ask ourselves what we have achieved as development donors if the very people we seek to empower are marginalized in the development process. That has been the reason behind our public consultation approach to this crucial project.

With the public consultation approach, interviewees were also cognizant of the culturally sensitive nature of the issue of women's empowerment in the patriarchal Liberian society. From that standpoint, implementing an ambitious program such as the FtF initiative, which sought to revisit the important but thorny subject of women's access to land without tact, often resulted in pushbacks. Thus, "gender segmentation" was adopted as part of the public consultation process, where men and women were consulted separately to elicit information and concerns about the gendered nature of farming and its attendant challenges to women's rights to land. The study found that besides using public consultation as an entry point into communities and getting the mandate of traditional leaders to operate in their jurisdictions, it provided grassroots knowledge about the potential challenges to any development program. As a key informant put it:

Traditional leaders are the most influential agents of development in communities. And recognizing their authorities is the first step in navigating the potential challenges to the development process. This is because they wield the final authority in creating the enabling environment for women's empowerment, including giving them significant access to land.

In the use of the public consultation approach, community radio also served as a tool for informing and educating women in rural Liberia on the M&CH program. The strategy also used community radio to galvanize support among stakeholders in the communities. This brought to

bear the critical need for public consultation with key stakeholders such as traditional authorities, opinion leaders, and to a more strategic extent, spouses of the key beneficiaries of the program, whose perspectives on the subject matter of maternal reproductive choice and utilization could significantly affect the campaign. In that regard, the communication specialists for the program explained how public consultation helped to navigate the expected pushbacks that stemmed from cultural perceptions about maternal reproductive health choices and utilization in rural Liberia.

Two key informants argued:

You cannot go anywhere as an outsider and expect positive reception when you do not gain entry into the community through the appropriate protocols. More so when the goal is to champion a culturally controversial issue such as maternal reproductive health, no matter its benefits.

In such an inflammatory environment, public consultation with people whose decisions are critical to the success or failure of the campaign is inevitable. In the case of women in rural Liberia, husbands wield so much power in sanctioning their wives' access to reproductive health. It was because of this that we adopted public consultation as a communication strategy.

The above observations are congruent with the perspective that global health issues, including maternal reproductive health, reflect the complex interplay of history, politics, geography, and culture (see, Whiteford & Vindrola-Padros, 2015). Traversing this complicated terrain also requires cultural sensitivity in mitigating the potential for miscommunication that negatively impacts relationships in healthcare situations while gaining access to individuals in a given culture (see, Williamson & Harrison, 2010; Siebert, 1992). Stakeholder endorsements through public consultation also call for rural outreach and mobilization through which women's land right could be promoted.

Rural outreach and mobilization. The LGSA program's focus on women in rural Liberia aimed at advocating for access to land to sustain their livelihoods, has rendered necessary the idea of rural outreach and mobilization as a key communication strategy in the development process. This communication strategy ostensibly was more participatory and more effective in getting the messages across to hard-to-reach parts of rural Liberia. This was made possible with the commitment of the gender and communication specialists of the LGSA program, through meetings with the chiefs and elders as a means of entry into selected communities. The advantage of this approach is that the "consent and the blessings create an atmosphere of cooperation from the entire community," a key participant explained.

The community outreach and mobilization strategy also created an atmosphere of dialogue between development practitioners of the LGSA program and the participating communities. This offered the former the opportunity to hear the perspectives of all stakeholders in the community about the perceived benefits of the program, as well as the potential challenges and how the grassroots stakeholders were willing to collectively help to solve them to sustain the project. The interviewees also indicated how the community outreach provided first-hand accounts of the community members' knowledge about the development program. A key informant justified the strategic benefits of this approach to the organization sponsoring the project in the excerpt below:

Yes, this crucial as far as the image of USAID is concerned, so that if you went back and did the project, that project will have more visibility and the people will know the name of the people who came, the organization which gave the money to sponsor that project and even the person who called that meeting with them.

The rural outreach and mobilization approach in creating awareness about the LGSA was thus expanded to involve "training of trainers." It enabled the communication specialists to

identify and recruit some leading members in rural communities who they considered to be early adopters of the development program and equipped them with behavior change techniques to encourage others to adopt and spread the message behind the program. This was complemented with the screening of documentaries on the impact that giving women the right to access and own land would have on the larger community. A key informant explained why a case study documentary on women's land rights initiative in Rwanda, a country that had experienced a protracted civil war just as Liberia, was a useful behavior change strategy:

We screened this Rwandan documentary to drive home the economic benefits that the larger society stands to gain when women inherit the land, own it, and farm on it. And we do this mindful of the controversial nature of gender and land in Liberia. But at the end of the day, we want our men to understand that giving women the right to own land does not diminish their manhood.

To some extent, the rural outreach and mobilization strategy is in sync with the community-driven development approach to poverty reduction that gives control of decisions and resources to marginalized groups to improve their economic security. That notwithstanding, there is abundant evidence about how the untargeted application of the CDD approach commonly bypasses women and the poor, and which renders the voices of marginalized women within the community less significant than those of men (World Bank, FAO, & IFAD, 2009). This validates the need for intensifying education on gender-sensitive development programs to equip women for their livelihood empowerment.

Rural outreach and mobilization also formed part of the strategies deployed under the FtF program to rally women in communities that benefited from the initiative throughout rural Liberia. This was to introduce the program to the beneficiaries and provide resource information on the initiative, and the potential benefits that would accrue to the women, considering the

statuses of the majority of the women as breadwinners of their households. The rural outreach and mobilization approach also sought to expose the women to opportunities they stood to gain as lead farmers, lead processors, as well as traders thereby enabling them to navigate constraints in the agricultural value chain to improve productivity and income.

As part of the rural outreach and mobilization strategy was to identify and train women leaders through the provision of technical assistance to equip them as lead farmers. These change agents were expected to transfer the basic skills they had acquired to other women within the community. As one of the informants indicated, the goal of the approach was to “get the women at the grassroots to feel part and parcel of the program in a manner that equips them to support the equitable growth of the agricultural sector.” This strategy fits into the mold of the local systems framework guiding USAID’s development programs to support sustainable development, in line with the global good practice of collective experience to ensure aid effectiveness. As a key informant put it:

Our rural outreach strategy was to get to the grassroots partners that this development program was meant for to get them on board, inform them about the initiative, let them know the role that they must play in sustaining it. Ultimately, the program's sustainability will be determined by the women's ability to produce desired outcomes over time, which will reflect in their improved livelihoods.

The inclusive nature of the rural outreach and mobilization strategy by USAID was to create broad-based awareness of its programs among local development actors. And as another informant added, it sought to "pay attention to the roles that grassroots actors play in the post-Ebola development process in Liberia and build their capacity to sustain the initiative." The strategy also created an atmosphere of participatory engagement between local actors (women in rural Liberia) and development experts implementing the FtF program to iron out related

concerns over women's rights to land its impact on sustaining their livelihoods under the initiative. In this vein, the interviewees indicated how the rural outreach strategy was a face-to-face opportunity to allay fears over the intricate land issue and its potential to truncate the gender-sensitive FtF program:

The success of Feed the Future was contingent on the availability of land in Liberia and women's access to it. That was why we thought of the rural outreach and mobilization strategy as an avenue to rope in traditional authorities and get them to understand the nationwide benefits of the program when women were granted access to land. I can tell you, in the nutshell, that it worked.

The rural outreach and mobilization strategy for including women in the implementation of the FtF program gives expression to the relevance of the gender dimensions of community-driven development. This, as Carnermark (2011) argued, explains why the priorities of poor people, who are targets of development projects, must be considered "if the program objective is to reduce poverty" (p.14). The rural outreach and mobilization strategy was supplemented with the gender-based capacity-building approach, which will be discussed next. This reinforced USAID's acknowledgment of the place of gender in international development as far as the livelihood empowerment of women in post-Ebola Liberia was concerned.

Rural outreach and mobilization was considered an equally important approach in sustaining the M&CH program. Its goal was to prioritize maternal and child health by emphasizing the need for regular access to the revamped health facilities in the various localities and promote regular visits to such facilities to ensure safe deliveries. The rural outreach offered an opportunity to educate women on the best practices of health maintenance through primary health education to women. The outreach was a collaboration with public health personnel recruited under the program to maintain regular visits and contacts with women in rural

communities that benefited from the program. Regarding the usefulness of this approach, a key informant explained in the excerpt below:

We recognized the essential need for sexual reproductive health in rural Liberia. And the fact that many in that demographic lack these services is concerning. So, the program served as a vehicle to map out communities in the various counties that required these services and helped us mobilize the women around service providers who would continually attend to them.

Like the other USAID-funded programs, the community outreach and mobilization strategy under the Maternal and Child Health component promoted a dialogic environment between healthcare service providers and their clients in rural communities. The goal was to deepen the relationship between service providers and their same-gender clients in an atmosphere of privacy and trust, where they could discuss and find solutions to sensitive concerns regarding their reproductive healthcare. As another key informant emphasized the relevance of this communication strategy in the extract below:

The goal was to expose our rural clients to maternal and child health education and encourage them to explore their sexual and reproductive health choices in an environment that respects their privacy and promotes their health.

Gender-based capacity building. This approach was another effective method for creating public awareness about the LGSA program. This approach was contingent on the disproportionate impact of the Ebola epidemic on women who constitute the backbone of agriculture in Liberia. Although the capacity-building process focused on equipping women to function beyond their traditional roles, their husbands were invited in the deliberations to get them to understand the critical roles that women play in national development. But implicit in this strategy was a ploy to douse the flame of resistance from men, who by custom, consider

attempts by women to assert their independence and demand their rights to as contempt of their authority as men. As a key participant put it:

We needed to place more attention on building the capacity of women beyond the home so that they can function in other spheres of society. When that is done, they can do things for themselves, speak out, and defend their roles and rights as responsible people in society. But we also realized that if we build the capacity of women only in the absence of the men, they will resist; some men will feel that it is an affront to them.

The recognition of the crucial role that women play in Liberian society, particularly in the agricultural sector, was obvious at the peak of the Ebola epidemic in the country. This, the interviewees argued, justified the need to rethink the role of women beyond the community to the national level, which also called for the need to revisit the issue of land rights in Liberia. The LGSA capacity-building process was thus replicated at the national level to include the Liberia Lands Authority, which superintends land administration, as well as women's task force on land and other groupings in the country. "We have a gendered training exclusively for women but like I told you, if you do the training outside of men, there will be problems. So sometimes, we do three days' capacity exclusively for women, and then we do the same thing—three days exclusively for men," a key informant explained.

Apart from the national reach of the gender-based capacity-building strategy, the interviewees emphasized the strategy's focus on equipping women at the community level in line with the LGSA program. The quest to empower rural women through capacity-building and give them a voice, a key participant intimated, was to develop their confidence to aspire to and play leadership roles in their communities. A follow-up strategy, which one of the key informants termed as the "Jehovah's Witnesses approach," was employed to gather women at the community levels, even meeting with them at the well or by the riverside to encourage them to

avail themselves of community leadership positions. A key informant noted how the strategy has elevated women into community leadership positions after four years of the program:

In many communities, there are now women that are taking leadership roles because of USAID intervention. This should tell you that there will be no way that land discussions in a town or a community will not involve a woman sectional chief or community leader.

In sum, the communication strategies deployed under the LGSA program such as the use of community-based traditional media, public consultation approach, rural outreach and mobilization, and gender-based capacity building, significantly promoted the program's focus on women's rights and access to land under the Liberia land reform regime. The next section will discuss how these strategies have helped to drive the implementation of the Feed the Future (FtF) agricultural initiative, which also depended on land as a critical resource for the livelihood empowerment of women in post-Ebola Liberia.

The gendered nature of the FtF program had in it an inherent capacity-building strategy to engage with rural Liberian women and get them to benefit from the agricultural value chain. This came with communication specialists' acknowledgment and emphasis on the critical role that women play in the country's agricultural sector, for which they needed to be supported. Capacity for women under the FtF program meant providing them with basic knowledge about best agricultural practices to improve yield, reduce post-harvest losses, and maximize their basic technical know-how to be able to recoup their investments along the agricultural value chain. A key informant explained how this was done:

Building their capacity entailed guiding research capabilities. In the process, we show how we appreciate their local knowledge, but also suggest how they can improve upon that by incorporating modern practices that would maximize results. Thus, at the end of the day, it is about a marriage between local knowledge and innovation.

Sustaining the capacity-building process also entailed the adoption of "training of trainers" sessions within the overarching strategy. This involved workshops to impart knowledge and skills through hands-on training to women leaders in agriculture, who in turn would transmit the skills and best practices acquired along the agricultural value chain to other women at the grassroots. This deliberate approach was to sustain the whole process, one informant recounted, "working along with the women in the communities and training them so that when we leave, they will then spread the skills they had acquired to others in the various communities."

The communication strategies for the FtF program in supporting equitable growth and improving nutritional status in post-Ebola Liberia were in line with the global FtF initiative's goal of "sustainably reducing poverty through regional and national programs" (see, USAID, n.d.). Under the M&CH program, capacity building was also considered key in the education and empowerment of women about maternal and their right to access it. As a key informant explained, capacity building was to "provide gender-sensitive training for women to recognize the challenges and opportunities that come with being women and endeavor to make informed choices on all facets of their health." This strategy also involved a conscious and deliberate attempt to equip women leaders in rural communities with maternal and child health, as well as reproductive healthcare skills, who would, in turn, impart them to others at the grassroots. A key informant explained the motive for this approach thus:

We wanted women to be the drivers of the program at the community level. This required that they acquired some knowledge about maternal and child health so they can self-manage both the program and their reproductive health as they recover from the lingering impact of the Ebola epidemic on their lives.

Addressing Research Question 2

This research question examined the communication strategies employed to create awareness about USAID's post-Ebola development campaign in Liberia between 2015 and 2019. The study found that the communication specialists for the three USAID-funded programs, namely: Land Government Support Activity, the Feed the Future initiative, and the Maternal and Child Health project, all adopted a unified set of communication approaches in line with USAID's local systems approach for supporting sustained development in its missions abroad. The goal for this overarching approach is to recognize and tap into local knowledge of development stakeholders.

To achieve this participatory culture, implementers of the USAID-sponsored programs abroad must incorporate local perspectives by paying attention to the voices of marginalized populations. They must also plan, design, implement, monitor, and evaluate interventions in tandem with the local beneficiaries (see, USAID Local Systems Framework, 2014). This implied the communication strategies for the three gender-sensitive USAID-sponsored programs in post-Ebola Liberia, based on the responses of the various communication specialists, actively engaged women at the grassroots. There were, however, some contradictory views from the leadership of women's groups regarding USAID's communication strategies. For example, two informants complained:

...it is about time USAID engaged with the leadership of the vulnerable women they are helping. They should sit with them, let them articulate their issues, and say this is what we want; this is what it should be. But the truth is, they (USAID) already have in mind what they wanted to do. They already have their development plans because they have the money and most of the time, what they do is confine your thinking to their thinking.

Look, we local CSOs representing women must survive, so we preach the kind of empowerment our women want, but they are not buying it. There are no clear local strategies; you cannot develop your local sustainable projects towards sustaining your ideas. So how can you have a project like that and say you are empowering us?

The Problem with USAID's Communication Strategies

Leaders of the women's groups did not discount the contributions of USAID to the cause of women in post-Ebola Liberia. What they advocated for was the need for the practitioners implementing the USAID-sponsored projects to adopt a more participatory approach where the “developed” could feel part of the development process. This legitimate concern by the women leaders also exposed the extent to which implementers of the USAID programs overlooked African traditional media as part of their communication strategies.

Adopting communication strategies such as community-based traditional media, public consultation approach, rural outreach and mobilization, and gender-based capacity building certainly did not help much. This was particularly so, when the focus and emphasis on radio as the center of the development campaign reflected nothing less than a modernization bias that sought to use this mass medium to ‘modernize’ the Third World. For instance, West & Fair (1993) examined development communication in Africa by observing the struggle over tradition and modernity through media. They concluded how the modernization paradigm considered the role of the mass media as not limited to creating a climate of social change but was itself development.

The modernization bias may have explained why the USAID project implementers overlooked traditional forms of communication in rural Liberia as integral to the ‘standard’ communication strategies. An attack on the modernization bias resulted in the culturalist

approach by African communication theorists who argued that real social change should start with communication with audiences through a variety of indigenous communication forms that were known and accepted by local people (e.g., Ugboajah, 1985; Bofo, 1988). This resulted in the birth of the concept of “oramedia,” using songs, drama, and marketplace gossip as forms of African traditional media that Ugboajah argued, “should be the first tactical move of development planners” (1972, p.95).

The case for “oramedia” as a social change strategy is similar to the concept of theater for development (TfD) in the 1960s, which continues to be used today as among alternative approach that focuses on participatory communication for social change. The legitimacy that TfD has gained as an important traditional form of communication renders its place inevitable in the development process. Kerr (2014) described TfD as not just as an approach but a movement that is “opposed to elitist models of communication and seeks to empower subaltern communities by using their own language and culture to strategize solutions to their own problems” (p.207). This explains why USAID’s bias against traditional forms of communication may have disadvantaged rural women in participating in a development process that sought to empower them.

Chapter Summary

This chapter assessed the communication strategies employed by the implementers of the USAID development programs to mitigate the impact that the Ebola epidemic had had on women in Liberia between 2015 and 2019. The findings revealed two observations. The first is that implementers of the three USAID development projects in post-Ebola Liberia deployed communication strategies that prioritized community-based traditional media, public consultation, rural outreach and mobilization, and gender-based capacity-building. Although the

intention was to promote participatory development, these communication strategies were driven by the extent to which USAID envisioned the role of mass media, for that matter community radio, in the development process in a way that aligns with modernization bias.

Scholars in communication for social change have critiqued the role of the mass media under the modernization paradigm. For example, Melkote and Steeves (2015) observed how Western models of development overvalued media technology as a solution for social problems elsewhere. They also argued how the question of selective exposure of audience to particular media messages influence audience members' preference for messages that may not be "pro-development" (p.249). This also explains how biases of the modernization paradigm impede the success of development programs in the Global South.

The second finding in this chapter is the extent to which the concept of participatory development functioned in theory more than it received practical expression in the USAID development process. Carragee and Frey (2012) observed that in participatory development, people, including marginalized individuals, groups, or communities, have voices. What they advocate for is the need for development researchers and practitioners to "hear and listen to those voices" (p.24).

My theory is that, discounting traditional forms of communication through which rural Liberian women can best express their lived experiences amounts to denying them a voice in the participatory development process. This aligns with Ata-Awaji's (2020) case for 'trado-modern' communication as a better communication strategy that employs both modern and African communication media, based on "their strength in awareness creation, advocacy and spread of innovation in the society" (p.38). The next chapter examines how gender was represented in the

design and implementation of USAID's communication strategies in the post-Ebola development process.

CHAPTER VII

GENDER CONUNDRUM IN DEVELOPMENT DISCOURSE AND PRACTICE IN POST-EBOLA LIBERIA

Development has been defined in the simplest term as a process of expanding equal freedoms for all people (Sen, 1999). From this context, many scholars believe that the elimination of barriers against women working in certain sectors or occupations could increase output by raising women's participation and labor productivity (Cuberes & Teignier-Baque, 2011). This validates the assumption that empowering women as economic, political, and social actors can change policy choices and make institutions more representative of a range of voices (Beaman et al., 2011). These views arose out of the global concern that "as citizens, women are lacking a voice, even if they are more visible" (Wilkins, 2016, p.2).

Having a voice, therefore, means having the capacity to speak up and be heard, as well as being present to shape and share in discussions, discourse, and decisions (World Bank, 2014). In this vein, development discourse serves as more than a set of phrases used to explain the world and its myriad problems (Wilkins, 2016, p.3). The challenges that women face in the discourse of global development, notwithstanding the crucial role that they play in it, explains why Sen (1999) sees "nothing as more important today in the political economy of development as an adequate recognition of political, economic, and social participation and leadership of women" (p.3). From this background, USAID's agreement with the call to empower women in international development makes the agency and voice of women more important than ever.

This chapter presents results of Research Question 3, which examines the extent to which gender was represented in the design and implementation of the communication strategies deployed by USAID in its post-Ebola development programs in Liberia between 2015 and 2019. Since access to land was a common denominator to the livelihood empowerment of women under the Land Governance Support Activity (LGSA) and the Feed the Future (FtF) initiative in post-Ebola Liberia, data collected on the two programs were analyzed thematically, using Braun and Clark's (2006) approach. The transcripts on the Maternal and Child Health (M&CH) program were also analyzed thematically but separately from the other two programs. The findings from each program are discussed respectively in the sections below:

Gender Representation under Land Governance Support Activity

The Land Governance Support Activity (LGSA), as discussed in Chapter VI, was created by USAID to support the Government of Liberia's land rights reform process. Inherent in this was a gender strategy that ensured that the processes and actual implementation of the LGSA project would address the existing gender inequalities that characterize access to land. In the nutshell, the LGSA project sought to create an enabling environment where men and women could benefit equally from access to and ownership of land in Liberia (see, LGSA Gender Strategy, 2015). Research Question 3 sought to explore how women were represented in the policy process of the USAID-funded project to address their challenges. The findings from in-depth interviews with LGSA specialists and leadership of women's organizations in Liberia are discussed below:

Recruiting men as champions of land rights. Although the overarching goal of the USAID project was to advocate for women's rights to land in Liberia, implementers of the

project were mindful of the delicate and characteristically controversial nature of the subject of land in the country. This is born out of the century-old tradition, rooted in customary laws and practices that consider women as the “property” of their husbands in Liberian society. Thus, in such a deeply conservative and patriarchal society, where women have no right to inherit or own land because of their statuses as “properties” themselves, the safest strategy for the LGSA project was to adopt a more diplomatic means, where men are recruited to act as champions of land rights for women. A key informant justified this approach with the explanation below:

Up till now, when you discuss women’s rights in certain parts of Liberia, the discussion gets emotional and is full of tension because, in many parts of the country, women cannot own land. Do you understand? Women cannot own land and women should not own land.

So going to these kinds of communities with a women’s land rights campaign, to say that women should own land, oftentimes we receive stiff opposition. Do you understand? This is the reality in many parts of Nimba, for example.

The customary justification for denying women their rights to inherit land in Liberian society is steeped in the belief that females would be married and taken away by their husbands. In that sense, giving them access to land as maidens amounts to giving their husbands the opportunity to appropriate the birthrights that are traditionally passed down to male children to maintain the might and the status of the patrilineal bloodline that the family is identified with. In other words, giving women the right to inherit land in the patriarchal system, when they themselves are potential property of their future husbands, implies ceding a family’s territory to another. A communication specialist of the LGSA project, who also identified as a native of one of the traditional communities of the study setting, provided a more in-depth explanation of the dynamics behind the customary law on land rights in the traditional Liberian society:

This is how it is: If the father dies, his property -- the land goes to his son. Why? Because the woman will be married and be moved to her husband's community. In this case, she cannot inherit land here because she becomes the property of her husband. You do not expect them to change this customary system overnight to accommodate your development policy, so we had to devise a strategy to respect that custom and also get them to understand what we bring to the negotiation table.

Many of the interviewees under the LGSA project expressed the personal discomforts that they had experienced with the use of men as champions of the land rights campaign on behalf of women at the grassroots in Liberia. The informants recounted how in trying to be professional without being judgmental of customs and traditions, they could not resist the temptation to be emotional about the harm that customary denial of land rights had done to women's livelihood empowerment in rural Liberia. One of the communication specialists on the LGSA project argued how, despite his belief in the positive aspects of customs and traditions in ensuring good governance, was struck by the persistent, overly conservative view of women as property of their husbands in Liberia. This, he added, worried him even when all attempts to use some local chiefs as advocates for land rights for women were opposed in many communities.

He added:

I always believe that most of our customs and traditions were meant for good governance. And I tell people that it is always selfish and bad people who take advantage of some gaps and lapses in our customary laws to disadvantage marginalized people. If women are property, then why aren't our kids, the male children that they produce for us, not considered our property? Why are our boys considered assets but our girls as property to their husbands when they marry?

Although the informants were dissatisfied with the impact that using men as champions had had on the campaign for women's land rights under the LGSA project, they considered that as the strategy that was worth experimenting with within a belligerent cultural setting that was

difficult to navigate. As one informant quipped, “when it comes to our tradition, we need to be careful how we go about it.” In that regard, the use of men as advocates for women’s rights to land under the LGSA project was non-negotiable at the outset, rather than empowering the latter by giving them the voice to champion their own cause using their lived experiences. The informant concluded his thought about working around tradition thus:

“...So in doing that, one of the strategies we put in place to address the foreseeable customary pushbacks to our campaign was to have more men who would serve as women’s land rights champions, to help us talk to other men in the rural communities to allow their daughters to access land, at least for livelihood.”

Gender integration strategy. This strategy was adopted by implementers of the USAID project to attempt to achieve gender representation in the design and implementation of the campaign on women’s rights to land in Liberia. Thus, the LGSA, in collaboration with the Liberia Lands Authority, organized a series of awareness-creation workshops and fora that emphasized full rights for all to address the gender dimension of land reform in the country. One informant explained how the collaboration between the two institutions culminated in the eventual establishment and strengthening of the gender unit of the Liberia Lands Authority to achieve gender integration in land reform in the country. This was considered as a criterion for development partners’ willingness to work with the government of Liberia in the land reform process. In appraising the gender integration strategy by the LGSA, a key informant in the Liberia Lands Authority made this observation:

For Liberia to have gender equality within the land sector, some of our international partners have decided to assist us because of the functional gender unit that the LGSA under the sponsorship of USAID helped to create within the Lands Authority to mainstream gender within the land sector. Because of this, we have had a lot of partners that have recognized the gender unit as a requirement for development assistance to us.

In terms of evidence, the gender integration approach was considered an enabler of gender representation in the design and implementation of the communication strategies used by the LGSA on behalf of USAID. This was because it offered the opportunity for the leadership of the various women's groups to be represented in the land reform process that resulted in the eventual passage of the Land Rights Act into law in Liberia in 2018. As one informant put it, "the gender integration strategy gave some level of representation to women's front to make some inputs in the passage of the Land Rights Act into law." Another informant representing the LGSA emphasized in a manner that appeared to project the significant impact that the gender integration strategy has had on women's agency:

I can say that the gender integration strategy has helped to project the voice of women quite remarkably. Even though there was no gender parity in the representation during policy deliberations that gave birth to the passage of the law, there was a strong women-led civil society organization that echoed the voice of women quite forcefully.

Of course, we are not saying that the gender integration strategy we have put in place was perfect. Far from that, but at least for the first time in the history of Liberia, women have quite sizable representation at the table of policymaking, even in the face of the entrenched system of patriarchy that characterizes the formal and informal sectors of this country. You will agree with me that development is a process, so is the strategy to achieve the level of development that you are looking for, maybe a decade from now.

There were contrary views from the leadership of women's organizations regarding the qualitative representation of women under the gender integration strategy championed by USAID in the land reform process. From the standpoint of this group of informants, the strategy appeared to ensure the ceremonial representation of women in the land reform process rather than making significant policy contributions to the process. The experiences of informants who represented the women's constituency in the land reform process, based on which they disputed

the gender integration process, are coded under the theme of unequal gender representation, which will be discussed in the next section.

Unequal gender representation. Despite the numerical representation of women in policy deliberations on the land reform process in Liberia, women did not have equal voice. Majority of the informants who represented the women's constituency recounted the harrowing experiences they had, even in the hands of some high-standing male counterparts. Such ordeals appear to reinforce the perception about women as the property of their husbands that permeates all facets of Liberian society. In the view of one informant, "it appears as though advocating for women's inclusion in the land rights process is a sin that must be punished." This was an explanation for the attacks that on women leaders who challenge the customs that marginalize women in society often receive.

Another informant recalled how a Liberian lawmaker disrupted an ongoing presentation she was making on behalf of the Women's Land Rights Taskforce before the passage of the Land Rights Bill in 2018. The informant explained how the lawmaker shouted at the women to sit down as he did not understand why women were advocating for the rights to own property when they knew they were themselves their husbands' properties. She quickly asked (me) the interviewer to authenticate the incident from a newspaper publication, whose edition and date of publication she had provided. The informant admitted how under the burgeoning Land Rights Law, women in Liberia are gradually able to own land. That said, the informer warned against dousing the flame of advocacy too soon. In response to the question on women's leadership in policy-decisions after the passage of the Land Rights Law, the informant intimated:

We are still struggling to get to that level. For me, I like to be realistic. We are making strides, but we are not there yet. We are still pushing because, in terms of the

implementation and interpretation of the Land Rights Act, we have not got there yet. Let me repeat, we are not there yet until people who are supposed to make laws to protect us first come to the realization that women are not property.

That unequal gender representation persists in Liberia, even after the passage of the Land Rights Act in 2018, is not an understatement. While the majority of the informants representing the women's rights groups acknowledged the role of the LGSA in that regard, they also advocated for a true representation for women in leadership and at policy levels on land governance in Liberia. For example, one informant observed that having just 56 women out of 341 officials at the Liberian Lands Authority was highly disproportionate. Consigning almost all women to lower administrative positions versus their male counterparts in technical and managerial positions, validates perceptions of the unequal gender representation in the system. An informant advised, therefore, that:

In order to be an example, to go out into the counties and attempt to mainstream gender within the land sector and make sure that women's land rights are adhered to, it must start from an entity that oversees land governance in the country.

The above observation is not just an indictment of the LGSA for championing the cause of women in Liberia and doing less to enhance the numerical representation of the women that the agency sought to empower, in decision-making. It also calls to question the need to address the issue of the unequal representation of women in the LGSA's quest to promote the overarching goal of the USAID to empower women in post-Ebola Liberia. Besides the inequality in gender representation in the land governance process, elitism played a contributory role in deciding who represented women's interests in the advocacy process.

Elitist representation of women. This theme represents the general concerns expressed by a cross-section of the study participants on the virtual exclusion of women at the grassroots in the decision-making process. While the respondents acknowledged the unequal representation of women across the LGSA process, most of the female informants also blamed the challenges they faced as partly the making of women. The informants registered displeasure about the way elitism has weakened the fronts of many women's organizations that should be championing the cause of marginalized women in Liberia. This observation questions the commitment of some women leaders to fighting for a cause they believe would empower women in an androcentric environment that reduces women to properties that could be bought through payment of dowries on their heads.

The implicit indifference that characterizes the elitism of some of the women's leaders, the participants assumed, has weakened the fight against the campaign for land rights for women as stipulated in the new law. As one participant put it, "when division sets in because some of the women think they are more educated than others, they start picking among women and forget about what is at stake in the fight for women's right to land in Liberia." This was described by another respondent as a "betrayal of womanhood" and a neglect of the larger constituency of marginalized women in Liberia by their educated sisters they expected to give them a voice.

These grievances were summed up by two dejected informants in the excerpts below:

Because we speak, some people feel that it is not important for women to become representatives. And so already remind us about the fact that we are properties who cannot fight for properties. Then instead of uniting ourselves as women, we discriminate amongst ourselves between who is educated and who is not educated...and when women are in power, they overlook the uneducated women.

I am not afraid to say it; some of our challenges are caused by us. Some of our women leaders think “once I am educated, what am I going to do with the one who is not educated?” So, when we say ‘women’, they go there and say, ‘some women.’ It means that because you are not educated, you don’t have anything, so the problem is amongst us as women in Liberia.

The concerns by these disgruntled participants regarding the marginalization of grassroots women by some of their “educated sisters” appeared to absolve officials of the LGSA project. In a sense, it acquits them of their perceived neglect of rural Liberian women, in terms of their active involvement in the design of the communication strategies to implement the USAID-funded project to enhance their livelihoods. The discrimination that the so-called elitism has created among some women civil society groups in Liberia explains the problem of elite capture of development programs that is a common element in attempting to ensure participation (Lund & Saito-Jensen, 2013).

The participants believe that women’s empowerment must start with women’s leadership realizing their privilege as a responsibility to represent the needs of all women. They decried the culture in the Liberian community, where the leadership of women’s groups prefers to delegate instead of reaching out directly to women at the grassroots whose concerns and aspirations they claim to champion. One of the key participants called for women leaders to understand why it is often said that “charity begins from the home.” With that, they argued how, before appealing to international development partners to support women in Liberia, there was the need for women to support themselves first. A key informant reiterated thus:

...USAID needs to support women organizations whose leadership evolves from the community and therefore can go down to our rural women to speak at their level. You know, when you go to Bong County and speak Kpele, they see it as an opportunity to say, “Yes, that’s my Kpele daughter, that’s my sister.” And when you go deep down to

Margibi County, they say, “that is our own sister there.” When they realize that you understand their problem, they see you as their direct representative.

Women as development beneficiaries. The long-held perception about women as beneficiaries of development in the global South continues to gain traction in development discourse and practice. Even when the informants on the LGSA project sounded “inclusive” in terms of their involvement of women in the discourses surrounding land governance in post-Ebola Liberia, their approach was less participatory in practice. For instance, spontaneous refrains such as “helping them” (in reference to Liberian women) and “advocating for their rights to own land” to enhance “their livelihoods,” appeared to limit the agency of women and portray them as beneficiaries of development instead of as stakeholders of the development process.

On the other hand, the informants’ constant reference to the “vulnerability” of rural women in Liberia due to “their inability to own land,” they argued, justified the need to speak for this group of vulnerable women. As one informant noted, the communication strategy for the LGSA program was to “have more women participating in the process because this is a development project that is targeted at them.” In that regard, they believed that “when you train a woman, you train the nation.” But in a situation where the team of experts was predominantly male and the orientation was to “bring development to rural women who are the focus of the program,” it means nothing more than placing women at the receiving end of development. The excerpt below justified the perception:

At the heart of the LGSA program is the issue of women’s empowerment in Liberia. And just as many development programs are gender-focused, the primary beneficiaries of this initiative are women who feed the country yet cannot own land. So the woman farmer in Liberia, in particular, is the number one target of this development program.

Concerns by women leaders on their exclusion from the implementation of the LGSA program were crucial. The informants expressed dissatisfaction about the marginalization of the leadership of the very women for whom the LGSA initiative was meant for. “It might interest you to know that although implementers of the LGSA know we are a strong CSO representing women in Liberia, our voices do not matter to them that much in the implementation process of policies targeted at those we represent,” a key informant representing the women’s leadership complained. This accusation was partially admitted to by the development specialists implementing the LGSA program. An informant on the LGSA project attributed the perceived exclusion of some local women leaders to a conscious effort on the part of the LGSA program to remain participatory but apolitical. Another key informant added:

We acknowledge that there is a need for strong advocacy on the land governance front. And we also accept that we need to increase the awareness to get more women at the local level involved in the process as their inclusion is key to the whole process. That said, we needed a kind of participation that at the end of the day, gets the women to benefit meaningfully from the development project packaged for them.

The above excerpts on women’s agency in the LGSA development process in post-Ebola Liberia support the usual narrative in the sphere of international development that frames women in the developing world as the primary focus and beneficiaries of development programs while failing to fully engage them. The next section discusses the themes related to gender representation under the Feed the Future initiative.

The Place of Gender in the Feed the Future Initiative

This section analyzes the results of the representation of gender in the design and implementation of the FtF initiative in Liberia between 2015 and 2019. As discussed in chapter

VI, the gender dimension of the FtF initiative focused on equipping women, who are the backbone of Liberia's agriculture, to improve yields that would enhance food security in Liberia and correspondingly reduce poverty among women farmers. The findings from the role that women played in the strategic implementation of the initiative are thematically discussed as follows:

Agribusiness as a man's domain. The historical gendering of land in Liberian society has served as a framework through which the FtF initiative prioritized men by default as champions of agribusiness. In other words, the disproportionate representation of women in the agribusiness sector under the FtF initiative, although they constitute the proverbial backbone of Liberia's agriculture, reinforces agribusiness as the preserve of men. As one informant representing the leaders of women groups put it, "they always praise women for feeding the country, but when it comes to modernizing agriculture, men are handpicked and resourced to achieve that goal." This observation appeared to reflect the FtF program's departure from its primary objective to transform the status of smallholder women farmers in the developing world. In a critical appraisal of women's role in transforming the country's agriculture under the FtF initiative, another key informant has this to say:

It is one thing to claim that you are rolling out a program to empower women in agriculture, and another thing to see how in reality, women are not in the driving seat of the agribusiness process. When you look carefully at the way the program was implemented, women in Liberia are still farming predominantly at the subsistence level.

The informants bemoaned the extent to which the good intention behind the FtF initiative to transform agriculture in Liberia to empower women virtually ends up empowering male farmers more. They emphasized how the running of many of the FtF micro-projects in rural

communities ended up being overseen by male farmers, thereby giving them a resource advantage over women farmers. This alleged situation at the grassroots amounts to a situation where male farmers appear to be “holding in trust” the resources for the livelihood empowerment of women without the latter getting empowered. The implicit assumption is that despite the initiative’s focus on women, its implementation has remained gendered in favor of male farmers to the exclusion of women:

Yes, rural women have benefitted from the FtF program somehow. But when you want to sustain an initiative like this without practically involving those it is meant for, you reinforce the gender status quo that disadvantages women.

If you think rural women farmers are not ready to maximize the resources at their disposal, train them some more until they are ready. You don’t empower people by putting the tools for their empowerment in the hands of those who continually suppress.

Elitist representation of women. This theme further discusses the perspectives shared by the leaders of women’s groups on the representation of women at the grassroots in the design and implementation of the FtF program. It extends the argument about the marginalization of rural women in the very development program that prioritized their livelihood empowerment. And just like the elitism that characterized the LGSA program, the informants also blamed the FtF project implementers for creating undue opportunities for a few men and women who were relatively successful agribusiness people, to hijack a program that ostensibly was meant to empower rural women farmers for shared prosperity. This shows a clear case of misplaced priority in the implementation of a development project that is disconnected from its target beneficiaries. In emphasizing their grievance, a key informant argued:

When it comes to real representation of gender regarding access to resources under the Feed the Future program, I am sorry to say it does not exist. Talking about making agriculture an attractive business in Liberia is a fantastic initiative. But at the end of the day, let us find out who the beneficiaries of the initiative were.

Again, when you handpick a few women who were already small business owners and give them more opportunities, and later use their success stories to represent the entire population of women farmers in Liberia, what have you achieved?

The elitism that characterized the unequal representation of women in the FtF program, and the way it gave voice and access to resources to a “few privileged” women who could afford to grow their businesses, was criticized. According to one informant, that raised questions about the implementation of the program in Liberia. This, implicitly, is an indictment of the implementers of the FtF initiative in Liberia, which calls for a thorough evaluation of the program and its sustainability in ensuring sustainable agriculture in that country. The informants expressed concerns about the need to streamline the implementation of development programs to provide equal opportunities to all stakeholders at the agricultural value chain in Liberia. As one key participant noted:

Liberia must be resourced to feed herself. But if we need to feed ourselves into the future, we cannot overlook women who produce the bulk of the food crops that we eat. So yes, when you create the environment for agribusiness in Liberia, those who are already in the sector could benefit more. But the system must be transparent so that rural farmers, particularly women, are not deprived of the opportunity to benefit from the fruits of their labor.

The above argument implies that framing agriculture as a business entails having the technical know-how to be able to operate effectively across the agricultural value chain, which requires some level of literacy. This, the informants observed, has created a system of

discrimination against rural women farmers regarding having a voice in the FtF program. From a more critical perspective, a key informant described the elitism that characterized the implementation of the initiative as a strategy to “hype the global success of the Feed the Future program and make it look like the majority of rural women in Liberia have been empowered.” In addition to the ‘ceiling of elitism’ that has limited rural women’s access to the FTF implementation process is the challenge of unequal gender representation which will be discussed next.

Unequal gender representation. The inequality that characterized the disproportionate gender representation in the core investment area of the FtF initiative was a major concern throughout the interviews. For instance, the women’s leaders observed how the ‘change agent model’ of the FtF initiative in Liberia, which ostensibly focused on transforming women into lead farmers and processors, ended up creating more agribusiness men than women. The unequal gender representation is also reflected in the androcentric nature of the resource team implementing the FtF program, which interpretively reinforces the perception of agribusiness as a preserve for men. This reality has the potential to create a sense of entitlement among men beneficiaries, even when the program’s focus has been to uplift women farmers in rural communities. As one informant noted:

There is no denying that the Feed the Future project has improved the Liberian agricultural sector. What is left to be seen is whether it has changed the statuses of women farmers in rural Liberia beyond their current peasant conditions.

When a complete evaluation is done, the outcome will be an emphatic no! But that does not mean that the program has failed. If you ask for my view on it, I will tell you that it just was not implemented equitably to benefit both men and women farmers.

Besides the marginalization that rural women faced regarding access to resources, the informants expressed indignation about the patronizing justification for the unequal gender representation. A key informant shared the view that “When women are constantly made to believe that having their husbands or close male relatives represent them is okay, it limits their sense of independence.” In that regard, it is legitimate to question the extent to which gender inequality is “normalized” if it benefits those already empowered. This validates the arguments of women leaders who constituted a section of the interviewees for this project, who strongly advocated for “a voice from women for women” who have too long been silenced in the discourses of development programs that affect their lives.

How can you “feed the future” when you starve the one who tills the soil, grows, and harvests the food crops that are supposed to feed the country? And how can you mute the voice of the one you are trying to empower? You know, women’s empowerment starts with true representation for women.

The case for equality in gender representation is emphasized by development stakeholders, who argue how amplifying the voices of women and increasing their agency can yield broad development dividends for society (e.g., World Bank, 20114). In other words, a sustainable path toward ending poverty and promoting shared prosperity involves creating an inclusive society not only in terms of economic welfare but also in relation to voice and agency for all people and groups (World Bank, 2013). Despite acknowledging the unequal representation of women in the FtF activity, implementers of the program attributed the problem partly to the reluctance of the part of women to lead when offered the opportunity.

Women’s reluctance to lead. The perceived reluctance on the part of women to lead the implementation of FtF activities at the community levels featured prominently throughout the

interviews. For example, a key informant indicated how the ratio of beneficiaries of the FtF initiative largely favored women in rural Liberia, in terms of farming cooperatives and access to resources. They, however, admitted that men dominated the leadership positions in most of the farmer groups at the grassroots, a situation they attributed to the cultural orientation that constrains the role of women, and the latter's hesitancy to accept leadership positions when proposed to them. A key informant explained:

During the implementation process, women were in the secondary role, more as housewives, you know, than as the heads of the cooperative groups. There were exclusively segregated communities where women led the process, but they were few. I will be very straight with you, the reason for their unwillingness to lead was because most of the women groups we worked with were headed by older women who were not very literate.

In addition to culture and illiteracy as factors accounting for women's reluctance to lead the development process is the disincentive that agriculture offers the younger generation of women in Liberia. The informants lamented how this drift from farming as a business has created a vacuum that deepens the gender inequality in the program implementation. In their collective view, project management, whether co-investment or purely donor-funded, requires some management skills if it should be run by those it is meant for. "Unfortunately, most of the farmer groups do not have basic education and so there is little you can do to beef up their capacity," one participant said. Another informant added:

When you have young females coming out of high school or the universities taking over these groups, they can be trained to manage projects in the communities, because they will have the capacity. Therefore, the next generation of women leaders needs to be encouraged to get involved in agriculture, agricultural processing, and agricultural marketing and help to develop the sector for their livelihoods.

The arguments advanced by the FtF program implementers to explain the leadership gap within the rural women's circle appeared valid. However, these were contested by the participants representing the leadership of women's civil society organizations (CSOs), who justified why their advocacy on behalf of rural women is critical in the decision-making process. This dovetails in the theme of gender integration as a stakeholder approach to address the bottlenecks surrounding women's involvement in the development process, which will be discussed next.

Gender integration strategy. The theme of gender integration in the implementation of the FtF initiative emphasizes the advocacy for active representation for rural women across the agricultural value chain. What leadership of the women's groups demanded was a representative quota for women of the various farmer groups. This, the informants intimated, would help to streamline the system, and ensure that women elected on leadership positions would guard the interests of women farmers in the allocation of resources based on gender at the community level. The demand for a gender-based quota system in the implementation of the FtF initiative would mean that women farmers would benefit equally from the 'change agent' model under the program. In that regard, a significant proportion would have the opportunity to play important roles as lead farmers and leader processors, as well as benefit from the resource allocations that would accrue to those roles. As one informant stated:

Women farmers also deserve to be leaders in agribusiness in Liberia. They also deserve to have equal access to agro-processing machinery, produce on a commercial basis, and add value to their produce. That is why we say give us a quota so that we can have an equal voice in the planning and implementation of the Feed the Future program.

The clarion call for gender integration to have practical expression in the implementation process was considered by the FtF officials as an integral part of the program. As one informant

indicated, “Feed the Future was borne out of the quest to transform the conditions of women farmers in Liberia.” This translated in the significant 56% of beneficiaries as women, compared to 44% men (Personal Communication, 2019). What the leadership of the women groups demanded, in their call for gender integration in the context of the FtF program implementation, was a quota system that would give a stronger voice to women in the management process. One informant asserted:

There should be a meaningful gender quota that would empower those who represent women farmers to articulate their voices as strongly as possible. We are in an era of quota when it comes to gender equality on all fronts. So, giving women a fair quota in this program would have significantly reduced the barriers that women face to fully participate in the implementation process.

The results from the interviews pointed to the disproportionate representation of women in the implementation of the Feed the Future program, although it sought to empower women farmers in post-Ebola Liberia. This explains Mohanty’s (2002) observation that despite advocacy for quotas of women on committees of development programs, much depends on the goodwill of the male-dominated leadership of such development programs. The next section of this chapter will discuss results from interviews regarding the representation of women in the implementation of the Maternal and Child Health program in post-Ebola Liberia.

Gender Representation under Maternal and Child Health Program

The issue of gender as a key determinant of health (Hawkes & Buse, 2013) has generated increasing funding for global health in the developing world, where women are 14 times likely to die during childbirth (see, UNFPA, 2016). The significant impact of Ebola on the 75% surge in maternal mortality in Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia (see, Mullan, 2015) culminated in the Maternal and Child Health program in the affected countries. This section presents the findings

on the participatory nature of the USAID-funded program, and how gender was represented in the implementation process in post-Ebola Liberia. The coded data will be discussed under dominant themes below.

Women as household health educators. The gendered nature of healthcare in the Liberian society significantly influenced the feminization of the Maternal and Child Health (M&CH) program in that country. This reflected in the participatory design and implementation of the program, where the place of women as health educators, right from the household to the larger community, was key. Thus, implementers of the M&CH program identified the strategic need to include women—both at the local community and at the national levels—in the health intervention process. As the informants argued, women formed an integral part of the health intervention in post-Ebola Liberia due to the significant roles they have played in creating awareness about the Ebola epidemic. A key informant explained the reason for the inclusion of rural women in the design and implementation process thus:

In those communities that we worked, the role of the woman is traditional. Although the Liberian society is a male-dominated one, women functionally control the home. During the crisis, they played a prominent role because they had to organize around families, add the responsibilities of their deceased husbands, and communicate prevention messages to the family and the larger community in the fight against Ebola. And we thought that if their efforts could help during the epidemic, they certainly would be critical in the post-Ebola Maternal and Child Health intervention.

The study found how involvement of rural women in the M&CH intervention, albeit less actively at the design level, created a sense of ownership in the process. As one informant noted, “we were mindful of the fact that the success or failure of this program depended on the extent to which we involved the rural women that we sought to reach. That way, they would appreciate its relevance when they were involved in the process.” This corroborates extant research studies

suggesting that health communication programs tend to be more successful if they are designed in concert with intended beneficiaries and stakeholders (Neuhauser, Syme, & Kreps, 2014). The informants' alleged inclusion of rural women in the design and implementation of the communication strategies of the M&CH program was confirmed in interviews with rural women in Liberia. One woman participant said:

They visited us to inform us about the program that the American government has sent to help us to fully recover from the health effects of Ebola. At other times, they invited some of the women from the community to represent us in Monrovia.

After all these, they made regular visits in the company of other midwives to educate us on our health and provided us with healthcare facilities to improve our health and those of our children.

Women's affairs fora. Implementers of the M&CH program also recognized the need for cultural sensitivity in global health interventions. The program considered the gender determinants of health and the impact that other socio-cultural factors could have on health delivery. A female-led intervention was devised to protect the gender space and ensure candid interactions between rural women and their expert female counterparts on issues of maternal and child health. This was strategic and necessary, according to one of the key implementers of the program, who indicated how it sought to “deliberately create an atmosphere of confidentiality, where certain issues about women's health could best be explored in women's circles.” This aligns with the perspective shared by women leaders in a UN Women conference in Chile in 2012, (cited in Jarroud, 2015) who argued that:

Women's participation in decision-making is highly beneficial and their role in designing and applying public policies has a positive impact on people's lives...where change cannot continue to be the sole responsibility of civil society groups that defend the rights of women but requires action by the authorities and those in power — both men and women.

The excerpt above reinforces the critical need for gender equity in the design and implementation of international development programs, particularly when such programs affect women significantly. This further validates the survivors-as-champions campaign strategy deployed by implementers in the design and the implementation of the M&CH program, which will be discussed next.

Survivors-as-champions approach. This was another innovative communication strategy employed by implementers of the M&CH intervention to fully incorporate the voices of women in the design and implementation of health messages. Women survivors of the Ebola disease were recruited as “champions” to share their experiences on the impact of the virus on their reproductive health and confirm the benefits that patronage of the M&CH care would bring to women and their children. These survivor stories were supplemented by accounts of other public health personnel implementing the program, using case studies from other countries to support the need for rural women to embrace the campaign. These narratives by women’s health champions to the women’s constituency in post-Ebola Liberia were seen as effective in creating awareness about the campaign. Two participants affirmed respectively:

Using women survivors of the deadly Ebola virus disease to narrate their harrowing experiences to other women made their accounts more believable. Secondly, telling them about the importance of accessing maternal and child healthcare, which of course was free, would certainly elicit significant responses...and I can tell you on authority that the approach was highly successful.

We also thought that reinforcing the benefits of maternal and child healthcare from the perspective of healthcare professionals was also crucial. The reason being that they would see the critical need for this intervention in the qualitative improvement in their health and the health of their children.

Studies into the narrative-based approach in health communication interventions have shown how powerful it is in communicating health information and influencing audiences (e.g., Thompson & Kreuter, 2014; Green & Brock, 2012). Others have reinforced its effectiveness in providing social support through para-social relationships between audience and storyteller, and the higher likelihood of the information to be shared with others (Larkey & Hecht, 2012). These findings help explain why this approach was not only an effective means of gender representation but has helped to strengthen other communication strategies in the design and implementation of the M&CH campaign in post-Ebola Liberia.

Addressing Research Question 3

Research Question 3 examined how gender was represented in the design and implementation of the communication strategies deployed by USAID between 2015 and 2019. This question is important in giving expression to participatory development, which advocates for the rights of stakeholders to “influence and share control over development initiatives, decisions, and resources that affect them” (World Bank, 1994, p.6). The place of women has become central in international development as many development programs tend to focus on women’s empowerment. However, “development has failed to resolve gender disparities on a global scale” (Wilkins, 2016, p.1), resulting in the marginalization of women in the participatory process (Guijt & Shah, 1998).

It is critical, therefore, that “bringing a gender perspective to bear on the practice of participation in development must assist in identifying strategies for amplifying voice and access to decision-making of those who tend to be marginalized or excluded by mainstream development initiatives” (Cornwall, 2003, p.1326). This perspective strengthens the question as

to how gender was represented in the design and implementation of the three development activities, namely: the LGSA; the FtF, and the MCH program between the period under study.

The overarching response to Research Question 3 is based on findings from the analyses of data which suggest that gender representation under the LGSA and FtF interventions were generally inadequate and more of rhetoric than practice. The findings reflected dominant issues such as the unequal gender representation of women, and the elitist nature of those who represented the constituency of women in the leadership of the two development programs. The issue of women's reluctance to lead was also used by program implementers as justification for the gender inequalities that characterized leadership of the two development programs. It is also interesting how this contrasts with the so-called goal of empowering women as lead farmers under the FtF initiative. These findings are also linked to the dominant perceptions about land governance and agribusiness as the preserve of men in Liberian society.

Unlike the LGSA and FtF development programs, the communication strategies for the M&CH intervention were female-centered in design and implementation. This showed in the focus on women as household health educators, adoption of women's affairs fora to discuss pertinent issues related to women's health, and the use of survivors-as-champions approach. The overarching goal of these health communication strategies has been to give relevance to the need of maternal and child health education among rural women in post-Ebola Liberia.

Chapter Summary

This chapter examined the extent to which gender was represented in the design and implementation of communication strategies to promote the three gender-sensitive USAID-funded development programs in post-Ebola Liberia between 2015 and 2019. The results

revealed the androcentric approach in the implementation of the LGSA and the FtF programs versus the M&CH intervention. The underrepresentation of women in the development process validates Boserup's (1970) view of the marginalization of women in agricultural production in sub-Saharan Africa. This strengthens the collective perspective of WID advocates who argue for an end to the representation of women as passive recipients of welfare programs but rather as active contributors to economic development (e.g., Tinker, 1990; Miller & Razavi, 1995).

To realize the above call for women's active role in the development process necessitated the 'efficiency approach' within the WID framework to promote women's economic contributions to development planning and projects in the Global South (Sarker, 2006). This, to a large extent, continues to remain a rhetoric in development discourse and practice in sub-Saharan Africa. The next chapter evaluates how the data collected from focus group discussions point to participatory empowerment of women in post-Ebola Liberia exhibits modernization characteristics from the bottom-up.

CHAPTER VIII

PARTICIPATORY EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN POST-EBOLA LIBERIA THROUGH ‘MANUFACTURED CONSENT’

This chapter presents the results of focus group discussions regarding USAID’s communication strategies for enhancing grassroots women’s participation and empowerment in the post-Ebola development process in Liberia. The focus groups sought to examine the perspectives of participants on the strategies. This was based on the diversity of opinions on the subject matter of participation and empowerment in the context of the gender dimensions and the power dynamics that characterized the discourse and practice of development. Focus groups are appropriate for this analysis due to their usefulness in creating a collaborative process of meaning construction and the cultural performance of communication, as discussed in the methods chapter.

Specifically, data from the focus group discussions addressed RQ4: “How did USAID’s communication strategies enhance women’s participation and empowerment in the development process in post-Ebola Liberia?” As discussed in Chapter IV, the data collected through this method to assess the participatory empowerment of women under the USAID development programs were analyzed thematically, using Fereday and Muir-Cochrane’s (2006) lead. The results from the six focus group discussions suggest that participants understood the concept of empowerment as implementation of development projects; grassroots women’s representation; capacity building for women; giving women a voice; and livelihood empowerment against poverty.

The data collected for answering RQ4 are analyzed in two parts. The first involves the presentation of results around the dominant themes under each of the three USAID-funded development interventions in post-Ebola Liberia. These are examined epistemologically, through interpretative analysis of the data to assess the extent to which the participants felt they had been involved and empowered as stakeholders in the development process. Each of the thematic analysis is supported with excerpts that are quoted verbatim and help to represent the overarching perspectives shared by the participants in response to the research question under investigation.

The second part of the presentation of data employs a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of the same set of data. The goal of this approach is to understand the processes of discursive construction and their social consequences (see, Willig, 2014). This examines the way institutional and corporate discourses characterize power relations in society, in ways that obscure power inequalities in social policy decision-making (Wodak, 1996; Fairclough, 1995). The CDA approach will situate the analysis on the lived experiences, social practices, and cultural representations, from the perspective of Winter (2014), to explain how power and difference determined the agency of rural women in the post-Ebola development process. The next section thus presents a thematic analysis of the results, as earlier indicated in the formats above, under the three respective USAID-funded interventions as follows.

Participatory Empowerment of Women under LGSA

Women's rights to land in patriarchal Liberia—whether by inheritance or purchase—serve as the key to their livelihood empowerment against poverty. Thus, the recognition of this conundrum and its adverse impact on women in the country's economy necessitated the introduction of the LGSA program. The latter's role in unlocking the potential of women in the

agricultural sector explains its overarching influence on the other USAID interventions to ensure the socio-economic empowerment of women in post-Ebola Liberia. Evaluating the overall impact of the LGSA program on grassroots women requires investigating how the communication strategies deployed by the program implementers enhanced women's participation and empowerment in the development process in post-Ebola Liberia. Participants' experiences on their inclusion in the LGSA implementation process, and how that necessitated in their sense of empowerment as grassroots stakeholders, are discussed next.

Development projects implementation. Among the development priorities in grassroots communities is the provision of physical infrastructures with resources that qualitatively affect the lives of target audiences. This perspective is not far from those shared by participants in the focus group discussions with reference to the LGSA activity. The participants overwhelmingly confirmed the bottlenecks associated with women's rights to land in the traditional Liberian society, despite government's efforts at relieving the socio-economic impacts on women farmers. The participants thus understood the singular goal of the LGSA activity as an intervention under the auspices of the USAID in actualizing, as one of them put it, "our rights to land as women in contributing to the development of our families, community, and the country."

The above excerpt explains the widespread significance of the LGSA in Liberia and by extension, its success in creating and sustaining awareness among rural women on land and their rights to it. This, as indicated in an interview with one LGSA official in Chapter VII of this dissertation, LGSA "succeeded in getting grassroots women to not only know their rights to land, but also reconsider land as a critical resource for their sustainable livelihoods." It stemmed from the perceived regular interface with the LGSA officials and their stakeholders such that the majority of the participants in the focus groups considered themselves "well involved" as

development stakeholders. For instance, one participant indicated how workshops organized by the LGSA project equipped her as a widow and a farmer after the Ebola epidemic:

I was among one of the women from my community who attended a three-day workshop organized by LGSA that asked us how we thought the land rights issues could be tackled. This workshop also invited our men counterparts, who are chiefs and community elders, to take part in it, knowing that when they understood the importance of giving women land, the whole society benefits.

After these workshops, the LGSA people paid follow-up visits to meet with the chief, elders, and our other males in the various communities to find out how they thought about helping to empower their wives and daughters who are farmers. Based on that, we have women groups communities who have access to lands to grow cash crops.

The participants believed that the incorporation of the collective views at the LGSA workshops could have contributed to the program officials' breakthrough in getting women access to land at the community levels. This reinforced the implicit assumption about their involvement as stakeholders in the LGSA project's implementation process. Others explained how the stipends they had received as participants in the various LGSA workshops augmented the resources given them to expand their farms. This was particularly important after some participants intimated that the post-LGSA workshops and subsequent community visits by program officials had improved their access to farmlands. In that sense, it justifies participants' view of empowerment as the implementation of development programs that affect their lives qualitatively.

In other words, some of the participants construed how their roles as "champions" and testimonial-based partners with LGSA program implementers to spread the message of women's rights to land in their communities constituted their active involvement in the implementation

process. From one participant's experience, she did not only benefit from the LGSA workshops by sharing her experiences about her land rights being denied for so long. She added how the advocacy and negotiation skills she had acquired from the various workshops she had participated in offered her legal aid to press for her legitimate rights to inheritance: She explained:

When our father died, the family elders asked our second born to take over our late father's responsibility as custom demands. This also meant taking over all the lands that our father had left behind. That has been the case for seven years until I attended workshops organized by LGSA on why women should own land. I learned about how to go about demanding for my share of our father's land.

With the help of legal aid, our family elders agreed for the matter to be settled out of court. Finally, last year, the elders advised our brother to let them share the land among us for peace to prevail. Because of this, me and my two other sisters now have been given some portion of our father's land as inheritance.

Much as these excerpts indicate the active involvement of participants in the LGSA implementation process, they did not represent the general response of participants. This is because many of the participants, whose demeanors and nonverbal communications were observed throughout this phase of the discussion, contradicted these perspectives of participants' true involvement. That said, some of the participants' perceived their involvement in the LGSA implementation process as creating a sense of participatory action. This, according to Cooke (2001), builds a sense of commitment, allows local knowledge to contribute to how the development plan is implemented, and creates room for evaluation, which "gives beneficiaries themselves the chance to comment on the effectiveness of a given development intervention" (p.104). This leads to the theme of grassroots women's representation which will be examined next.

Grassroots women’s representation. One popular phrase articulated by participants in the six focus groups in communities of the three counties sampled was “grassroots representation” of women. Its spontaneous use among participants in reference to their participation in the development process was almost surreal but emphatic. The participants believed that the participation of leaders of women’s groups in the various communities meant they were represented in any development policy that affects them as grassroots women. It also created a sense of empowerment among participants who considered representation as an effective means of expressing concerns about the place of women in the land rights process in Liberia. As one key participant argued:

We are happy that the NGO people (referring to LGSA officials) helping to empower women on land rights always invited some of our members to Monrovia to discuss the issue with them. They were also willing to know our challenges as rural women and how best empower us to inherit land. And when our representatives returned from those meetings, they briefed us about USAID’s commitment to empower us to own land as women.

The participants emphasized the extent to which their leadership effectively represented them to table their concerns in workshops on women’s land rights and empowerment. They almost unanimously attributed that to the inflow of material resources that also significantly improved their welfare at the grassroots. This supported a fairly common finding in development, in which the participants believed that women’s leadership had translated to the empowerment of women, not only in their improved access to land at the community levels, but also in sustaining women’s cooperative ventures that enhanced their economic wellbeing in rural communities.

The study also found an interesting trend in the focus group discussions. This manifested in majority of the discussions where the few outspoken participants, who forcefully touted

women's active participation in the LGSA implementation process, happened to be the representatives of their respective communities. Apart from the depth of knowledge provided by this category of participants on the issue of participation and empowerment, their strong perspectives on LGSA's incorporation of women in the implementation process often dominated. This appeared to be informed by their positions as representatives in the various LGSA workshops and the benefits that accrued to them. The excerpt below from a key participant succinctly explains this perspective:

The LGSA officials had demonstrated to the core their commitment to women's empowerment throughout the project. In situations where they were not visiting the communities, they invited the leadership of women groups to their consultative meetings. I will state categorically that the experiences and the benefits that I gained from representing my community in many of the workshops were life changing.

In my personal view as an individual beneficiary of the LGSA project and as a women's leader, I would say the implementation of the program was inclusive of rural women whose interests and empowerment the program sought to promote.

Extant research pointed out the problematic nature of representation, and how much of what is considered "participatory is more a process whereby large numbers of people are represented by a relatively small group of participants" (Hickey & Mohan, 2004, p.19; Mitlin, 2004). These empirical findings explain how the perceived representation of the larger segment of grassroots women by few leaders may not necessarily translate in the qualitative participation and empowerment of women. This extends the analysis of the theme of capacity building for rural women as the next finding.

Capacity building for rural women. The study also found the idea of capacity building for rural women as a more recurring response across all the focus group discussions. Its practice throughout the lifespan of the LGSA project created a perceived atmosphere of participation and

empowerment among participants. Capacity building, as the respondents operationalized it, assumed a form of non-formal education for women on their collective status as rightful participants and beneficiaries in the land governance process in Liberia. In other words, the LGSA approach to grassroots capacity building exposed participants to the knowledge of land acquisition within the land rights law, even if they have been marginalized in the policy deliberation in the land governance process.

Beyond the non-formal capacity building for women on their rights in the land governance process was the need for them to also understand their role as stakeholders in the national economy. Thus, participants attested to how the LGSA capacity-building workshops reinforced their role as the “engine of Liberia’s agriculture and on whose shoulders the country’s food security rests,” as one participant put it. In that vein, it was important that participants also acquired basic know-how to maximize land for agricultural productivity. Inherent in the capacity-building discourse was a feeling of the active engagement of participants in the process.

A participant made this absolute claim to buttress their involvement in it:

In all the meetings that they (referring to LGSA officials) had with us anytime they visited the community, they told us that they were there to listen to us. Because of that, they were always prepared to hear our views, learn from us about our experiences on the land matter.

After each training session, they opened the floor for us to suggest how we thought this would help and if there was anything we had to add. So, you returned from the workshops feeling that you were really empowered as a woman.

Although the participants were convinced about their active involvement in the capacity-building process, studies have found how the concept of participation can sometimes be elusive in the discourse and practice of international development. For instance, Hildyard et al. (2004)

argued how not only does consultation tend to be haphazard, and that where development practice appears to be participatory, “the voices of the local people rarely appear to be listened to” (p.59). This extends the argument about how participatory development can be a manipulative tool to engage people in a predetermined process, where participation often becomes “an expedient way to achieve results, or an attempt to support a democratic, empowering process” (Keough, 1998, p. 187). Notwithstanding these scholarly critiques of participation, another participant intimated how its use by LGSA had empowered rural women:

LGSA people made us understand that we were the drivers of the project because it belonged to us. Therefore, they felt it was necessary to seek our input on how it should be implemented. This gave many of us the motivation to share our thoughts in the workshops to build our capacity. And truly, we have learned a lot that would empower us as women to properly use the farmlands that we have access to and be able to improve our yields.

Some of the participants regarding how they had been empowered to pull resources together to engage in an all-year cooperative irrigation farming in their communities. The success in the new venture, according to the participants, was due to the skills that they had acquired in the LGSA capacity-building workshops on engaging in modern agriculture to improve yield and have a ready market to sell their produce after harvest. In sum, the participants believed that the capacity-building process was dialogic as well as ‘participatory’ in nature. This links the analysis to the theme of the LGSA giving a voice to marginalized women in post-Ebola Liberia in the next section.

Giving marginalized women a voice. One principle that underlies the practice of international development is the need for the process to be fully participatory. In that sense, the call for “local people to have a decisive say in the matters that affect their lives” (Hildyard et al., 2004) is both legitimate and necessary. In other words, ‘participation’ must have a voice,

particularly in the gender-mainstreaming process where women tend to be the main targets of development programs. When that is in place, it becomes normal, as Howard (2003) suggests, that development frameworks “stress the need to involve women beneficiaries as stakeholders in the planning process, regardless of the level at which planning occurs” (p.125).

The participants’ testimonials on the participatory nature of the LGSA project in giving women a voice at the grassroots level, is a feather in the cap for development practitioners in this instance. The study found how, what constitutes participation and empowerment from the participants’ collective perspective, has been the opportunity given to rural women to express their views concerning the implementation of the LGSA project. The participants explained how gender-sensitive and attentive implementers of the project had been in their gradual persuasion of the chiefs and elders in several communities to reconsider the issue of women’s access to land in the Liberian society. A key participant noted:

They (LGSA) gave us the platform to express our challenges concerning how we have been considered as ‘properties’ of our husbands whereby we as properties cannot inherit and own lands. They gave us the courage to voice our concerns in several community fora where our husbands were present. ...now that the law says women can also own land, we know that LGSA played a role in that process. Liberian women have a voice now to demand that they own land, and we are happy that as they speak, they speak for all women.

The above extract about the LGSA giving grassroots women a voice, even when it means a few privileged women ‘speaking for’ others, reinforces the issue of representation and its problem as argued earlier in this chapter. Representation is also defined as ‘speaking of’—constructing accounts and writing texts, or ‘speaking for’—advocating and mediating. The latter, as often happens in the participatory process, Hickey and Mohan (2004) observed, is controlled by a few in the development process, “believing that by speaking of the subaltern experience,

they will change the political relations in their favor” (p. 37). This explains the practicality of the voice given to the marginalized, or those speaking for them, when such voices translate in the qualitative empowerment of the marginalized. This extends to the subject of the livelihood empowerment of grassroots women against poverty as the next finding to be analyzed.

Livelihood empowerment against poverty. At the heart of the USAID-funded LGSA project in Liberia was the goal of reducing the economic hardships brought about by the Ebola epidemic. The epidemic worsened the plight of women who were already disempowered by patriarchal norms that limited their access to and ownership of land. It came as no surprise therefore, that one way the participants operationalized ‘development’ in relation to the LGSA project was its ability to empower their livelihood against poverty. As one of the key participants noted:

One of the best things that had happened to us as women in Liberia was to the wake up one day to the good news that the Unites States government was concerned about the damage that Ebola had done to us. For far too long, women have been praised for feeding Liberia, which is a good thing because that is our nature as mothers. But how can you deny the one who feeds the country the right to inherit land?

The participants took turns to recount the ordeals they had suffered due to the Ebola virus disease, which compelled many of them to “sell almost all that we have as women to be passed down to our children someday.” And with customs and traditions well in place in the patriarchal Liberian society, the hope of women at the grassroots having access to land to enhance their livelihoods remained farfetched. It was for this reason that the participants expressed immense gratitude for the role of USAID in expediting the passage of the land rights bill into law to advocate for women’s rights to land in Liberia. In that regard, the LGSA project was seen as a

force behind the quest for the livelihood empowerment of rural women against poverty in post-Ebola Liberia. In further acknowledgement, a key participant had this to say about USAID:

Society still believes that women cannot own land because they are properties for their husbands. We have made countless appeals to government to pass a law to give women the rights to inherit land.

But this does not see the light of day because some of our lawmakers themselves openly support that view. It was USAID that stood by us to forcefully advocate and ensured that today, there is a law in Liberia that gives women the right to inherit land.

A society's ability to feed itself is dependent on access to land for sustainable agriculture. This makes the LGSA project's goal of advocating for women's rights to land directly connected to the FtF initiative, which sought to "combat global hunger, poverty and malnutrition" by catalyzing agriculture-led economic growth advancing self-reliance in beneficiary countries (FtF Progress Snapshot, 2019, p.1). Therefore, data from focus group discussions with participants affected by the two projects were analyzed together to answer RQ4. Thus, results from the FtF initiative will be presented in the next section under similar themes as the LGSA, but from different perspectives as recounted by participants.

Participatory Empowerment of Women under FtF

As discussed earlier in Chapter V, USAID contended that achieving global food security through self-reliance on agriculture under the FtF initiative was contingent on the economic empowerment of women. The agency believed also that unleashing the potential of women was crucial, if investment in agriculture must be considered as a transformative power to uplift millions of people out of hunger and poverty in the developing world (USAID, 2019). Thus, just like the LGSA project, assessing the extent to which the participants were involved and felt

empowered in the implementation of the FtF initiative, and how that translated in their understanding of development, are presented under the themes below.

Development projects implementation. The fact that women constitute about 70% of the labor force in Liberia's agricultural sector, which in turn generates 61% of the country's GDP (OECD, 2012 find a more current source), makes any gender-sensitive- agriculture-related projects a big deal for women. Thus, implementation of the FtF project appeared as a glimmer of hope for many of the participants, who by necessity as widows and single mothers, are heads of farm households that survive on rain-fed agriculture in Liberia. Therefore, even though the study found that implementation of the FtF project offered less opportunity for women under its 'change agent' model as discussed in Chapter V, participants were largely content with the cooperative rural facilities, such as rice milling and cassava processing factories that the project had provided them. The economic benefits that these machineries brought to the grassroots women, who hitherto had suffered seasonal gluts and lack of market for their produce, was positive. Two key participants took turns to express their views below:

When they came to us and promised to build factories for us to process our farm produce, they honored their words. Today, we have our own factory for milling the rice and cassava that we produce. They also brought extension workers to train us on how to plant our crops, improve yield, and process them at the factory for ready market. Before, we made losses because we had no market, but now when there is glut, we process them for sale in the lean season.

This project has changed the situation of women in Liberia. For instance, in Lofa County, we have women's groups that have been given resources to expand their farms. After the harvest, we are now able to sell our produce to companies that buy from us at a good price. We are also processing some of the cassava that we produce into starch and gari for export.

It appeared that rural Liberian women were visibly absent at the FtF project's core investment areas as lead farmers and lead processors along the agribusiness value chain. That notwithstanding, they relatively have benefitted from the initiative, which has reflected quite significantly in improving agricultural productivity and income at the grassroots level, based on their accounts. This, however, does not negate the fact that women in agriculture in Liberia deserve more than just subsistence improvement in their livelihoods as farmers. And if the global objective of the FtF initiative in prioritizing smallholder women farmers is to be realized, it must reflect in the quantitative and qualitative representation at the 'change agent' level in Liberia's agricultural sector. This leads to the theme of grassroots women's representation which will be discussed next.

Grassroots women's representation. Just like under the LGSA project, representation of women at the grassroots under the FtF initiative was operationalized to mean participants having their fair share of voice in and benefits from the FtF project. This, the participants expressed satisfaction that their women's leaders at the national level had worked in concert with implementers of the project to understand women's challenges and enhance their livelihoods. As one participant noted, "if they promised to bring us a factory and they made that happen soon after they came and left, it means that they really listened to our plea for help." The participants also believed that leaving the running of the FtF cooperative projects almost entirely under the management of women meant that the concerns of women have been considered. A key participant added:

Before the commissioning of the cassava processing factory, we suggested that they train us as women to manage it ourselves. They agreed and selected some of our members for training. Because of that, we manage the facility and keep it running. When we have any problem, we meet to discuss it and our leaders take it to the development partners.

This development, as recounted by the participants, gives expression to the concept of participatory development, whose broad aim is to increase the involvement of socially and economically marginalized peoples in decision-making over their own lives (see, Guijt, 1998). In other words, a development program becomes more relevant and sustainable when there is recognition and support for greater involvement of local people's perspective, knowledge, and skills, which serve as alternatives to donor-driven and outsider-led development (Cooke & Kothari, 2004). In the nutshell, any development project that is participatory in terms of its design, planning, and implementation, ought to be sustainable and relevant. It, therefore, calls for capacity building for local people who are affected by it. This extends the analysis to the theme of capacity building for rural women in the next section.

Capacity building for rural women. Another way participants construed their participation in the FtF project implementation was capacity building for their members. As always, the term “capacity building” was bandied throughout the focus groups in a repetitive manner that reinforced participants' sense of empowerment under the initiative. When pressed to explain how practically involved they were in the process, participants mentioned, for example, the “training of trainers workshops” for their women leaders, who in turn returned to impart them with the basic skills required to collectively run the facility provided them under the project. A key participant explained how she was equipped as a representative in the capacity-building process:

When “Feed the Future” asked community groups to delegate people for capacity building on the management of the facility, my group decided that two of us should represent them in Monrovia because of our high school education. Therefore, we took advantage of the opportunity to go to Monrovia several times for training on how to self-manage the project as women. On our return, we have been appointed as co-managers, who would also teach the skills that we had acquired to our members.

Another participant added how the training sessions raised her “confidence” and made her feel that “that was the kind of empowerment we need as women to be economically independent in our communities.” That way, they could maximize the scarce resources that they have access to, and engage in “smart agriculture,” which meant turning every little space in the backyard into farms as home managers without necessarily waiting on their husbands to give them large portions of land for farming. It appeared, therefore, that the capacity building that the participants referred to, in terms of their participation and empowerment under the FtF initiative, was indeed life-transforming, which made them feel more productive. A second key participant emphasized how useful it was:

We have realized that there were many things we should have been doing in our capacities as women at home. For example, we do not have to walk far away to make use of land for farming when we can turn the backyards into ginger farms, or plant tiger nuts. Now we know that it is a smarter and easier way to produce organic crops that we can sell anytime.

It also appeared how the capacity-building process had turned the participants into proactive individuals in their respective communities. As many of them implied, they did not have to “wait forever” to assert their rights to land as women under a law that is for now, only alive on paper. That explains how women in rural Liberia have been empowered under the FtF initiative to realize their mandates as the backbone of the country’s agriculture. And living up to their responsibilities to “feed the nation into the future” would mean deploying the knowledge that they had acquired through the capacity-building process to maximize the resources at their disposal to enhance productivity. It also makes sense that building a people’s capacity also requires giving them a voice in the process. This links the analysis to the next finding about what the respondents perceive participation and empowerment to mean giving marginalized women a voice in the development process.

Giving marginalized women a voice. The participants expressed how implementers of the FtF initiative gave them a voice as beneficiaries at the various stages of the project cycle. What they meant by having a voice, again, was the ability of leadership of the various women's groups to interface with project officials at workshops organized under the auspices of FtF to discuss the way forward for their empowerment. The respondents also valued their direct participation in forums organized at community levels, where they had the privilege to interact with the FtF development officials about issues they needed further clarification on concerning modern farming techniques. Two key participants described their experiences with the personnel in the extracts below:

We were happy that they offered to go to the bush to see our farms when they visited us. But I was particularly surprised that they asked for cutlasses to help us brush under the crops, after which they recorded an interaction with us on the farm on video to show to USAID which funded the project.

Many of us can testify to the good work they did to assist us get back on our feet after Ebola... We cannot describe enough how grateful we are to them for giving us hope and the opportunity to tell the world what challenges we are facing here as women farmers. Even though tradition says women cannot own land, we produce most of the food we eat in the country. Imagine what would be the situation in Liberia if women say, "because we cannot own land, we will not farm..."

The experiences shared by the participants reinforce the view on development as a process of expanding equal freedoms for all people (see, Sen, 1999). This dovetails with what many other scholars have argued that empowering women as economic, political, and social actors can change policy choices and make institutions more representative of a range of voices (e.g., Beaman et al., 2011). In sum, giving women a voice implies giving them the capacity to speak up and be heard, as well as being present to shape and share in discussions, discourses, and decisions that affect them (World Bank, 2014). In this milieu, development projects can be

appraised by examining the extent to which their impacts translate in the livelihoods of beneficiaries. This leads to the analysis of the theme of livelihood empowerment against poverty as the final finding for RQ4 under the FtF initiative.

Livelihood empowerment against poverty. That the FtF initiative was a crucial intervention for grassroots women in agriculture in post-Ebola Liberia is indisputable, no matter the implementation approach used. The majority of the participants in the focus group discussions attested to the timely impact that the resources provided under the project had had on them. Some referred to the immediate benefits such as food items and the stipends they had received as compensation after several visits by project officials. These endeavors, modest as they seemed, were economically significant.

It made much sense how helpful such “relief items” were, considering the enormity of the Ebola epidemic in Liberia and the impact on grassroots women who were already poor. Thus, for this population that has been marginalized in almost every way based on gender, some of their needs had to be met almost immediately under a flagship initiative that sought to feed them into the future. A key participant narrated her experience about the “benefits” from the FtF officials, which was like others’ reactions to compensations they had received after participating in the focus group discussions:

Anytime “Feed the Future” came to us for community meetings about the program, they would provide us with meals, food items, and money. They would tell us that it was a way to say “thank you” for having time for them. But I feel that we should rather thank them for giving us all these. For me, that was a lot because the additional money they gave us helped a lot.

The FtF officials’ timely support could be described as a “stop-gap measure” against poverty within the project’s broader agenda to ensure the sustainable livelihood empowerment of

the beneficiaries. It was within this framework that the participants' awareness as stakeholders in such a USAID-funded development project that affected them, is crucial. Like the other interventions within this case study research, the participants defined 'development' as any project that would enhance their livelihood empowerment against poverty. The participants appeared to be less concerned about their role as stakeholders in the implementation of the FtF project. Instead, they responded extensively about the extent to which the project had empowered them economically. The extracts below sum up the general perspectives of the participants:

Women have been empowered so much under "Feed the Future" because we have benefitted from grants as cooperatives which we used to hire labor to clear the land. We also have access to an improved variety of seeds that help us to increase yield...and because of the machines which they have installed for us, we are able to mill the rice that we produce here, package it nicely and sell it.

We are still benefiting from the development that "Feed the Future" brought us to continue to empower ourselves. Now, some of the banks are willing to give women's groups soft loans for agriculture, unlike before where they wanted us to produce collateral which we did not have.

The study has found that participants' understanding of 'participation' in the implementation of both the LGSA and FtF projects differed from reality. This was evident throughout the focus group discussions, where participants were more concerned about the socio-economic benefits of the projects than their role as stakeholders in them. In other words, participants believed that they were empowered by the projects, even when they were less involved in the implementation process. This finds expression in Arnstein's (2007) typology of citizen participation.

Informing citizens of their rights, responsibilities and options can be the most important step toward legitimate citizen participation. However, too frequently the emphasis is

placed on a one-way flow of information—from officials to citizens—with no channel provided for feedback and no power of negotiation. Under these conditions, particularly when information is provided at a late stage in the planning, people have little opportunity to influence the program designed “for their benefit” (p.219).

The results from the two interlinked development projects regarding citizens’ active participation in them contradict USAID’s development framework that enjoins agencies executing the former’s development programs to actively engage local stakeholders in all steps in the implementation process (USAID, 2014). The results also contradict the overarching community-driven development approach that argues for implementation of development projects and programs that are sustainable and responsive to local priorities, as well as to empower local communities to manage and govern development programs that are targeted at poor and vulnerable groups (see, Nkonya et al., 2012; Gillespie, 2004). The next section presents results from the participatory empowerment of women under the M&CH project, which formed part of the case-study dissertation.

Participatory Empowerment of Women under M&CH

As previously discussed in Chapter V, the M&CH project was contingent on the need to provide women the right to access global maternal health. This basic right to healthcare was necessary for women affected by the Ebola virus disease, thereby reducing the incidence of maternal and child mortality that would have been exacerbated by the epidemic. In that regard, prioritizing delivery in health resources by improving trained birth attendants and midwives’ capability to meet this goal was paramount (USAID, 2018). Exploring participants’ view on development and how access to this human right to health empowered them in post-Ebola Liberia is discussed under the themes below:

Development as freedom of choice. Participants expressed concerns about the continuous adherence to age-old customs, where payment of bride price ‘commoditizes’ women as the ‘property’ of their husbands in the traditional Liberian society. They narrated how women are required to get the consent of their husbands prior to accessing reproductive health services in many rural communities. The participants also indicated how a woman’s access to family planning, for instance, is the prerogative of her husband, where defiance of one’s husband regarding reproductive health choice evokes attendant consequences. A key participant recounted how her decision to exercise what she learned was her right to universal reproductive health cost her in the excerpt below:

I had given birth to three children—two girls and a boy. My husband wanted us to have one more child, which he hoped would be another boy. But I resisted and went ahead to get family planning against his will. This landed me before the elders of our two families where I was pronounced guilty and had to choose between my right and my marriage...I overcame it and the rest, they say, is history. But I would not wish for any woman to go through that experience.

Although society has evolved with corresponding reforms in norms and customs, gender inequalities persist through traditions that continuously constrain women’s rights to healthcare in whatever form, sometimes at the peril of their lives in many parts of Africa. At the roots of gender inequalities are patriarchal social structures in which power is inequitably distributed, with men traditionally holding authority over women (Milazzo & Goldstein, 2019). The case in rural Liberia is telling as participants’ lived experiences in the focus group discussions revealed how this practice is alive and well. Their exposure to the M&CH project and the interactive education they received from project implementers had shaped the participants’ perspective about development as the freedom to global maternal health in any form that improves their health and their children’s. A key participant reported:

With the kind of knowledge that we have received on maternal and child health, there is no reason why Liberian women should continue to be treated like somebody's properties. So, if women die of childbirth because we have to obey our husbands, is that also acceptable by custom? We are not saying customs should not be obeyed, but when it is about life and death, women must also have the freedom to protect their health.

Another participant wondered why women's rights to reproductive health should be curtailed, notwithstanding ample evidence and numerous instances where "women continue to die in labor in Liberia." The participants reported how sometimes, no matter the number of female children a woman produces, she is considered "barren" until she gives her husband a baby boy. The concerns expressed by the participants in view of the health challenges they face, are testaments to their increasing awareness about and interest in the relevance of maternal and child health. Although the study did not find how the communication strategies deployed by the M&CH project directly enhanced the women's participation, it motivated them to want to assert their rights to reproductive health.

Clearly, global equity principles require that women and men have equal opportunities to realize their potential for health. This explains the need to understand how gender shapes vulnerability to ill-health and health sector responses so that health services can address the needs of women and men equitably (MacPherson, Richards, Namakhoma, & Theobald, 2014). It derives from this that women's desire to freely make maternal and reproductive health choices that affect their lives and find expression in their understanding of true development. Thus, development as freedom of choice would be meaningless unless it is linked with education on reproductive health for women.

Education on reproductive health. The focus group discussions created an encouraging atmosphere for participants to express in-depth the benefit they derived from education on

maternal health under the M&CH project. More concerning was the issue of sexual and reproductive health and the challenges therein for women. The participants explicitly valued the knowledge they acquired from the use of contraceptives, as well as awareness on breast and cervical cancers for women. The discussions centered on the sense of empowerment that the participants felt by having the opportunity to recount their experiences regarding reproductive health, while learning from the experts educating them on the alternatives of practicing safer reproductive health. A key participant narrated the interactive nature of the encounter:

They told us from the start that although they have come to educate us on the importance of practicing safer sexual and reproductive health, we have the power to decide whether to practice the knowledge they will give to us because it is our rights as stakeholders to accept it or not. We told them our previous health challenges with family planning... and they assured us how improved and safer the service has become.

The view that beneficiaries of development should have a say in any programs and policies that affect them has found expression in participants' involvement in the development discourse in the excerpt above. It also reinforces the perception among the women about their active participation and the sense of empowerment that their involvement in the process has given them. The interactive nature of the implementation of the M&CH project also emphasizes the concept of local ownership, through which the active involvement of stakeholders in any development project ensures sustainability. Participants also intimated how the interactive nature of education on their reproductive health emboldened them to suggest how awareness about reproductive health could be sustained at the community level. Two participants took turns to explain how program implementers' readiness to also learn from them about the way forward was assuring:

They told us that our views matter in the promotion of global maternal health. And after teaching us about the challenges that women suffer when they develop cancer in the

breast, they also asked us to explain how we deal with it in our communities. As we talked, they wrote it down and wanted to know more about the disease from us.

Yes, and they also noted that our experiences and the local knowledge that we give them on how we deal with our health would help them to improve upon research on global maternal health to make it safer for women.

Many prior studies have argued how international development agencies oftentimes ignore local knowledge in the implementation of development programs. This is common in the developing world in situations where projects are targeted at women at the grassroots. For instance, Nhongo-Simbanegavi (2005) argued how efforts to confront epidemics, particularly HIV/AIDS in Africa, recognize the critical position of women. However, she observed that: “On the occasions that the women’s voices have been sought, it has only been for purposes of rendering the ‘donor community’ conscious of their ‘plight’” (p.154).

The M&CH project officials seemed to be absolved of the operational neglect and the constant muting of the voices of local people by international development agencies in project implementation. This, at best, validates the participatory nature by which the education on reproductive health has appeared to have empowered the participants. It details how access to and utilization of maternal health, which will be discussed next, can actualize the empowerment of women in the development process.

Maternal health access and utilization. Women’s notion of empowerment was viewed through the lens of access to and utilization of maternal health in post-Ebola Liberia. The participants believed that one of the ways that women can be empowered is when they have full access to maternal health resources and the ability to use them to better their health.

Unfortunately, cultural norms and the deplorable nature of the health system in Liberia seem to

render the realization of this basic right to maternal health almost unattainable. Culturally, husbands' permission as critical determinants of women's ability to access maternal healthcare services, even when they are available, is a challenge women face. A key participant recounted their ordeal thus:

Our culture recognizes the man as the head of the family and so his wife must submit to him. Therefore, whatever he says is final. What will happen if all of us say, "yes, henceforth, we also have the right to decide how many children we want to give birth to?"

That will be the beginning of trouble. It is the women who do government work that will succeed. I will not, because my husband will not tolerate that in the first place, and I know many of us here who are older will agree.

The participants tacitly recognized their lack of education and dependence on their husbands as limitations. Equating formal employment as independence, which they did not have, was itself an obstacle to their empowerment as grassroots women. As one of them joked, "you don't bite the hand that feeds you if you have no harvest," which implied conforming to the status-quo ante of cultural submission to their husbands. Another participant alluded to the difficulty in achieving the utopian dream of women's empowerment, the realization of their rights to access, as well as utilization of sexual and reproductive health. She said:

When women understand and embrace the importance of maternal health, many of the health problems we face will be reduced. But we are still where we are because tradition says that women are to listen to their husbands. So, whatever they oppose, that is the end.

This social inequality that has been exacerbated by customs and tradition finds expression in the denial of women regarding access to almost everything, including the choice and utilization of healthcare. The consequence is how that undermines the right to health as "essential to the capacity of the individual to so expand choice as to achieve well-being"

(Alleyne, 2013, p.vii). The results, so far, point to the fact that although women felt a sense of empowerment as far as implementation of the M&CH project was concerned, that empowerment is yet to have practical expression in their ability to fully access global maternal health. The next section sets out to critically examine the power relations inherent in the discourse, and the subtle control that implementers of the USAID-funded development projects wielded over their ‘local stakeholders’ (i.e., beneficiaries) in the participatory development process in post-Ebola Liberia.

Power Relations in USAID’S Development Discourse Process

Power plays a critical role in social change. In theory, power functions as an influential tool for addressing the affective component of the gendered nature of the relationship between men and women, as well as the sexual imbalances that characterize the use of power in society (Connell, 1987). Its place in international development manifests in the discourses that characterize the design and implementation of development projects that are targeted at marginalized populations in the developing world. Fairclough (2001) noted how *Language and Power* “is about how language functions in maintaining and changing power relations in contemporary society, about ways of analyzing language which can reveal these processes, and about how people can become more conscious of them, and more able to resist and change them” (p. viii).

Analysis of power in the context of discourse in social change, therefore, requires critical language study, which according to Fairclough (2001), should focus on “discoursal dimensions of major social tendencies, in order to determine what part discourse has in the inception, development, and consolidation of social change” (p163). Situating this in the role of USAID in the post-Ebola development process in Liberia calls for a critical evaluation of the agency’s approach to participatory communication for social change. In this vein, USAID’s “Ten-

Principle Framework for Engaging with Local Systems in Development,” as discussed in Chapter III, appeared participatory. This is because the framework recognized the need for development experts under the auspices of USAID to tap into local knowledge by acknowledging that local people understand their situations far better than external actors, and therefore, seek their perspectives in the development process (USAID Framework for Supporting Sustained Development, 2014).

On the contrary, the study has found that USAID project implementers’ communication strategy in post-Ebola Liberia was less participatory in practice and more dominant in the development discourse process. This Fairclough (2001) described as “ideological-discursive formations (IDFs) associated with different groups within institutions,” in situations “where institutional subjects are constructed, in accordance with the norms of an IDF, in subject positions whose ideological underpinnings they may be unaware of” (p.30). In other words, the study revealed a somewhat consistent pattern in the discourse process, where although the local stakeholders felt they had a voice, the decision-making power resided mainly with implementers of the USAID-funded development projects. This finding aligns with Keough’s (1998, p187) view that:

The practice of participatory development is many things to many people. The motivation to use participatory development methods and the approach to its practice, depend upon one’s perspective on, or philosophy of, development. Participatory development can be a manipulative tool to engage people in a pre-determined process, an expedient way to achieve results, or an attempt to support a democratic, empowering process.

Thus, the perception created among participants that sharing “our experiences and the local knowledge on how we deal with our health would help them (project implementers) to improve upon research on global maternal health to make it safer for women,” could be just a

facade. In this regard, Omar (2011) argued how “development, as a discourse and practice, was the offspring of this project with European colonialism being an instrumental tool in propagating its ideals” (p.46). This view was buttressed by Escobar (1995) who maintained how “development was—and continues to be for most part—a top-down, ethnocentric, and technocratic approach, which treated people and cultures as abstract concepts, statistical figures to be moved up and down in the charts of progress (p.44).

This chapter continues with the presentation of the findings regarding the extent to which USAID’s communication strategies have enhanced women’s participation and empowerment in the development process in post-Ebola Liberia. This will employ critical discourse analysis—both in the context of discourse in practice, as well as discourse and power. The analysis will draw further on discursive construction strategies, using an interpretive approach to examine USAID’s discursive construction of participatory empowerment in the next section.

USAID’s Discursive Construction of Participatory Empowerment

Any form of participatory communication that is geared towards empowerment of people in the development process hinges significantly on discourse. This makes discourse analysis a key component of communication, which Mautner (2009) argued, entails the systematic analysis of patterns in text and the context in which the text originates and is used. To critically analyze discourse, therefore, implies “...unveiling and challenging taken-for-granted assumptions about language and the social, as well as recognizing discourse as a potentially powerful agent of change” (p.124). In that regard, critical discourse analysis, as Fairclough (2001) posited, goes with a critical study of language in examining the discursial dimensions of major social tendencies. The goal, as he intimated, is to “determine what part discourse has in the inception, development, and consolidation of social change” (p.163).

Communication for social change is a strategic process that is deliberately followed to achieve a particular goal, be it social, political, psychological, or linguistic (see, McPhee & Zaugg, 2009; Reisigl & Wodak, 2009). Based on this, the dissertation project examined the communication strategies employed by USAID to champion the participation and empowerment of rural women in the development process in post-Ebola Liberia. It draws on two out of the several corresponding discursive construction strategies postulated by discourse analysts, namely: the nomination or referential strategies, and the predication strategies (e.g., Reisigl & Wodak, 2009; Fairclough, 2001). The nomination or referential strategies explain how social actors or stakeholders are referred to in the communicative text, while the predicative strategies denote how the identified stakeholders are described or labelled, and what attributes are ascribed to them in the discursive-construction process (see, Reisigl & Wodak, 2005). Situating this in the discursive construction of participatory empowerment, the next section will analyze how implementers of the three USAID-funded development projects employed the referential and the predication strategies in engaging the local stakeholders they sought to empower.

Nomination strategies for development stakeholders. As discussed previously, nomination strategies formed part of USAID's discursive construction of participatory empowerment. These strategies were adopted by the agency's project implementers when referring to the social actors (i.e., them and their local stakeholders) in the project implementation process. Throughout the interviews, the project implementers consistently referred to themselves, using communication texts such as "we in LGSA," "our mandate as development experts," "FTF project implementers" and "global health experts," to mention but a few. These served as attributes that identified them as development practitioners and experts whose roles were critical in the livelihood empowerment of the so-called marginalized

population of rural women in the post-Ebola development process in Liberia. The excerpt below explains the distinction that a key participant made between them and their “project beneficiaries”:

The goal of USAID is to discharge the U.S. government’s leadership in the fight against Ebola in West Africa, and subsequently stem the impact that this epidemic had had on the people. And our mandate as development experts is to implement USAID’s project in global health to strengthen the country’s health system and empower vulnerable and poor women in rural Liberia who were most impacted by the epidemic.

Interpretively, the project implementers identified themselves mainly as development experts and “saviors,” whose collective role was considered indispensable in aiding a country decimated by an epidemic, and whose vulnerable women needed redemption. This reflects in what Mohan (2001) described as ethnocentrism and the politics of representation, emerging from attacks on “Western discourses that ‘place’ the non-West and thereby determine who has authority over knowledge” (p.154). In other words, the project implementers’ use of discursive construction through “othering,” which labeled them as “development experts” and their rural stakeholders as “vulnerable and poor women in rural Liberia,” reinforces development practitioners’ “complicity within which colonizing discourses” and thereby shape development interventions in the Third World (see, Mohan, 2001; Escobar, 1995).

The identity created by project implementers in the development process in post-Ebola Liberia reinforced the local actors’ perception of the former as the repository of expertise in development decision-making. Put differently, officials of the three projects were considered as the best determinants of what is good for the target beneficiaries in terms of implementation of sustainable development initiatives. This reflected throughout the focus group discussions, where participants discussed the three development initiatives—and supposedly advised USID officials

on where to implement them, and how they should be implemented to improve their livelihoods. In reality, their input was more cosmetic than real. For instance, one of the focus group participants recounted the confidence reposed in them during the awareness-creation process on the M&CH project:

The doctors (referring to implementers of the M&CH project) told us that they have been trained specially on the health of mothers and their children and so they understand what our challenges are and know what is best for us as rural women. Because of that, we believed that whatever advice that they gave us on maternal health was good.

In summary, the referential strategies that defined the discursive construction of participatory empowerment appeared successful in creating a sense of power around the “expert” identity created by project implementers. These strategies reflected in the collective response of the focus group participants who ascribed the power to implement and sustain the three USAID-funded development initiatives to the development experts whose goal was to ensure their livelihood empowerment as marginalized rural women. Next is an analysis of how the predication strategies adopted reinforced USAID’s discursive construction of participatory empowerment in the post-Ebola development process.

Predication strategies in the communication process. To recap, predication strategies explain how the named social actors are described (in the development process) and what evaluative attributes are ascribed to them. These strategies, according to Reisigl and Wodak (2005), “aim either at labeling social actors more or less positively or negatively, deprecatorily or appreciatively” (p.45). In the context of this dissertation, the social actors (i.e., women in rural Liberia) were often “negatively” labelled by project implementers in communication texts like “them” “marginalized population,” target groups,” or “project beneficiaries.” This denotes a

unidirectional relationship between the USAID project implementers and rural women in Liberia in the exercise of power in development discourse. To that end, these predication strategies did not only label the “marginalized women” as dependents and place them at the receiving end of development assistance but limited their power of participation in the discourse and practice of the development process.

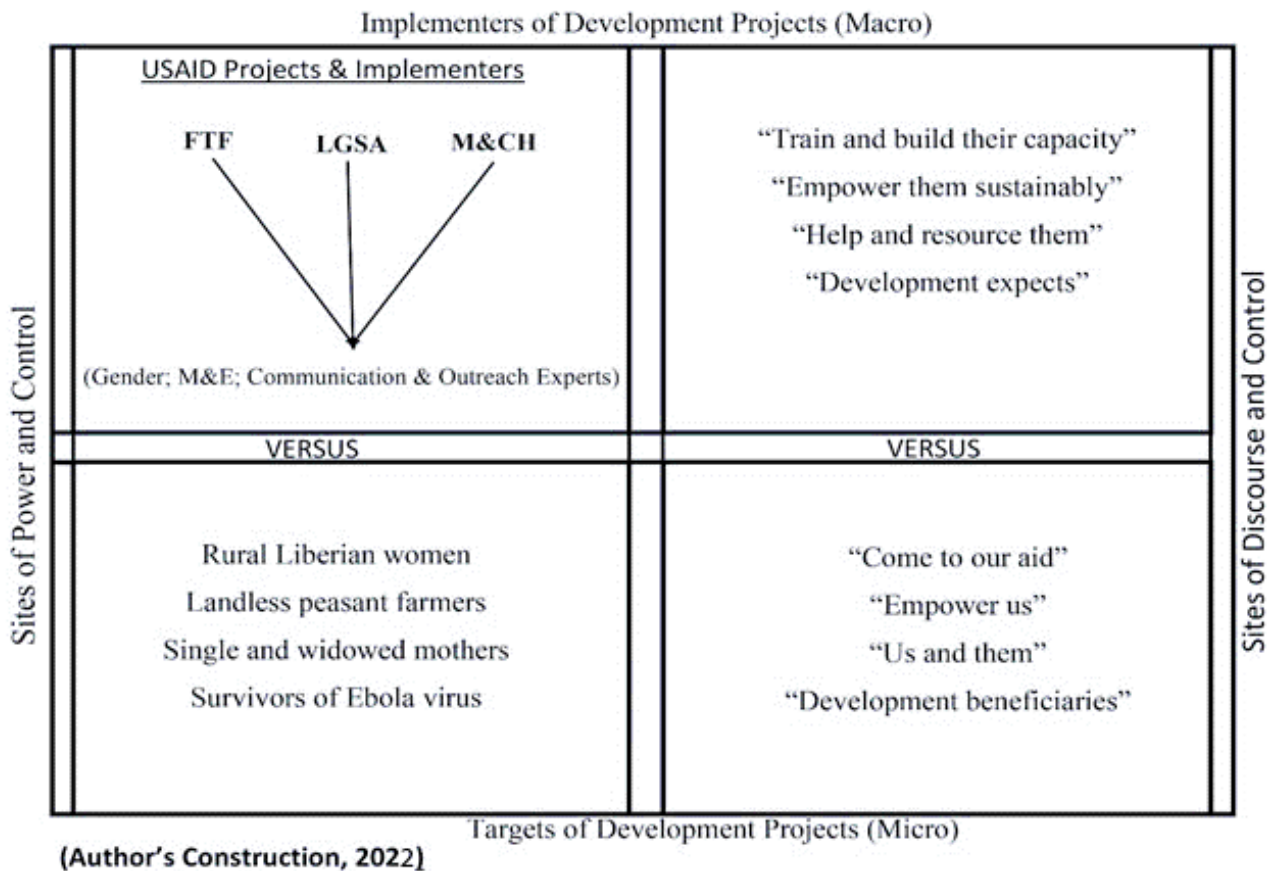
There were other instances where the rural women were labelled positively, albeit occasionally, by the project implementers as “stakeholders,” “our local development partners,” or simply as “clients.” These markers of identity, diplomatic as they sounded, appeared to give theoretical expression to the concept of participatory development, whereas in reality, masked the subtle *power over* dynamics that characterize the discourse between development funders and development recipients in decision-making in the global South. As discussed earlier in this chapter, participants in the focus group discussions expressed the sense of empowerment they had by sharing their views on the health challenges that they faced. This belief was corroborated in the excerpt below, where a key participant indicated:

They told us that our views matter in the promotion of global maternal health. And after teaching us about the challenges that women suffer when they develop cancer in the breast, they also asked us to explain how we deal with it in our communities. As we talked, they wrote it down and wanted to know more about the disease from us.

The sense of empowerment that the participants felt by being heard in the participatory space, on one hand, and the impact that such voices have on development decision-making, on the other hand, is a worthy question. This phenomenon has been analyzed in line with the data, through the referential and predication strategies discussed above.

Power Relations in Development Implementation Model. To deepen the analysis of the power matrix in development discourse and practice, the researcher has proposed the power relations in development implementation model to further explain the phenomenon in the post-Ebola development process in Liberia.

Fig. 6 Power Relations in Development Implementation Model



The hegemony that defines the power relations in the design and implementation of Western-funded development projects in the global South is a continual phenomenon. Often, the implementation process is characterized by consultation fora to give local beneficiaries a voice in the participatory space. However, Arnstein (2007) argued how many social development programs create such artificial forums for “citizens to hear and be heard, ...but lack the power to

ensure that their views will be heeded by the powerful” (p. 217). In the case of USAID in the post-Ebola development process, a short review of the four quadrants constituting the model above may help in the analysis of this phenomenon.

Implementers of development projects (macro). This constituted the category of social actors in the development process in post-Ebola Liberia, otherwise considered the “macro population.” This category formed the macro, not in the context of their numbers, but the status and the influence that they wielded as development experts. They comprised officials of the Feed the Future initiative; the Land Governance Support Activity; and the Maternal and Child Health program in Liberia. They derived their influence from their collective mandate as development experts to implement the three USAID-funded projects to empower the so-called population of vulnerable women in rural Liberia who were most impacted by the Ebola virus disease.

As such, this macro population employed referential strategies of identity with emphasis on their individual designations as the gender, monitoring and evaluation, as well as communication and outreach experts. While the participants emphasized participatory empowerment in the interviews, the constant reference to their individual identities reinforced the power relations in the participatory space, vis-à-vis the women’s role in the participatory process. From this perspective, Gaventa (2004) noted how power analysis is “critical to understanding the extent to which new spaces for participatory governance can be used for transformative engagement, or whether they are more likely to be instruments for reinforcing domination and control (p.34).

Targets of development projects (micro). Just like the category above, the targets of the USAID-funded development projects in rural Liberia formed the “micro population.” They are referred to as such in this analysis based on their collective identity as the silent majority whose

label as “beneficiaries of development projects” limits their influence in the participatory space. Within this development implementation model, this micro population has been programmed to accept the label of vulnerability, due to their position as “rural Liberian women,” “single and widowed,” “survivors of Ebola virus disease,” and more critically, as “landless peasant farmers.” Thus, the common denominator between implementers of the USAID development projects and their target population (rural Liberian women) is the label. In this milieu, the latter were made to understand their position in the structure of influence as marginalized people who needed to be helped (see, Freire, 2007).

The rural women’s orientation about implementers of the development projects reinforced their position as the silent majority, who needed to be informed, educated, and empowered by the “macro population.” This sustained the significant influence that the latter had, based on their identities as experts, and the power to control the decision-making process. This influence is further exercised at the sites of power and control in the development process, which will be explained next.

Sites of power and control. This segment of the model presents the “macro” as the liberator of the “micro.” In this scheme of things, the latter is programmed to believe that they cannot survive without the intervention of the former. Additionally, the sites of power and control come from the micro’s recognition of the macro as the authorities in the development process, in terms of their expertise, knowledge, and influence over the three development projects. Practically, within the sites of power and control was the recognition of the presence of the gender, communication and outreach, and the monitoring and evaluation experts as advocates of the rights of marginalized women in rural Liberia.

Guijt (1998) emphasized how “the broad aim of participatory development is to increase the involvement of socially and economically marginalized peoples in decision-making over their own lives” (p.1). But where the powerless are involved less in the empowerment process, they remain dependent on the source of their empowerment. For instance, the participants “normalized” the century-old customary marginalization of women in the land governance process. However, they overwhelmingly attributed the eventual passage of the land rights bill into law, which favors the cause of women in Liberia, to the LGSA. One key participant noted how the bill would have delayed “if the USAID people had not intervened.” The sites of power and control segment of the model attempts to explain how in this development, the marginalized repose absolute confidence in a higher authority within the “macro population” that they believe can champion their cause.

Sites of discourse and control. The final part of the quadrant summarizes the model by emphasizing the subtle usage of the referential and predication strategies that characterized the development discourse. The sites of discourse and control showed how the macro population of the development actors reinforced their identities as experts in the post-Ebola development process. The development experts alluded to their collective role in helping to “train and build their capacity,” referring to women in rural Liberia, who were consistently labelled in the development discourse as “powerless and marginalized,” “grassroots development beneficiaries” and “vulnerable women.” These labels percolated the psyche of the micro population who considered themselves as those who needed to be helped and empowered to regain their livelihoods.

The rural participants regularly used communication texts like “we” and “they” to refer to themselves on one hand, and the project implementers, on the other hand. These distinguishing

labels further explained the rural women's recognition of their vulnerability and the subsequent acknowledgement of the macro population's ability to "empower us," "help us," and "come to our aid" to mitigate the impact of the Ebola epidemic on their livelihoods. These distinctions between the micro and the macro, based on the former's needs and the latter's ability to meet those needs, explain why implementers of development projects wielded enormous control and *power over* their development beneficiaries in the discourse process. In summary, my proposed power relations in development implementation model compares the real power and control that the implementers versus targets of development projects have in terms of decision-making in the development process, despite rhetoric of bottom-up participation.

Addressing Research Question 4

RQ4 asked: "How did USAID's communication strategies enhance women's participation and empowerment in the development process in post-Ebola Liberia?" This research question was answered, using a critical discourse analysis of data collected from focus groups with rural Liberian women on one hand, and interviews with implementers of the USAID-funded projects on another hand. The concept of participation was interpreted by the participants in the manner that they felt *involved* in the implementation of the three development projects. This entailed being given the platform to narrate their lived experiences as survivors of the Ebola epidemic, and how the USAID interventions would enhance their livelihoods. The participants' sense of participation also stemmed from the recognition accorded them as *stakeholders* in the development process. This, they intimated, had resulted in the representation by leaders of rural women in the various meetings organized by USAID project implementers.

A participatory approach to development is seen largely as a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives, decisions, and resources

that affect their lives (see, World Bank, 1994). For this to be sustainable, therefore, requires the recognition and support for greater involvement of ‘local’ people’s perspectives, knowledge, and priorities as these represent an “alternative to donor-driven and outsider-led development...” (Moose, 2001, p.238). The participants’ report of their involvement in the development process, therefore, gives expression to the broad aim of participatory development in increasing the involvement of socially and economically marginalized people in decision-making over their own lives (see, Guijt, 1998).

The study also found the extent to which the participants believed that the communication strategies adopted by USAID in the development process had empowered them. The rural women defined *empowerment* under the LGSA and FtF interventions in post-Ebola Liberia as implementation of development projects, capacity building for rural women, provision of sustainable livelihoods, grassroots representation, and giving marginalized women a voice. Empowerment was also operationalized under the M&CH project as a development initiative that promotes education on reproductive health, access to and utilization of maternal healthcare, and the freedom for women to make choices that enhance their health.

In summary, the focus groups revealed how participants believed that the communication strategies for implementing the development projects targeted at them were not only participatory but empowering. These findings were supported by an interview response by a key participant, who reiterated how the USAID development interventions were designed and executed to “empower marginalized women to have a say in the development process in the Liberian society.” However, a critical analysis of the focus groups and interviews revealed the power dynamics that in fact characterized the development discourse, in which final decision-making regarding the execution of projects assumed a top-down approach seemingly

implemented from the bottom-up. This is evident within the sites of discourse and control in the model above, where project implementers reinforced their place and space in terms of who wields the power over the final decision-making process.

Development critics argue how, in examining the relationships of place and space vis-à-vis participation, there is the need to also examine the dynamics of power that shape the inclusiveness of participation within each (e.g., Gaventa, 2004). This explains the place and influence of power in participatory decision-making. In this vein, Fung and Wright (2003) observed that “where countervailing power is weak or non-existent, the rules of collaboration are likely to favor entrenched, previously organized and concentrated interests...” They added how “collaboration, under these conditions, is much more likely to become top-down collaborative governance involving experts and powerful interests, even if its impulse may have originated from bottom-up initiatives (p. 263-4).

It is obvious from the above findings, that although the gender-sensitive development projects funded by the USAID in post-Ebola Liberia empowered the beneficiaries qualitatively, their design, planning, and implementation were less participatory in practice. This justifies the criticisms from post-development scholars who maintained how development discourse has been constructed to legitimize the voices of Western experts while marginalizing those of local people (e.g., Escobar, 1995; Momsen, 2006).

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented results from the data collected to address Research Question 4, which examined the communication strategies deployed by USAID and how they enhanced the participation and empowerment of women in post-Ebola Liberia. Through a critical analysis of

the focus group discussions and interview responses, the study came across two sets of contrasting findings. First, results from the focus groups revealed participants' sense of participation in the development process. Participants also felt a sense of empowerment which reflected in the implementation of development projects that brought qualitative economic and health benefits to women.

In contrast, the study also found that implementation of the USAID-funded development projects in post-Ebola Liberia was mainly elite-driven. This has led to the conclusion that the general feeling among rural women regarding their participatory empowerment in the post-Ebola development process was a "manufactured consent" and does not reflect the true tenets of Freire's concept of participatory development. The next and final chapter will discuss the major findings of this dissertation project and the limitations thereof. It will conclude with recommendations for future research on the subject matter of the gender-power relations in the discourse and practice of international development in the global South.

CHAPTER IX

DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

The international development industry has gained prominence due to its historical focus on tackling the entrenched marginalization of women in all sectors of society, thereby making women more central than ever before to visions of global development. It is expected that an evolution of the industry must go with a corresponding change from the historical perception about women as objects of welfare concerns to women as active players in development policy making. However, existing studies show how international development agencies continually disregard local knowledge in the implementation of development programs, where women's voices are sought only for purposes of rendering the donor community conscious of the former's plights (e.g., Nhongo-Simbanegavi, 2005).

Following from the phenomenon above, the current study set out to examine the gender-power relations that characterized the discourse and practice of international development in post-Ebola Liberia, using USAID as a case. The chapter discusses the key research findings within the broader context of the political economy of the United States' leadership through USAID in international development in general, and in Ebola-struck Liberia in particular; USAID'S modes of engagement with local systems in the post-Ebola development process; and the agency of gender in the development discourse and practice in post-Ebola Liberia. This chapter extends the discussion to the study's theoretical and policy contributions to international development discourse and practice. The chapter also presents the limitations of the study and proposes new questions for future research.

Discussion of Major Findings

The discussion of the major findings is based on extant research, as well as existing theoretical and conceptual frameworks that advance the question of the power relations that influence the discourse and practice of international development. The discussion of the findings in subsequent sections of this chapter is guided by four major research questions. These examine the place of Liberia in the United States' foreign policy on international development and the role that USAID played in the crisis-hit country between 2015 and 2019; the communication strategies used in the post-Ebola development campaign; the representation of gender in the design and implementation of the communication strategies; and the extent to which USAID's communication strategies had enhanced women's participation and empowerment in the development process in post-Ebola Liberia.

United States' Leadership in Global Development

Research Question 1 sought to examine factors that accounted for Liberia as the United States' topmost priority in response to Ebola in West Africa, and the role of USAID in Liberia between 2015 and 2019. As anticipated, based on review and analysis of documents, the current study found a nexus between historical antecedents and the political economy of power in the United States' role in the fight against Ebola in Liberia in the intervening years. It was interesting to find that the United States' response to the Ebola epidemic in West Africa in the first place, and its focus on Liberia as a top priority, was influenced by the outcry across various sectors, including the international community, about the former's indifference towards the affected countries in the initial stages of the epidemic (see, Cooper et al., 2014).

Studies have argued how, because of the global outcry, the U.S. doubled efforts on how it would assist the response, even though top White House aides rejected criticisms from African officials, doctors, and representatives from aid groups that “the U.S. had been slow to act in the face of the disease...” (e.g., Calgano, 2018, p.91; Cooper et al., 2014). Other development scholars argued how the motivation behind the U.S.’ global leadership was to operationalize Harry Truman’s call to America to improve the conditions of the so-called underdeveloped world with its technology. This was to give impetus to the American ideal of global development in a way that would compel other nations to follow their footsteps (e.g., Sachs, 2020).

From this perspective, holding the United States to account for its leadership in the fight against Ebola in West Africa was justifiable. The case for Liberia was more legitimate, given that it was the most affected by the epidemic (Calgano, 2018). And as the international community observed how Liberia, a country ‘founded’ by the United States was betrayed twice by the latter’s omissions during the Liberian civil wars, it was critical that the United States realized that Liberia was its responsibility (Crocker, 2003). To save face globally, the United States stepped up its role in the fight against Ebola in Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, but chose to focus more on the latter, a decision that was motivated by the “deepest relationship between the two countries” (Widner, 2018, p.5).

A review and analysis of documents to answer Research Question 1 thus identified five major factors that accounted for the United States and USAID’s focus on Liberia in the fight against Ebola in West Africa. These factors, which were influenced mainly by political economy and geopolitical undercurrents, are summarized below.

Moral obligation to help. The issue of morality featured prominently in assessing the urgency with which the international community responded to the clarion calls for help by the three countries most affected by Ebola in West Africa. As discussed in Chapter II, medical experts and civil society organizations particularly attributed the West's indifference to the West African epidemic to the unprofitability of Ebola (e.g., MSF Report, 2015; Drazen et al., 2015). This was corroborated by John Ashton, president of the UK Faculty of Public Health, who described the pharmaceutical industry's refusal to produce Ebola vaccines for poor people in Africa as a moral bankruptcy of capitalism acting in the absence of an ethical and social framework (see, Ashton, 2014). Dr. Anthony Fauci, head of the U.S. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease, trumpeted similar concerns, that an Ebola vaccine would have been within spitting distance if it were not for the corporate skinflints (see, Phillips, 2014).

Other critics identified racism and the 'Africanization' of Ebola as factors, based on the premise that had there been significant Ebola outbreaks in affluent nations rather than in sub-Saharan Africa in the past few decades, there would have been an arsenal of medications in stock today (e.g., World Bank, 2015; MSF Report, 2015). These 'corporate skinflints' validate concerns by an independent panel of global health experts who attributed the "needless suffering and deaths" caused by the Ebola epidemic in West Africa to the slow international response and leadership failure (Gostin & Friedman, 2015, p.1902). To avert such a global phenomenon has necessitated "the need to rethink our moral obligations to create a better world" (Schwenkenbecher, 2018, p.1). This sustains the argument that the wealthy nations of the world, led by the United States, have a moral obligation to offer much greater assistance to developing countries facing severe epidemics (Nelson, 2002).

This fits the frame of thinking that as Liberia found itself in the infamous situation as the epicenter of Ebola in West Africa, the United States, more than any other country in the developed world, had the moral obligation to help. Therefore, the popular refrain that “Liberia is an American responsibility” (Gwertzman, 2003) and that the latter has a moral obligation to help the former (Hodge, 2002), was revisited in chastising the United States for its lethargic response in Ebola-hit Liberia (Cooper et al., 2014). A critical analysis of documents revealed the extent to which the USAID, both in the global media and on the ground, emphasized the United States’ leadership in combating the Ebola epidemic in Liberia. The initial response started with a declaration of a disaster on August 4, 2014, by Deborah Malac, the then U.S. Ambassador to Liberia, which culminated in a Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART), consisting of the various U.S. organizations working in Liberia under the auspices of USAID to support the fight against Ebola (USAID, 2014).

The intervention transitioned into what was known as the Operation United Assistance (OUA) program to set the conditions for support to USAID in providing life-saving requirements, focus on building and staffing treatment facilities, as well as train personnel in the fight against the epidemic in Liberia (Boucher, 2018). President Obama’s 25 September 2014 message that stopping Ebola was in the best interest of the United States, culminated in the deployment of 3000 American troops, a commitment to build 17 treatment facilities, and the training of up to 500 medical personnel to staff them, all amounting to about \$760 million to stem the spread of the epidemic in Liberia (O’Grady, 2014).

The intervention by the United States in Liberia, albeit delayed, was nothing short of a global moral responsibility. It supports the call by the then U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, that in times of global upheavals, “no one country, no individual group of nations is going to

resolve this problem by themselves....” but required what he termed as “a collective, global response” (The U.S. Government Response to the Ebola Outbreak, 2014). The moral obligation motivation behind the USAID’s role in combating the Ebola outbreak in Liberia aligns with the moral suasion that “if it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, we ought morally to do it” (Singer, 1971, p. 231, as cited in Jamieson, 2004). Thus, the United States could be said to have redeemed its image as a responsible ‘surrogate mother’ of a country whose responsibility the international community expects it to shoulder. The next section discusses the gesture of humanitarian solidarity as another factor in Liberia a U.S. priority in response to Ebola.

Gesture of humanitarian solidarity. Humanitarianism as a social concept originated in religious beliefs and the philosophical acknowledgement of a common humanity, through which arose a moral responsibility to assist people in immediate need (Benthall, 1993). Humanitarianism was championed by the Red Cross movement in the mid-19th century and has since become an international standard for other philanthropic organizations (see, Black, 1992). A new phase emerged after World War II, where humanitarianism, based on aid, has become a function of political economy and as a variable element of development policy, which focus on governments and their relations with former colonial territories and Third World countries (Paulmann, 2003).

Humanitarianism, through the ideal of ensuring a just world for all, became a window of opportunity for the United States to assert itself as leader of the Free World to offer financial and economic aid beyond its borders to ensure global stability and orderly political development. This Truman-inspired ideal of global freedom, which argued no one’s but the United States’ obligation, set the stage for the First Development Decade in 1960 to “guide international

development aid to the Third World” (see, Gronemeyer, 2010, p.66). This burden of responsibility was actualized in the establishment of the USAID in 1963, through John F. Kennedy’s call on Congress and the American people to give expression to their obligation to promote the cause of the sick, the poor, and the hungry globally.

Disaster relief as a form of humanitarian assistance has gone beyond providing immediate relief to rebuilding infrastructure for development to provide sustainable security against distress (Tisch & Wallace, 1994). This gave expression to USAID’s unmatched resource support to Liberia during the Ebola crisis, compared to what the agency had offered to Guinea and Sierra Leone (see, Figure 7 in Chapter V). While USAID’s relief efforts in Liberia were humanitarian in nature, it did not conceal the neocolonial motive behind the United States’ focus on Liberia during and after the epidemic.

This was emphasized by revelations about the neocolonial dynamics that dictated how financial responses to the fight against Ebola in West Africa were negotiated privately through institutional aid relationships between the United States and Liberia, the United Kingdom and Sierra Leone, as well as France and Guinea (O’Grady, 2014; UN, 2014). This neocolonialist approach to humanitarian assistance was reinforced by Samantha Power, then U.S. Ambassador to the UN, who challenged France to do more in the fight against Ebola in Guinea, just like the United States and Britain had done in their former colonies of Liberia and Sierra Leone respectively (AFP, 2014).

Thus, answering Research Question 1 as to the factors that accounted for Liberia as the United States’ topmost priority in response to Ebola in West Africa, and the role of USAID in Liberia between 2015 and 2019, were legitimate. The humanitarian role of the USAID in Ebola-plagued Liberia as a gesture of solidarity, and the post-Ebola development projects it had

embarked on, as the current study has found, were in line with the U.S. Embassy in Liberia's (2014) commitment to:

...working with Liberians to rebuild and recover from the devastating impact of the Ebola epidemic on their livelihoods, health, and families... ensuring that the new capabilities drawn from the response efforts, including laboratory systems, surveillance, and health care workers trained in infection prevention and control, remain, and bolster the Liberian capacity to implement the Global Health Security Agenda to prevent, detect, and respond to future threats (USAID, 2014).

The humanitarian face to USAID's role in saving lives in Liberia during the Ebola outbreak, and its post-epidemic development projects in the country, were both apolitical and political in orientation. This corroborates Slim's (2004) view that humanitarianism and development are concerned with saving life but are also political. Thus, "the idea that there is an implicit distinction in values between humanitarianism and development, which is encouraged by relief-development dualism, is misconceived" (p. 22). Based on this perspective, I argue that driving a 21st century international humanitarianism and development by political and neocolonial motivations is a bad example and a recipe for disaster within the framework of international development. The next section discusses the promotion of gender empowerment as another finding of Research Question 1.

Promoting gender empowerment. The subject of gender empowerment forms an integral part of USAID's development policy and implementation. And the realization that women and children tend to be the most affected by disasters of any kind, makes women's empowerment a more significant objective of global development (USAID, 2012). The agency also realized that fighting Ebola in Liberia also required resourcing women, who were the most affected, to sustain their livelihoods in an environment that has culturally marginalized women prior to the epidemic. Bridging the inequality gap between women and men in Liberia, USAID

observed, centered on the need for women to realize their fundamental human rights, including their rights to benefit from the outcomes of any sustainable development programs that affect them (see again, USAID, 2012).

The focus on gender empowerment as a factor motivating USAID's role in combating the scourge of Ebola in Liberia was also necessitated by the agency's development vision for a world in which everyone, devoid of their gender, enjoys economic, social, cultural, civil, and political rights, and are equally empowered to secure better lives for themselves, their families, and their communities (USAID, 2012). What gave this gender empowerment motivation a global appeal is its alignment with the overarching UN Sustainable Development Goals that aimed for equal rights and opportunities for women regarding access to resources to contribute their quota to sustainable development (see, U.N., 2019).

The close collaboration between USAID and the Government of Liberia in instituting the LGSA project, with a gender focus to increase women's representation and participation in the land governance process, was crucial. This strengthened the civil society advocacy and provided the impetus for women's active participation in policy, legal, and regulatory frameworks for land governance in Liberia. For instance, Uvuza and Nagbe (2018) attested to the extent to which USAID has contributed to addressing the gender dimensions that characterized land governance and provided the rights to access for women in Liberia. The case of post-Ebola Liberia is a testament to the actualization of USAID's (2015) Gender Equality and Female Empower Policy, which seeks to increase the capability of women and girls to realize their rights, determine their life outcomes, and influence decision-making in households, communities, and societies. The next section discusses USAID's objective of socio-economic reforms in Liberia during and after the Ebola outbreak.

Socio-economic reforms. Liberia's trajectory into the abyss of war in 2003 branded the country as the "worst place to live in the world" (*The Economist*, 2003 cited in Kieh, 2009). Although Liberia's return to multiparty democracy in 2005 had placed the country back on track, thanks to the influx of development assistance, the scourge of Ebola had worsened the already fragile situation in the country. The bid to save Liberia from total collapse necessitated the USAID to reposition itself as the largest development agency in the country in the fight against the Ebola outbreak. One of the key challenges to the post-Ebola development process was land, the pivotal resource upon which Liberia's agricultural sector depends.

As discussed in Chapter V, the Land Governance Support Activity (LGSA), was created by USAID to support the Government of Liberia's land reform process. The significant role women play in the agricultural sector in Liberia, vis-à-vis the challenges they face with land, added a gender dimension to the LGSA project to address the gender inequalities in land rights that limit women's productivity in the agricultural sector" (USAID Gender Assessment, 2018). The LGSA project facilitated the eventual passage of the Draft Land Rights Act of Liberia into law to sanction women's rights to land (CSO Working Group on Land Rights Reform in Liberia, n.d.). Central to the socio-economic reform process after Ebola was the need to support equitable growth in Liberia's agricultural sector to reduce the problem of hunger, poverty, and malnutrition among the people.

The USAID also restructured its Feed the Future (FtF) in Liberia to catalyze agriculture-led economic growth (see, FtF Progress Snapshot, 2019). This recognized and prioritized women farmers in the Liberian society, who constitute 68% of Liberia's farmers and 69% of its poor population (USAID, 2018). Poverty reduction among women as part of USAID's socio-economic reforms in post-Ebola Liberia required attention to the critical issue of maternal and

child health. The already dysfunctional health system, which accounts for the high maternal mortality rates in Liberia (WHO, 2006), was exacerbated by the Ebola epidemic in the country. USAID's socio-economic reforms in Liberia was thus extended to the health sector and focused on improving maternal and child health by exploring ways to better utilize trained birth attendants and midwives; tackle the problem of malnutrition and its attendant impact on women and children; and holistically ensure both healthy Liberians and a more secure nation post Ebola (USAID, 2018).

Besides the major findings pointing to moral obligation, gesture of humanitarian solidarity, the quest to promote gender empowerment as a universal ideal, and socio-economic reforms to mitigate the aftermath impact of Ebola, the study also found ideological motivations as another crucial reason for USAID's role in Liberia, which will be discussed next.

Ideological motivations. Critical review of documents points to how the United States' long-standing relations with Liberia has been premised chiefly on the former's interest in the latter as a strategic navigational station for the landing and refueling for its military aircraft and ships during World War I. Liberia continues to be identified as a frontline country for the United States' fight against socialism in Africa (e.g., Krauss, 1990), which suggests China's 'threats' to the U.S. presence on the continent. From that perspective, Ebola presented an ideological triumph for socialism, based on the goodwill and the global praise that Cuba received for voluntarily 'leading' the fight against Ebola in West Africa, including Liberia, at a time when the West was concerned about border security (see, *The Guardian*, 2014). This was an indictment on the United States, hence the need to reinforce its hegemony in the fight against Ebola in Liberia.

The motivations for the United States' priority on Liberia were also influenced by the historical economic benefits that the ports of Liberia offered the former as a favorable business environment, where Firestone became a strategic asset for the United States to break the British rubber monopoly in West Africa (Hahn, 2020). For the United States to scale up its aid to Liberia in the fight against Ebola was, ostensibly, to redeem its image and maintain its hegemony in the geopolitics of the world. These findings validate Tisch and Wallace's (1994) view about the ideological purposes that politically motivated aid serves in promoting the foreign policy concerns of donor countries.

Neoliberal critics of development aid, therefore, reiterate the extent to which development agencies from the global North use aid as an instrument of donor foreign policy and mechanism, through which leaders of Western nations lay their hands on and appropriate the resources of developing nations (e.g., Carbonnier, 2010). If these are anything to go by, then it is important to critically examine the communication and outreach strategies deployed by USAID in its post-Ebola development campaign in Liberia.

Communication and Outreach Strategies

Research Question 2 assessed the communication strategies USAID deployed in its post-Ebola development campaign in Liberia between 2015 and 2019. As a rule of thumb, awareness creation on the three development projects, namely: LGSA, FtF, and M&CH was shaped by USAID's 2014 Framework for Supporting Sustained Development approach, which emphasized engagement with local systems in the recipient communities. A common set of communication and outreach strategies such as (i) community-based traditional media, (ii) public consultation approach, (iii) rural outreach and mobilization, and (iv) gender-based capacity building, was used.

Community-based traditional media. Officials of the three development projects were unanimous in their views as to how reaching out to local stakeholders in a medium that they understand was the most effective way to engage their audience without alienating them. This was not unexpected, given that their communication and outreach strategies drew on the local systems approach advocated by USAID, under whose auspices the development projects were implemented. It was also appropriate from the stance of strategic communication, that engaging with people with a high level of illiteracy like rural Liberia (World Bank, 2020), requires a medium that is as good as the message that it seeks to convey. This supports Marshall McLuhan’s seminal view that “the medium is the message” because it is the “medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action” (McLuhan, 1964, p.9).

This strategy was evident how the choice of community radio stations like Radio Kpogbarn in Margibi County, Radio Dukpa in Grand Bassa County, Radio Saclepea in Nimba County, and Vahun Community Radio in Lofa County, was strategic among the plethora of community radios for the development projects in rural Liberia (USAID, 2017). It was also evident how besides the general influence that community radios have on rural development, implementers of the USAID-funded projects were deliberate in their choice of media for propagating the thorny issue of gender empowerment in rural Liberia. This validates the importance attached to the Liberian Women Democracy Radio in giving women a voice in the development process.

Pirio (n.d.) proposed that optimizing social and behavior change communication on USAID projects requires a strategic choice of mass media, where the use of local radio stations—whether community, religious, or commercial—has strong impact on audiences. This is based on the assumption that “community members normally perceive local stations as their

own, thus increasing the trust factor and giving credibility to the messages” (p.6). The perceived gratification that rural communities derive from community radio as observed here, supports Happer and Philo’s (2013) view of the central role that radio plays in informing the public about the development around them. This implies that the traditional media will continue to wield significant influence on communication for development and social change when they align with the values of the target audience in the development process.

Public consultation approach. Implementers of the three USAID-funded projects attached much importance to public consultation with the various stakeholders to get their inputs into the development campaigns. This approach appears to promote some elements of participation in the planning and decision-making processes of the various programs in a manner that would promote local ownership and ensure the sustainability of the projects. The study also found the extent to which the regular face-to-face contacts and interactions between USAID development experts and their local stakeholders in the various interventions deepened the trust between the various stakeholders. For instance, the approach helped to elicit confidential information from local women and their health, which hitherto, would have remained private and life-threatening as far as maternal and child health was concerned.

Whiteford and Vindrola-Padros (2015) observed how global health issues, including maternal reproductive health, reflect the complex interplay of history, politics, geography, and culture. In that sense, adopting a public consultation approach was appropriate for building and sustaining the trust that local stakeholders have in ‘outsiders’ on issues that are culturally inappropriate to public discourse. The success of the public consultation approach in the development campaign reflected in the tones of project implementers, who saw it as a platform to promote gender-sensitive projects with less customary inhibitions. The public consultation

approach also appeared to satisfy calls for grassroots participation in decision-making (e.g., Agarwal, 2001) to help resist traditional Eurocentric top-down approach to development in the Global South.

Arnstein (2007) observed how the common rhetoric of “citizen participation,” “citizen control,” and “maximum feasible involvement of the poor” in development are oftentimes misleading euphemisms. She argued how inviting citizens’ opinions in public consultation on development issues can be a legitimate step towards their full participation but can be a sham if the consultation process is “not combined with other modes of participation” (p.216-219). This reflects in situations where systems actors such as policymakers and practitioners revert to subtle top-down, unilateral messaging in campaigning about development projects that are often ineffective (Pirio, n.d.). It is in relation to Arnstein’s (2007) call to combine public consultation with other modes of citizen participation that a discussion of rural outreach and mobilization in the next section is important.

Rural outreach and mobilization. This approach was one of the successful communication strategies for bridging the gap between the USAID development officials as ‘outsiders’ and their rural women counterparts in post-Ebola Liberia. A practical application of rural outreach and mobilization, as the development implementers operationalized it, first entailed entering the various communities through culturally appropriate means by observing traditional protocols with the chiefs and elders of the localities. Additionally, gaining access to and sustaining the confidence of the target audience involved creating a participatory atmosphere between the gender and outreach specialists of the various projects and local women ‘opinion leaders’ in the various localities to frontline the outreach process into hard-to-reach parts of rural Liberia.

The community mobilization approach also sustained an atmosphere of dialogue among all stakeholders—rural women to deliberate with the USAID development experts on women’s rights to land under the LGSA; women’s access to agricultural resources and inputs under the FtF, and education on maternal health under the M&CH projects. The participatory nature of the rural outreach and mobilization strategy appeared to be ‘diagnostic’ as it explored the challenges of the target audience in line with what Carnermark (2011) advocates for if the development interventions would reduce poverty among the target population.

Gender-based capacity building. The gender-focused nature of the FtF project, it was clear from interactions with implementers of the initiative, required a strategy to get women actively involved at all levels of the development process. The need to “combat global hunger, poverty, and malnutrition,” as well as “catalyze agriculture-led economic growth and advance self-reliance in beneficiary countries” (FtF Progress Snapshot, 2019, p.1) is considered achievable if women are recognized as key to this transformation. Thus, USAID (2019) is convinced that when women are economically empowered in agriculture, they reinvest in their families and communities and create a multiplier effect that promotes global benefits and stability.

Capacity building for women, from the FtF project implementers’ perspective, basically aimed at providing women farmers with knowledge about best practices to improve yield, reduce post-harvest losses, and maximize their basic technical know-how to be able to recoup their investments along the agricultural value chain. Kaplan (2004) has however called for a shift from the usual concept of capacity building on the part of organizations to developing a conceptual framework which requires the “organization’s understanding of the world” (p.61). This understanding could be interpreted in the context of development practice to mean the need for

practitioners who are intent on helping the poor to first understand their world by incorporating the local knowledge of this population in the development process.

Ian (2001) acknowledged the growing recognition for capacity building in strengthening local capabilities as an essential ingredient for long-term development. However, he cautioned that while that is necessary, an “appropriate balance must be struck between the interventions of outsiders doing something in the midst of emergency, on one hand, and building long-term local skills, on the other” (p.266). This buttresses the need to revisit the concept of capacity building from a gender perspective, so that those doing the capacity building for those whose capacity needs to be built, do not negate the agency of gender. It also supports Ranjani’s (2001) call for the recognition that men (in development practice) need to be sensitive to gender issues if initiatives aimed at empowering women are to succeed.

The Gender Question in Grassroots Development

Research Question 3 examined how gender was represented in the design and implementation of the communication strategies employed by USAID between 2015 and 2019. The study found a superficial kind of trend how the idea of women’s empowerment in the post-Ebola development process was perceived and practiced. As expected, the approach to the empowerment of women in rural Liberia by USAID development revealed an inherent orientation about women as the objects of development. This was reinforced in the following themes which explain the approach by which women’s representation and empowerment was carried out.

Men as champions of women's land rights. It was clear throughout the literature review that although USAID has long been concerned about the empowerment of women, including women in post-Ebola Liberia, the agency did not seem to care so much about the process but rather the result of the empowerment. This explains why, despite USAID's cognizance of the entrenched patrilineal influence on land tenure system, its development practitioners chose to use men as champions of women's rights to land in Liberia. This, at best, appears to resurrect the modernization paradigm's patriarchal orientation that downplays the agency of women in the development process.

This advocacy approach was premised on the view that using men to fight a conservative system that marginalized women was the most effective way to realize women's rights to land without USAID interfering with the customs and tradition of people in rural Liberia. Thus, USAID adopted an "end-based-" rather than a "means-based" approach to gender empowerment in the development process. This revealed the androcentric nature of gender representation in the design and implementation of the communication strategies employed by USAID in the women's land rights advocacy in Liberia. The conundrum in this advocacy approach to gender representation reflects what Goetz (1997) observed about the inability of the gender and development (GAD) approach to remove the power structures that continue to subordinate women in the family and in the economy.

It is foolish to assume that this sort of chauvinist approach to men as champions of women's rights to land would liberate the latter from the patriarchy that subordinates them. This presents a clear case of speaking for the "subaltern" population of rural women who were considered incapable of having a voice in the post-Ebola development process in Liberia. Therefore, posing the question as to whether the subaltern can speak, in the context in which

Gayatri Spivak (1998) put it, shows the post-colonial orientation of development in which the voices of subaltern groups such as women, tribal people, and objects of development programs in the so-called Third World, are appropriated (see, Mortan, 2003). This dovetails in the finding of the elitist representation of rural women as the next theme to be analyzed.

Elitist representation of rural women. The study also found that much as the USAID officials tried to ensure gender representation in the design and implementation of the communication strategies for the development projects in Liberia, such women's representation turned out to be elitist. This reflected in the mixed feelings among gender stakeholders—particularly women's groups in Liberia—regarding the lack of true representation of the constituency of rural women on the projects. It appeared that the criteria for roping in representatives from the various women's organizations in Liberia were tied to the track records of leaders of selected NGOs led by women. These elite women leaders seemed to appropriate the representation given them to advance their personal interests more than the collective interests of the grassroots of Liberian women in the decision-making process.

Concerns about the 'elitism' that characterized the representation of rural Liberian women in the participatory process reflected in the three gender-sensitive development projects funded by USAID in the country. The elitism appeared to have marginalized the voices of the actual beneficiaries in the very development initiatives that were meant to empower their livelihoods. This has created the phenomenon of 'elite capture' in community-driven development, where Galasso and Ravallion (2000) observed how local elites appropriate for themselves substantial portions of the resources entrusted in their care for the livelihood empowerment of the poor they represent.

Scholars blame ‘elite capture’ on donor agencies, including governments from developed countries’ rush to adopt the so-called participatory approach to development. This approach is often subverted and deflected from its intended purpose by elites for their parochial interests (e.g., Platteau & Gaspart, 2003). Others proposed how the phenomenon can be addressed in development discourse and practice, using principles of good governance and participatory democracy (e.g., Musgrave1 & Wong, 2016). Thus, the elitism that denied rural women’s active stakes in the development process in post-Ebola Liberia will be reversed, if principles of good governance and participatory democracy are given practical expression. This links to the next finding about women as beneficiaries of development.

Women as development beneficiaries. The minimal role rural women had in the design and implementation of the USAID communication strategies in post-Ebola Liberia was due to the perception of women as beneficiaries of development programs. This echoed throughout the interview responses from development officials regarding the gender-sensitive focus of the USAID-funded projects in post-Ebola Liberia. This dominant perception also permeated the focus groups with women in rural Liberia, who reiterated the livelihood empowerment orientation behind the LGSA, the FtF, and the M&CH projects. It reflected in the participants’ absolute faith and confidence in the USAID project officials and their women representatives regarding any decisions on the projects’ implementation.

Wilkins (2016) observed that the massive reintroduction of development programs in the 1980s made women the central focus of global development. This means that as women become the center of global development, they must have a voice in any development policy decisions that affect them. This is critical as the World Bank’s (2014) view on global development suggests that having a voice means having the capacity to speak up and be heard. It arose out of

the global concern that “as citizens, women are lacking a voice, even if they are more visible” (Wilkins, 2016, p.2). The premium attached to the political, economic, and social participation of women as the most important element in the political economy of development (Sen, 1999), calls for a change in orientation about women as just beneficiaries of development projects. This requires looking at the gendered nature of key sectors of the economy that affects the productivity and the livelihoods of women in society.

Gendering of agriculture and healthcare. This final theme sums up the findings on Research Question 3 regarding women’s role in the communication strategies for creating awareness about the post-Ebola development projects in Liberia. In theory, participatory development requires the creation of participatory planning institutions to empower citizens by encouraging their direct participation in the planning of community development projects that affect them (see, Speer, 2012; Fung & Wright, 2001). This must involve the participation of local people in decision-making, implementation, and benefit-sharing in development initiatives, including health, agriculture, irrigation, as well as micro-credit and social funds (see, Ribot, 2007). Oftentimes, this principle finds less expression in development projects funded and implemented by Western donor agencies for poor people in the developing world.

The study found how the gendering of agriculture and healthcare under the USAID projects in post-Ebola Liberia culminated in the marginalization of rural women in the implementation process. First, the patriarchal belief in the Liberian society that women as ‘properties’ of their husbands cannot inherit land resulted in the disproportionate inclusion of women in the implementation of the LGSA project on women’s rights to land in Liberia. The study also revealed how the FtF initiative to promote agriculture and food security gendered agribusiness as the domain of men, which again led to the unequal representation of women in

the implementation process in terms of local leadership and access to resources under the initiative. This is interesting, given the FtF program's goal to "break down the barriers that hold women back from participating fully in society to unleash their full economic potential" (Feed the Future Progress Snapshot, 2019, p.2).

In contrast, the study found the extent to which rural women in post-Ebola Liberia, who were the targets of the M&CH project, perceived themselves to be significantly involved by project implementers in the design and awareness creation process. The rural women, during the focus group discussions, intimated how the interactive nature of education on their reproductive health under the initiative encouraged them to suggest to the USAID project officials how awareness about reproductive health could be sustained at the community level. This goes to support the gendered nature of healthcare, particularly community health nursing in the African context, as the preserve for women.

The virtual exclusion of women in the post-Ebola development process, and the gendering of key sectors of Liberian society, are traceable to the legacy of the modernization paradigm under colonialism in Africa. For example, Melkote and Steeves (2015) observed how the development discourse instituted by the modernization paradigm created the perception of the Third World woman as passive and ignorant, which reflected in institutional practices and interventions that marginalized women in many development projects. Sheldon (2017) also examined the association between women and colonialism and revealed how the introduction of cash crops relegated women to growers of food crops to feed the household, while men produced cash crops for export, which reinforced men's control over land in colonial Africa.

All the above created a colonial legacy of marginalization of women in the development process, which influenced the gendered dimension through which USAID's development projects in post-Ebola Liberia were implemented.

The Concept of Women's Empowerment through Participation

This section discusses the findings from Research Question 4 on how women in rural Liberia felt that the 'participatory' nature of the communication strategies by USAID project implementers had empowered them in the development process. The discussion will focus on three major themes that explained their understanding of empowerment through participation, namely: (i) empowerment through development projects (ii) education on maternal healthcare choices, and (iii) giving marginalized women a voice:

Empowerment through development projects. Even though the concept of empowerment encompasses many domains of society, Melkote and Steeves (2015) view empowerment as the mechanism by which individuals, organizations, and communities gain control and mastery over social, political, and economic conditions. They also add that empowerment must be in terms of "establishing equity in the distribution of and access to important resources; it should be at the core of our quest toward universal human rights and social justice" (p.416). This supports the fact that the critical role women play in the Liberian agricultural sector by generating about 61% of the country's GDP (OECD, n.d.), yet marginalized, requires attention. It is based on the women's lived experiences of poverty, and the quest to improve their livelihoods against the impact of the Ebola epidemic that the USAID gender-sensitive development projects were timely.

Thus, the study found how the idea of empowerment regarding USAID’s role in post-Ebola Liberia was interpreted by rural Liberian women to mean implementation of development projects that would improve their livelihoods against poverty. The result also showed how the participatory nature of the communication approach used by implementers of the USAID projects reinforced the women’s sense of inclusion and empowerment in the development process. These findings support the LGSA project’s goal of advocating for women’s rights to land, and that of the FtF initiative to “combat global hunger, poverty, and malnutrition” through agriculture-led economic growth to promote self-reliance among women (see, FtF Progress Snapshot, 2019, p.1).

It was apparent from the findings how the women’s sense of empowerment from the development projects was associated with the communication strategies used by the project implementers. This corroborates Hamelink’s (2020) description of development communication as “the container descriptor of projects, strategies, and policies that use human communication—in a multitude of formats—to achieve positive social change” (p. 396). Despite the absence of a universally accepted definition for what ‘development’ means as a concept, Slim (1995) defined development essentially as a process that brings about change which must lead to a definite improvement in the lives of people. He added how development as a tool for change “must make sense to people and be in line with their values and their capacity” (p.143).

The above views about what development basically entails and how it is communicated validate Kabeer’s (2018) application of the concept of empowerment to the economic domain and the qualitative improvements it brings to women’s livelihoods. This supports rural women’s understanding of empowerment as development projects implemented by USAID, which they felt had significantly improved their livelihoods post-Ebola. In the next section, I discuss the

finding in another way that rural women in post-Ebola Liberia defined empowerment to be the education that they received on maternal health choices under the M&CH project.

Education on maternal healthcare choices. Another way rural women in post-Ebola Liberia conceptualized ‘empowerment’ in relation to their basic rights to healthcare choice and utilization was the education and capacity building that the M&CH project offered them. This was in response to the change of perspective that they had received through awareness creation about their universal rights as women and the need to assert those rights. Being empowered also entailed being equipped with the capacity to navigate the norms, customs, and traditions that hitherto, constrained women from independently making their own maternal and reproductive health choices. Alleyne (2013) argued how knowledge of one’s rights to health is “essential to the capacity of the individual to so expand choice as to achieve wellbeing” (p. vii), which explains why education on maternal health choices was critical.

As previously mentioned, global equity principles require that women and men have equal opportunities to realize their potential for health (see, Doyal, Payne, & Cameron, 2003). To realize this potential meant that women in rural Liberia apply the education they received through capacity building under the M&CH project to navigate the patriarchal social structures that held them down (see, Milazzo & Goldstein, 2019). From this perspective, it was obvious how the education on maternal health choices under the M&CH project built their capacity to understand how gender shapes and deepens their vulnerability to ill-health (see, MacPherson et al., 2014). Thus, it was not out of place for women in rural Liberia to equate education on maternal health choices and utilization to empowerment.

Giving marginalized women a voice. The last finding from RQ4 was the feeling of participation and empowerment that the women derived from having a voice in the post-Ebola development process. The participation manifested in two ways: through outreach programs—whereby the rural women had the opportunity to meet and interact with implementers of the development projects, and participation by representation—where leadership of the women’s groups attended workshops organized by the USAID development projects. Even though the two forms of participation gave participants an appreciable sense of empowerment, critics of participatory communication question the effectiveness of participation by representation.

For example, Hickey and Mohan (2004) argued how “participation through representation is more a process whereby “large numbers of people are represented by a relatively small group of participants” (p.19), as it is primarily about the organized interaction of leaders rather than members per se (Mitlin, 2004). This supports the study’s finding that although the rural women felt a sense of empowerment due to the level of voice that they had in the post-Ebola development process, it was a case of participation based on ‘manufactured consent.’ The finding explains why the communication strategies used by USAID development workers was a subtle top-down and elite-driven approach implemented from the bottom-up.

It is worth arguing therefore, that to ensure real participation which leads to empowerment, local people must have a decisive say in the matters that affect their lives in development decision-making (see, Hildyard et al., 2004). This confirms the observation that development programs become more relevant and sustainable when there is recognition and support for greater involvement of local people’s perspectives, knowledge, and skills, which serve as alternatives to donor-driven and outsider-led development (Cooke & Kothari, 2004). The next section examines the disconnect between international development discourse and local

participation in it, and the case for participatory communication for development and social change.

The Disconnect between International Development Discourse and Local Participation

The findings from this dissertation project have been crystalized under four overarching themes based on the four research questions that guided the study: (i) that the role of the U.S. through the USAID in Liberia, during and after Ebola was declared over in the country, was based on humanitarian motive but mainly on ideological and strategic motivations, (ii) an opportunity for the U.S. to maintain its hegemony in the committee of nations and reinforce its dominance in the geopolitical space, (iii) that the communication strategies adopted by USAID in the post-Ebola development process appeared participatory or bottom-up but revealed evidence of dominant paradigm (where men were used almost exclusively as champions of women's rights to land in Liberia), using top-down and expert-driven approaches, (iv) and that women's empowerment reflected more in the qualitative impact of the project on their livelihoods, rather than the active participation of the rural women in the development process.

Previous studies have demonstrated how development programs become more effective when local stakeholders are involved in the development process. Among the leading proponents of the paradigm of participation is Freire (2010), who argues for people's knowledge, dialogue, and participation, based on consciousness to act, and change unequal and oppressive relations. Freire base this on his view of communication as part of a system that aims to share knowledge, raise consciousness, and empower oppressed people to be actors of their own liberation. Conversely, the failure of many development programs has been attributed to development experts' isolation from local people in a manner that undermines the idea of local ownership in development discourse and practice (see, Dichter, 2009). The present study has also observed

how a disconnect arises when there is lack of participation, and when power relations exist between development experts and their local beneficiaries in the development process, as explained in the Power Relations in Development Implementation Model (see, Figure 6 in Chapter 8).

A disconnect also exists when development agencies and their experts use the concept of ‘participation’ as a ruse in the discourse and practice of development. From this perspective, Bliss and Neumann (2008) observed how in many development programs and poverty reduction strategy processes, participation is seen and implemented in a functional and utilitarian way to achieve predefined objectives, and not as a tool for empowerment. Hildyard et al. (2004) emphasized how in many situations where development practice appears to be participatory, “the voices of the local people rarely appear to be listened to” (p.59). This aligns with Arnstein (2007) who argued how many social development programs create such artificial forums for “citizens to hear and be heard, ...but lack the power to ensure that their views will be heeded by the powerful” (p. 217).

Creating a healthy nexus between development discourse and practice entails changing the motive behind ‘participation’ as not a manipulative tool to engage people in a predetermined process and as strategy in international development practice (see, Keough, 1998). This must also change the way that development has been used from a top-down, ethnocentric, and technocratic approach, which “treated people and cultures as abstract concepts, statistical figures to be moved up and down in the charts of progress” (Escobar, 1995, p.44). There is also the need for a clear collaboration between development agents and targets of development projects, where decision-making is not always top-down, even if its impulse originates from bottom-up initiatives (see, Fung & Wright, 2003). Therefore, making an argument for genuine and mutual

stakeholder participation in the discourse and practice of international development is legitimate, since “people’s participation in planning development projects is desirable because it makes projects more efficient, effective, and sustainable” (McGee 2002, p.95).

Limitations and Questions for Future Studies

Notwithstanding the contributions that this study makes to the literature, policy, and practice, based on the rich data collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions in particular, the study has some limitations that deserve mentioning. The first limitation concerns the generalizability and veracity of findings, which arose from the adoption of a case study as a research method. The findings from this study are also less generalizable due to the sampling method used, resulting from the relatively small sample size. This calls for the need to interpret the findings of the study, taking into account the identified limitations.

Given time and financial constraints, I selected only two districts in Montserrado and Lofa counties in Liberia. However, this decision was based on background research on the impact of the Ebola epidemic on the livelihoods of rural women who formed the backbone of the rural agricultural economies that characterize them, and due to their statuses as beneficiary districts of the USAID-sponsored women-centered development interventions. It is probable that the generalizability of the research findings will be limited to rural women in these two counties, as indicated earlier, due to time and financial constraints. These constraints made it impossible for the sample size to be expanded to the 14 counties in Liberia, which were also significantly impacted by the Ebola epidemic.

I also had limited access to two senior officials of USAID who were stationed at the United States Embassy in Monrovia, Liberia. Despite meeting all the protocols and tentative dates for appointments to meet with and interview these officials, I was met with bureaucratic red tape, which ostensibly, required that the two senior officers would have to be given the “greenlight from Washington, D.C., to speak on the issues.” This was obviously a limitation to the study, as access to these key potential informants would have enriched the data. Another limitation was the inability to include chiefs and traditional leaders in the initial data collection plan. This may have affected the veracity of the findings as these key stakeholders in the land rights process in Liberia would have provided different perspectives to the subject matter.

Reflexivity provided another limitation to the study. Scholars have called for reflexivity on the part of researchers to identify with women participants by being cognizant of how their lived experiences, values, beliefs, and perceptions do shape the research process (e.g., Palaganas et al., 2017; Dowling, 2006). Despite my best efforts, my identity and background impacted the initial stages of the focus group discussions as some of the participants appeared silent about questions on maternal health, compared to other issues. Although two female research assistants were trained to moderate the focus groups on this issue, it appeared that my presence as a male and perhaps also as a Ghanaian posed a barrier to such private and sensitive women’s issue.

Although advocacy on women’s rights to land in Liberia constitutes an integral part of the issues of participation and empowerment, the dissertation did not study activism in relation to the participation and empowerment of women in the land governance process in Liberia. There is the need for future research to fill this gap in literature. It is also important that in order to promote sustainable development, there is the need for an intersectional approach to policy and practice. This also calls for future research on comparative analyses of USAID’s 2014

framework for supporting sustained development with focus on women's empowerment, as against what happens in practice in the post-Ebola development process.

Concluding Remarks

This dissertation sought to examine the gender-power relations that characterized the discourse and practice of development in post-Ebola Liberia. The overarching goal was to explore the communication strategies deployed by USAID's development experts in the campaign; find out how gender was represented in the design and implementation of the communication strategies employed; and ultimately evaluate the extent to which the communication strategies used enhanced the participation and empowerment of rural Liberian women in the post-Ebola development process. By analyzing the findings through the theory of gender and power, and the theory of change, this dissertation advances two arguments.

The first argument is that the implementation of gender-sensitive development projects aimed at the livelihood empowerment of women was timely and necessary, given the disproportionate impact of the Ebola epidemic on Liberian women. However, there appeared to be a clear disconnect between rhetoric and practice in USAID's communication strategy for the LGSA project by deploying men as champions of women's land rights. The study contends that empowerment is not achieved by always speaking for the marginalized but giving them the platform to speak for themselves based on their lived experiences. In other words, the goal of women's empowerment will best be evaluated not based on *what* is done to empower them, but *how* participatory the empowerment process is by involving the marginalized in the advocacy process.

The second argument is that acknowledging women as the backbone of the agricultural sector in Liberia entails prioritizing the agency of women in the FtF initiative which sought to modernize the country's agriculture. In that regard, theorizing the livelihood empowerment of women through agriculture but "masculinizing" agribusiness in practice, is a departure from USAID's mantra of women's empowerment in agriculture. These arguments emphasize the study's findings about the extent to which the design and implementation of the USAID development process in post-Ebola Liberia were elite-driven and male-dominated. This departure from the USAID participatory approach, despite the projects' qualitative improvements in women's livelihoods, is an unstoppable conveyor belt towards the continuous marginalization of women in the discourse and practice of international development in sub-Saharan Africa.

APPENDIX A

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AFP: Agence France-Presse.

AU: African Union.

BLPA: Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs.

CDA: Critical Discourse Analysis.

CDC: Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

CDD: Community-Driven Development.

CIA: Central Intelligence Agency.

CGH: Common Goods for Health.

CITI: Collaborative IRB Training Initiative.

CNFA: Cultivation Network Frontiers in Agriculture.

CSH: Collaborative Support for Health.

CSOs: Civil Society Organizations.

CWIA: Christian Women in Agriculture.

DART: Disaster Assistance Response Team.

DAWN: Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era.

DFID: Department for International Development.

DHS: Department for Homeland Security.

DOCs: Development Outreach and Communications.

FAO: Food and Agriculture Organization.

FTF: Feed the Future.

GAD: Gender and Development.

GDP: Gross Domestic Product.

GTZ: German Agency for Technical Cooperation.

HIV: Human Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome.

IDF: Ideological Discursive Format.

IFAD: International Fund for Agricultural Development.

IRB: Institutional Review Board.

LADA: Liberian Agriculture Development Authority.

LGSA: Land Governance Support Activity.

LEAF: Local Engagement Assessment Framework.

M&CH: Maternal and Child Health.

MDGs: Millennium Development Goals.

MYS: Multi-Year Strategy.

NGOs: Non-governmental Organizations.

ODA: Overseas Development Agency.

OECD: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

OFDA: Office of Foreign Development Assistance.

OUA: Operation United Assistance.

PAR: Participatory Action Research.

PD: Participatory Development.

RCS: Research Compliance Service.

SAPs: Structural Adjustment Programs.

SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals.

UK: United Kingdom.

UN: United Nations.

UNDP: United Nations Development Program.

USAID: United States Agency for International Development.

US: United States.

UNFPA: United Nations Fund for Population Activities.

WHO: World Health Organization.

WID: Women in Development.

WOCDAL: Women and Children Development Association in Liberia.

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT

For USAID Program Implementers

You are being asked to participate in this research about the gender-power relations in the discourse and practice of international development: The case study of USAID in post-Ebola Liberia.

The purpose of this research is to: (a) find out factors that accounted for Liberia as the U.S.' topmost priority in response to Ebola in West Africa, and to what extent USAID considered women's socio-economic roles in the post-Ebola development process in Liberia between 2015 and 2019 (b) find out the role that USAID played in Liberia during the crisis and what it has been between 2015 and 2019 (c) find out the communication strategies used by USAID in its post-Ebola development campaign in Liberia (d) find out how gender was represented in the design and implementation of the communication strategies employed by USAID, and how the communication strategies enhanced women's participation and empowerment in the development process in post-Ebola Liberia.

If you choose to participate, you will be answering interview questions on what you think about the role of USAID in Liberia. You will also answer questions on what communication strategies you think were used by USAID, and how you perceive women have been empowered throughout the process. I will be asking you some questions and recording your responses on a voice recorder. The recording is to ensure that I am able to adequately and accurately capture your responses. The interview will last between 30 to 45 minutes.

As may be the case with most research, the only risk this research poses is the risk of breach of confidentiality and loss of privacy, but this is mitigated since we are not collecting your identification and we are also restricting access to the data.

The records of this study will be kept private, and in any sort of report we may publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. The recordings will be stored on a password-protected disk, and will be discarded a year after the study. Access to the records will be limited to the researchers, and if necessary, the Institutional Review Board at the University of Oregon. All records will be destroyed a year after the research is completed. Your participation is voluntary. If you choose not to participate, it will not affect your current or future relations with the School of Journalism and Communication. You are free to withdraw at any time, for whatever reason, in the course of the interview.

The researchers conducting this study are Professor Leslie Steeves and Mr. Elinam Amevor. If you have any questions about this study, please contact me eamevor@uoregon.edu.

Do you understand the information read out to you? If not feel free to ask any questions you may have. Do you give consent to participate in this study, and do you consent to this interview being recorded electronically? Your participation in this study will be an indication of your consent.

For Leaders of Women's Groups

You are being asked to participate in this research about the gender-power relations in the discourse and practice of international development: The case study of USAID in post-Ebola Liberia.

The purpose of this research is to: (a) find out factors that accounted for Liberia as the U.S.' topmost priority in response to Ebola in West Africa, and to what extent USAID considered women's socio-economic roles in the post-Ebola development process in Liberia between 2015 and 2019 (b) find out the role that USAID played in Liberia during the crisis and what it has been between 2015 and 2019 (c) find out the communication strategies used by USAID in its post-Ebola development campaign in Liberia (d) find out how gender was represented in the design and implementation of the communication strategies employed by USAID, and how the communication strategies enhanced women's participation and empowerment in the development process in post-Ebola Liberia.

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As may be the case with most research, the only risk this research poses is the risk of breach of confidentiality and loss of privacy, but this is mitigated since we are not collecting your identification and we are also restricting access to the data.

The records of this study will be kept private, and in any sort of report we may publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. The recordings will be stored on a password-protected disk, and will be discarded a year after the study. Access to the records will be limited to the researchers, and if necessary, the Institutional Review Board at the University of Oregon. All records will be destroyed a year after the research is completed. Your participation is voluntary. If you choose not to participate, it will not affect your current or future relations with the School of Journalism and Communication. You are free to withdraw at any time, for whatever reason, in the course of the interview.

The researchers conducting this study are Professor Leslie Steeves and Mr. Elinam Amevor. If you have any questions about this study, please contact me eamevor@uoregon.edu.

Do you understand the information read out to you? If not feel free to ask any questions you may have. Do you give consent to participate in this study, and do you consent to this interview being recorded electronically? Your participation in this study will be an indication of your consent.

For Rural Women

You are being asked to participate in this research about the gender-power relations in the discourse and practice of international development: The case study of USAID in post-Ebola Liberia.

The purpose of this research is to: (a) find out factors that accounted for Liberia as the U.S.' topmost priority in response to Ebola in West Africa, and to what extent USAID considered women's socio-economic roles in the post-Ebola development process in Liberia between 2015 and 2019 (b) find out the role that USAID played in Liberia during the crisis and what it has been between 2015 and 2019 (c) find out the communication strategies used by USAID in its post-Ebola development campaign in Liberia (d) find out how gender was represented in the design and implementation of the communication strategies employed by USAID, and how the communication strategies enhanced women's participation and empowerment in the development process in post-Ebola Liberia.

If you choose to participate, you will be answering interview questions on what you think about the role of USAID in Liberia. You will also answer questions on what communication strategies you think were used by USAID, and how you perceive women have been empowered throughout the process. I will be asking you some questions and recording your responses on a voice recorder. The recording is to ensure that I am able to adequately and accurately capture your responses. The interview will last between 30 to 45 minutes.

As may be the case with most research, the only risk this research poses is the risk of breach of confidentiality and loss of privacy, but this is mitigated since we are not collecting your identification and we are also restricting access to the data.

The records of this study will be kept private, and in any sort of report we may publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. The recordings will be stored on a password-protected disk, and will be discarded a year after the study. Access to the records will be limited to the researchers, and if necessary, the Institutional Review Board at the University of Oregon. All records will be destroyed a year after the research is completed. Your participation is voluntary. If you choose not to participate, it will not affect your current or future relations with the School of Journalism and Communication. You are free to withdraw at any time, for whatever reason, in the course of the interview.

The researchers conducting this study are Professor Leslie Steeves and Mr. Elinam Amevor. If you have any questions about this study, please contact me eamavor@uoregon.edu.

Do you understand the information read out to you? If not feel free to ask any questions you may have. Do you give consent to participate in this study, and do you consent to this interview being recorded electronically? Your participation in this study will be an indication of your consent.

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW GUIDE

For USAID Program Implementers

1. What was your role in the fight against the Ebola epidemic between 2014 and 2015?
2. What would you say has been the impact of Ebola on Liberians, particularly the livelihood of rural women?
3. What are the goals behind the various development programs you are undertaking that are targeted at Liberians (rural women in particular) after the epidemic?
4. What did you consider when sitting the various development programs (in relation to women's livelihood empowerment) across the country?
5. What communication strategy do you adopt in creating awareness about your development programs for women in post-Ebola Liberia?
6. How did you prioritize your communication strategy in the post-Ebola development process? How do you measure its effectiveness?
7. To what extent do the cultures and social structures of the various communities you work in affect your development communication messages?
8. How have you mitigated these cultural challenges facing the communication strategy you adopt in creating awareness about your development programs in rural Liberia?
9. How are women in rural Liberia represented in the design and implementation of the development messages that are targeted at them?
10. How does the concept of 'local ownership' factor in the design and implementation of the development programs you undertake in post-Ebola Liberia?
11. How would you define 'empowerment' in relation to the livelihood of women in Liberia?
12. What challenges undermine the livelihood empowerment of women in post-Ebola Liberia?

13. How are the development programs you are undertaking empowering rural women in post-Ebola Liberia?

For Leaders of Women Groups

1. What has been your experience throughout the Ebola epidemic between 2014 and 2015?
2. What would you say has been the impact of Ebola on women's livelihood in post-Ebola Liberia?
3. How did you as women negotiate your socio-economic roles in the absence of loved ones who played support roles as breadwinners in the family?
4. Are there organizations you work with to support the livelihood empowerment of women after the epidemic? How do these organizations operate as a support network for women in the post-Ebola recovery process?
5. Has there been any development program support to help you recover your livelihood after the Ebola epidemic? If so, what development support programs did you benefit from?
6. What kinds of USAID development support programs do members of your organization benefit from after Ebola?

Communication Strategy

7. What forms of communication does USAID use to create awareness and expose women to the development programs that are targeted at them?
8. How would you evaluate the communication strategy used by USAID to engage with women about these development programs?
9. What other means do you think would have been better compared to what USAID is using? Why?
10. How do you interpret the communication messages you receive from the program officers?
11. What messages do you think would work well if used by USAID in creating awareness about the development programs that women benefit from?

Participatory Development

12. How would you define development in relation to women's livelihood after Ebola?

13. Has the USAID ever approached you to seek your view as women's leadership regarding any of the development programs being rolled out for women after Ebola?

14. Have your views been sought by USAID or do you know of any of your fellow women who have taken part in the decision-making process of the projects women benefit from?

15. Have observed or experienced any challenges regarding any of the USAID development programs that women benefit from?

16. How do you represent the views of women regarding the challenges they face concerning the communication approaches adopted by USAID in communication to them?

Issue of Empowerment

17. How would you define empowerment in relationship to the livelihood of women?

18. What challenges do you face that you think hinder your empowerment as women?

Thank you.

APPENDIX D

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

For Women in Rural Liberia

1. What has been your experience throughout the Ebola epidemic between 2014 and 2015?
2. How did the Ebola epidemic impact your source of livelihood during the Ebola crisis?
3. Did anyone among you lose close relations who were breadwinners in the Ebola epidemic? (If they respond yes, express your condolences and listen to their stories)
4. How did you negotiate your socio-economic roles in the absence of your loved ones who were breadwinners in the family?
5. Do you belong to any social-support network that is focused on post-Ebola recovery process?
6. Has there been any development program support to help you recover your livelihood after the Ebola epidemic? If so, what development support programs did you benefit from?
7. What kinds of USAID development support programs do you benefit from after Ebola?
Probe: Let them talk about the various programs they benefit from?

Communication Strategy

8. How did you hear about the USAID development program that you are benefiting from?
9. What forms of communication does USAID use to create awareness about the development programs they bring to you?
10. How satisfied are you with the channels used by USAID to communicate to you about these development programs?
11. What other communication means do you think would have been better compared to what USAID is using? Why?
12. How do you interpret the communication messages you receive from the USAID program officers?

13. What messages do you think would work well if used by USAID in creating awareness about the development programs that you benefit from?

Participatory Development

14. How would you define development in relation to your livelihood after Ebola?
15. Has the USAID ever approached you to seek your view about what development program you want?
16. Have your views been sought by USAID or do you know of any of your fellow women who have taken part in the decision-making process of the projects you benefit from?
17. Do you face any challenges regarding the development programs that you benefit from?
18. How often do you have access to the USAID officials regarding your concerns about the development programs that you benefit from?
19. How do you communicate the challenges you face with the various development programs to USAID officials?

Issue of Empowerment

20. How would you define empowerment in relationship to your livelihood as women?
21. What challenges do you face that you think hinder your empowerment as women?
22. Present a photo on an elitist and male-dominated top-down communication approach to the women participants.
 - a. Ask them what they think about the photo.
 - b. Ask them how they feel about the photo.
 - c. Find out from the participants if the USAID way of communicating to them about development looks somehow like what they see in the photo.
 - d. Find out what alternative communication approach they would want USAID officials to use in interacting with them regarding the development programs.

Thank you.

APPENDIX E

LIST OF DOCUMENTS ON USAID'S POST-EBOLA DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS IN

LIBERIA

- Council on U.S. Foreign Relations discussions on crises in Liberia (2003).
- USAID's Local Systems Framework for Supporting Sustained Development (2012).
- President of Liberia, Ellen Sirleaf Johnson's SOS letter to the U.S. President (2014).
- USAID Country Development Cooperation Strategy for Liberia (2013-2017).
- USAID Gender Equity and Female Empowerment Policy (2012).
- USAID Liberia Feed the Future Population-based Survey Final Report (2015).
- Remarks of USAID Mission Director to Liberia during the Ebola Crisis (2014).
- Office of the Inspector General's Audited Report on USAID's Ebola Disaster Assistance to Liberia (2015).
- Beyond the Outbreak: USAID Strategies for Post-Ebola Recovery in West Africa.
- The Aftermath of Ebola: Strengthening Health Systems in Liberia (USAID & CDC).
- Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Reports on USAID Development Projects in Liberia.
- USAID Gender Assessment Report on Liberia (2018).
- USAID-sponsored Liberia Land Governance Support Activity Quarterly Report (January-March 2017).
- Lessons from USAID's Ebola Response Highlight on the Need for Public Health Emergency Policy Framework (2018).
- USAID Collaborative Support for Health (CSH) Program Document (2015).
- Liberia: Background and United States Relations.
- U.S. Embassy in Liberia's Statement on US-Liberia Relations.
- USAID Feed the Future-Funded Agriculture Program in Liberia.

- USAID’s Ebola Recovery to Self-Reliance Campaign Report on West Africa (2014-2015).
- Brochures on the LGSA, FtF, and M&CH Projects in Post-Ebola Liberia.
- Video Documentaries on the LGSA, FtF, and M&CH Projects in Post-Ebola Liberia.
- Press Releases on USAID’s commitment to a stronger post-Ebola health system in Liberia (2015-2019).

APPENDIX F

NOTICE OF REVIEW AND EXEMPT DETERMINATION



UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

DATE: November 27, 2019

IRB Protocol Number: 11132019.016

TO: Elinam Amevor, Principal Investigator
School of Journalism and Communication

RE: Protocol entitled, "Gender-Power Relations in Development Discourse: A Case Study of USAID in Post-Ebola Liberia"

Notice of Review and Exempt Determination

The above protocol has been reviewed and determined to qualify for exemption. The research is approved to be conducted as described in the attached materials. Any change to this research will need to be assessed to ensure the study continues to qualify for exemption, therefore an amendment will need to be submitted for verification prior to initiating proposed changes.

For this research, the following determinations have been made:

- **This study has been reviewed under the 2018 Common Rule (45 CFR 46) and determined to qualify for exemption under Title 45 CFR 46.104(d)(2).**

Approval period: November 27, 2019 - November 26, 2020

If you anticipate the research will continue beyond the approval period, you must submit a Progress Report at least 45-days in advance of the study expiration. **Without continued approval, the protocol will expire on November 26, 2020 and human subject research activities must cease.** A closure report must be submitted once human subject research activities are complete. Failure to maintain current approval or properly close the protocol constitutes non-compliance.

You are responsible for the conduct of this research and adhering to the Investigator Agreement as reiterated below. You must maintain oversight of all research personnel to ensure compliance with the approved protocol.

The University of Oregon and Research Compliance Services appreciate your commitment to the ethical and responsible conduct of research with human subjects.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Daniel Berman'.

Daniel Berman, MS
Research Compliance Administrator

CC: H. Leslie Steeves

COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS • RESEARCH COMPLIANCE SERVICES
677 E. 12th Ave., Suite 500, 5237 University of Oregon, Eugene OR 97401-5237
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