

# **Do women who participate in Methodist Church projects in Liberia gain more knowledge of their rights and increased opportunity for a beneficial and dignified life?**

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MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society,

AVH5035 Thesis for Master in Religion, Society and Global Issues (60 ECTS), 01 2021

Word count: 30125



INFORMATION CAMPAIGN DEMOLISHED ON A DOOR OUTSIDE THE METHODIST CHURCH SCHOOL IN ST. JOHN (PHOTO TAKEN BY THE AUTHOR)

Dedicated to  
Milla Isabelle

## **Acknowledgments**

My boys.

Stacy Douglas

The Methodist Church in Norway for the scholarship.

The Methodist Church of Liberia for access to translator, chef, driver, and accommodation in Monrovia, Bong and Bassa county.

Leemu K. Momo for marvelous cooking and translation. For protecting me and giving me advice and inspiration. Thank you!

Thanks to all the proud and strong women in Gbechon and St. John.

Roar Fotland

## **Abstract**

I present an empirical research project of two local communities Gbechon and St. John, in rural Liberia, that have received assistance through the Norwegians Methodist Church's project Partnership in Development, CODEVPRO. It is a qualitative study, and I have chosen to use observation, semi-structured focus groups, and in-depth interviews to gain the best possible access to experiences from the projects' users, especially the women. My research shows that the Norwegian Church's projects profoundly impact the communities and particularly the women's lives. The women claim they have a better knowledge of their rights, better self-esteem, and more significant influence in the community. They also claim that they achieve more respect, are less exposed to violence, have increased their income, and gained more control of the household finances.

My aim of this thesis in religion, society, and global issues, is to examine if women who participate in the Methodist Church project in Liberia gain a better knowledge of their rights and if they get an increased opportunity for a beneficial and dignified life. I find this necessary because we need more research and more in-depth insight into how development money is used and whether the help we offer has a pleasing effect on the most vulnerable groups.

My inspiration for minimum requirements for a good and dignified life is Martha Nussbaum's theory, The capability approach. Do the women feel that their lives have been improved in any way after participation in the projects?

The Norwegian Methodist Church shows a deep commitment to their projects, and they support students to travel and visit their projects. All the choices and decisions made on this trip are my own, and I write the thesis with a feministic perspective where the main goal is to improve women's lives.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Actualization

Because of Liberia's former hardship, caused by two civil wars between 1989-1996 and the second war in 1999-2003 and an Ebola epidemic in 2014, they still rely heavily on assistance and financial contribution from foreign countries. These may be some of the reasons Liberia is considered one of the poorest countries in the world. The people of Liberia are mainly self-sufficient through agriculture, living from hand to mouth.

The Norwegian Methodist Church's Mission Company receives Norad's support through Digni for its project Partnership In Development program CODEVPRO in Liberia. Norwegian aid and development organizations receive more than 90% of the funding for their work through the Norwegian government, which puts high pressure on staying within Norwegian guidelines. Christian organizations have often been the object of opposition and skepticism among political leaders and in public debate. Because several of Digni's members have a conservative gender equality policy, it gives Digni extra strong pressures to disprove such an attitude.

(Kilden kjønnsforskning.no,Skaar,2014)

According to the PID training manual (2015), men and women are to be equally involved in the Methodist Church development projects. (Bergstrøm, 2019, P. 47). One of my aspirations is to look closer into whether the women truly participate as equals in projects.

Research shows that after 30 years of targeted assistance to women, there is some progress in education, health, and political participation. On the other hand, it proves to be a deterioration in terms of poverty and violence against women. Many indicators show that women are poorer than ever and that violence against them is still rising. (Chant, 2007, P. 44)

This troublesome information indicates that much more research is needed on the poorest women and how one can help improve their lives.

### **1.1.1. Personal interest**

As a Norwegian, I know that we are giving a lot of money to development projects, but I rarely hear any good news. The media mostly writes about scandals, corruption, and failed projects. From the beginning, I was curious to learn if a Christian Church really can do any good for women in a poor patriarchal country. Does the money go where it was intended, and does it really make a difference? Are women getting empowered when the support goes to the community and not to individuals? Is assistance able to make lasting changes if no pressure or demands are placed on the country's authorities? I have written this paper out of curiosity. I feel incredibly blessed to have been allowed to travel into rural Liberia and see for myself how projects supported by the Norwegian government are doing. It is indeed an experience I will treasure for the rest of my life.

### **1.1.2. A brief account of the what, how, and why of the project**

As a part of this master's thesis, I traveled to Liberia and visited two rural villages, Gbechon and St. John, which both have received support and participated in projects funded by the Norwegian government. The Norwegian Methodist Church provided a scholarship for me to travel to Liberia and conduct an independent study of the Methodist Church projects.

By conducting a qualitative study with observation, semistructured-project interviews of female and male, and in depth-interviews with women who have participated in Methodist Church projects in Gbecohn, Bong County, and St. John, Grand Bassa County in Liberia. I aim to determine if the women gain more knowledge of their rights after participating in Methodist Church projects. The participants did not need to be members of the Methodist Church but had to have experience with one of the projects.

I want to explore if the women participating in Methodist church projects have increased opportunities for a beneficial and dignified life. I have used Martha Nussbaum's theory the capability approach to find some minimum requirements for what is required for all human beings to live a dignified life.

### **1.1.3. Shortly what the reader might expect**

The women in Gbechon and St. John expressed that they had gained more knowledge of their rights, that they received more respect, and now had the opportunity to influence their society. The women claim they are more involved in decision making and they also reported that they were less exposed to domestic violence from their husbands. Every women I talked to felt empowered after participating in the Methodist Church projects.

During my stay, I have been entirely dependent on translators handpicked and paid by the Methodist Church, and I can not completely exclude that this may have affected the result.

It is a qualitative study, and I have no measurable numbers or concrete facts on how many people now feel they have a beneficial and dignified life or know more about their rights, nor any minimum requirement of what kind of rights they should understand. I have been trying to find confirmation that the feeling of learning more about their rights is changing women's lives. I hope that empowered women can, given enough time, change destructive cultural and gender norms.

## **1.2. Women's condition according to research**

The situation for many women in Liberia is difficult; there have been several studies about the high rate of domestic abuse and rapes, especially during times of war. But still, 17 years after the war, the conditions for the women in Liberia still remain troublesome.

A 2013 UNICEF study estimated that 66 percent of girls and women age 15 to 49 had undergone genital mutilation.

By law, women may inherit land and property, and are entitled to equal pay for equal work, have the right of equal access to education, and may own and manage businesses. By family law, men retain legal custody of children in divorce cases. In rural areas, traditional practices or traditional leaders often did not recognize a woman's right to inherit land. Programs to educate traditional leaders on women's rights, especially on land rights, made some progress, but authorities often failed to enforce those rights.

Girls accounted for less than one-half of all students and graduates in primary and secondary schools, with their proportion decreasing progressively at higher levels. Sexual harassment in schools was commonplace, and adolescent girls were often denied access to school if they became pregnant.

According to UNICEF, 9 percent of girls were married before age 15 and 36 percent before age 18. (Bureau of democracy, human right, and labor, 2019)

Despite legislation allowing for abortion in sexual violence cases where the attack is recorded with the police and authorization given by two medical professionals. Affordable and accessible abortion services continued to be mostly unavailable to rape survivors,

Unsafe abortions continued to contribute to Liberia having one of the highest maternal death rates and injuries in Africa.

(Amnesty,2018)

The Norwegian Methodist Church has had several studies of their projects. Elsa Døhlis' report «Great change begin with small steps evaluation of Liberia-Norway partnership community development program» from 2012 states that CODEVPRO is a useful program that reaches the target group in the rural villages, and the programs are affecting as many as 154,000 Liberians. Døhli claims that the church fills the gap between public initiatives and the local community's initiative in a very good way.

As one can see from Døhlis' report, it is certainly impressive that the Methodist Church can build schools, hospitals, and wells in such rural areas. The roads are in such bad condition; it is difficult even to get there. They also manage to get the whole community to engage, cooperate and help with building of the projects.

(Metodistkirken, 2012)

The Methodist Church ordered a study by Roger Mersland of their project in Angola in 2008. I find it relevant how he noticed in the project PRODESSA that, « PRODESSA is not able to support balanced gender efforts. Project coordinators are men, pastors in all the communities are men and most committee members are men».

(Mersland,2008)

Several students from Menighetsfakultetet in Norway have written a master thesis on the Norwegian Methodist Church projects in Liberia and Sierra Leone. I find Emmanuel Bergstøm's work very interesting. In his dissertation «A presentation on recipient participation in grassroots movements development work in Liberia,»: Bergstrøm reports uncertain answers to direct questions about how many women actually are represented in the project committee, where CODEVPRO requires women to be represented. He also writes about a project that consisted of a mill that

simplified the women's lives. He observed that only women worked on the mill and that CODEVPRO selects and trains a man to take care of the mill's maintenance.

In «Women wielding the hoe, lessons from rural Africa for feminist theory and development practice,» Bryceson claims that the first step leading to modern development and better standard for women living in the west was decreasing the amount of domestic chores. The western agents promoting growth in the Third World have really not contributed much to the woman's improvement of material conditions. Income-generating projects have been dominating because women seem to gain equality with men by earning money outside the household, but it is often the case that women do not have time for any income-generating activities next to their regular heavy workload.

Alleviating women's daily workload through technical innovation and better organization establishes a material foundation for women to challenge gender imbalance. (Bryceson, 2020, P. 218)

Martha Nussbaum and her book «Women and Human Development, The capabilities approach» have been my main inspiration for this thesis. With a philosophical approach, she explores what people can become or do and what it requires to have a good and dignified life. Nussbaum wants us to be aware of gender differences as a problem of justice, and wants everyone to be treated as their own end in their own life.

Women in much of the world lack support for fundamental functions of human life. They are less well-nourished than men, less healthy and more vulnerable to physical violence and sexual abuse. They are much less likely than men to be literate and even less likely to have a preprofessional or technical education. (Nussbaum ,2000, P. 1)

Nussbaum has created a philosophical approach with ten central human capabilities. It is not an entire theory of justice, but it gives a basis for determining a decent social minimum in various areas. (Nussbaum, 2000, P75)

In «Feminisms in development contradictions, contestations, and challenges,» Cornwall, Harrison, and Whitehead want to challenge the picture we have of the African women as inferior, barefoot and pregnant while carrying heavy loads on their heads.

For decades now, the development industry has thrived on the stereotypical image of an African woman as the «target» or «beneficiary.» (Win, 2007, P. 79)

Pictures of these women bring in financial resources. But it does not cover the African women's complex reality at all. This book inspires Northern and African women not to see each other as charity objects but as partners.



### **1.3. Analytic unit**

My analytic unit consists of volunteer women and men who have participated in a Methodist Church project in Gbechon or St. John. The projects I visit are a school and a water pump in St. John, and a guesthouse and a water pump in Gbechon. Several of the women had also participated in the Methodist Church women's groups work-shops.

The Methodist Church is influential in Liberia, and they have connections and an extensive network that enables them to provide help in very rural areas.

The Methodist Church in Norway and the Methodist Church in Liberia started a collaboration called Partnership In Development (PID) in 2007, which receives support from Norad through the umbrella organization Digni.

The main focus of the collaboration is PID, the Partnership In Development program CODEVPRO, a program for community development that emphasizes that the support is not for individuals but local communities. They are supposed to have democratically elected leadership and to hold seminars on gender equality. The Methodist church is working to give the village people a sense of ownership of the projects, and they mainly use local resources for the projects. All planning, implementation, and accounting occurs locally, and transparency around finances is essential. The main focus has been education, management and health, including water and sanitation and income-generating projects such as the development of agriculture and infrastructure. CODEVPRO receives support from NORAD through Digni.

(Metodistkirken)

The Methodist Church organizes women's groups with a female leader; all the female leaders I met were married to the village leader. As well as learning to cooperate, discuss and work together in the women's groups, they learn about hygiene, cooking, child-rearing, basic economics and women's rights. The women's group also teaches cake baking and soap making to get an extra source of income for the women.

The women in Gbechon and St. John subsist on farming and selling homegrown products at the markets. Their main product is rice, fruits, and red palm oil. Some of the women had chickens. None of the villages have electricity, none of the villages have sanitation or inlet water. Gbechon has a medical office, St. John has no medical care. Both of the towns now have schools. In both of the villages I visited, the community leader were men and belonged to the Methodist Church.

### **1.3.1. My problem statement**

My primary research question is, do women who participate in Methodist Church projects in Liberia gain more knowledge of their rights and increased opportunity for a beneficial and dignified life?

I am also curious to see if the women participated as equals in the projects.

I use Martha Nussbaum's capability approach, which means personal opportunities or freedom to achieve desirable capabilities. Nussbaum has ten points that she claims are needed to live a worthy and dignified life. I have focused on three of them in my thesis:

Bodily integrity.

Senses, Imagination, and thoughts

Control over one's environment

(Nussbaum, 2000, P.78-79)

### **1.3.2. Presentation of central concepts**

My research has a feministic approach, and with the word feminism, I mean - an international political and intellectual movement to challenge women's subordination.

To have a feministic approach to development means that I wish to avoid mystification and appropriation that does not serve women, and challenge a tendency in the development industry which maintains patriarchal power.

Feministic approaches to development are, after all, modes of feminist activism and intervention. These seek to resist the mystifications and appropriations which have complicated the terrain. (Mama 2007, P. 157)

### **1.3.3. Limitations**

There's a lot I can not include in this thesis. The corruption in Liberia is so widespread that I lack words. When I was in Liberia, President George Weah was busy building a giant beautiful palace by the beach, while so many of his people starve and the women and children in St. John do not have access to any healthcare. During my stay, the public school was closed because the teachers had not been paid for several months. The legal system and corruption make it seem pointless to even report rape, abuse, threats, and sexual harassment.

The poor women in the rural areas can not be expected to fight for equality. The educated middle class must do that job in Liberia, and one should support them in this. My focus will be on the poor women in the rural areas and what can possible be done to increase their quality of life.

## **1.4. The research design of the thesis**

Feministic research is a holistic attempt that incorporates all stages of the research process. Feminist standpoint epistemology creates knowledge and empowerment through women's lived experiences and aims to address issues that are neglected and made invisible by the traditional research paradigm. (Hesse-Biber, Brooks ,2007, P. 4)

I have conducted a case study from two rural villages in Liberia to provide descriptions of the women's lives and knowledge about what impact the Methodist Church projects have on women's lives. It is a qualitative study where I build my theory on observing and interviewing my participants, seeing all from women's perspective.

### **1.4.1. How the research question, the findings, the theory, and the method are interconnected.**

The purpose of this study is to find out if the poor women of rural Liberia gain more knowledge about their rights and better opportunities for a beneficial and dignified life after participating in the Methodist Church's projects.

I want to highlight the women's experiences and understand my participant's perspectives to provide more profound insight. To do this, I had to travel into the jungle to interview people who have participated in the Methodist Church's projects and use observation to find out if I could discover any effect of the projects in the villages. I have used a qualitative method with group interviews, individual interviews, and observation to find my answers.

My main inspiration for the thesis has been Martha Nussbaum's capability approach. I needed to possess a minimum requirement for what it takes to live a good and dignified life for all human beings.

To take a closer look at why it seems women often do not receive the help they were meant to receive and what does not work optimally for women in development projects. I have gained information from Cornwall, Harrison, and Whitehead's book, *Feminisms in development, contradictions, contestations, and challenges*.2007

For more background information, I have used «Women wielding the hoe, Lessons from rural Africa for feminist theory and development practice.» Bryceson questions if a western feminist theory can be applied to the rural African context and how effective western aid-agency interventions in Africa really are.

My aim is to take women seriously as knowers and further use that knowledge to create social change.

## **1.5. The structure and organization of the thesis**

In Chapter 2, I present the theories I have used and explain how they have helped me obtain the necessary background information to answer all my questions. Starting with feminist theory with a particular focus on African context and continue with the philosopher Martha Nussbaum and her capability approach.

In Chapter 3, I present the method I used in my research project and explain why I have chosen a qualitative research as an approach to answer my questions. I further explain my methods to collect research material, if my research are reliable and my thoughts on research ethics.

In Chapter 4, I present research findings from the villages Gbechon and St. John where I collected data through project- group interviews, in- depth interviews and observations.

Chapter 5, I discusses the research findings from Chapter 4, combined with all the knowledge I have acquired from the theory in Chapter 2.

In Chapter 6, I conclude and answer my questions. Did the women get more knowledge about their rights? Did they get increased opportunities for a beneficial and dignified life? Did the women participate as equals in the Methodist Church project?

## **2. Theory**

### **2.1. Feminist theory in an African context**

My theory consists of a general feministic idea with the main focus on Martha Nussbaum's capability approach. In the first chapter, I will present what I have learned about general feminist theory with particular focus on African context; I need to investigate what does not work for women to see what can contribute to empowerment, progress, and development. In my second chapter, I explore what is required to live a worthy and dignified life, according to Martha Nussbaum's theory, the capability approach.

I also find it relevant and necessary to take a closer look at what prevents women-focused projects from reaching their goals.

#### **2.1.1. Gender myths**

The collaboration between feminism and development work started in the 1970s, but rural Africa's results are not as promising as one should expect. Feminism is a movement that wants to challenge the subordination of women, but it seems like the feminist impact on the development industry is not as progressive as wished. Different myths about women have been used to raise money for successful NGOs. We definitely need more awareness of how the development industry shares and interpretive the women's stories.

The term «female farming» was first brought to us by Ester Boserup ( 1970 ); in her book *Woman's Role in Economic Development*, she argued that women contribute more to African agriculture than men. That statement gave the western development community economic reasons to put the women on their schedule. (Bryceson,2020, xvii)

One of the essential things feminist research has contributed to is awareness of race, class, sexuality, and culture. When I have searched for appropriate literature for my thesis, it has been easier to find western feminist women writing about Africa than African feminist women who write about Africa. Whether it is because there are more western feminist women or because it is more difficult for African feminist women to be published is difficult for me to assess. However, there is an increasing trend where they point out having one African woman as co-author.

«Rarely does one find an article written by anyone on the front-line? The most recent fashion is for coauthored papers by northern and African writers, but one can still pick out who contributed what to the place» (Win, 2007, P. 83)

A feminist approach will usually seek to remove myths and prejudices used to oppress women. Still, why does the development industry continue to portray the African woman as inferior, powerless, pregnant, barefoot with a heavy burden on her head? «Like the fly-infested and emaciated black child that is so often used by international news agencies, women pull in financial resources.» (Win, 2007, P. 79)

Gender myths and generalities like «women the poorest of the poor,» «women do almost all work in African agriculture,» «educating girls leads to better economic development» are common. Simplification has been thought of as necessary to give gender attention in development agendas. But women almost always appear in this simplification as victims and passive subjects just waiting to be rescued by western development aid, one may ask oneself how empowering that really is for the African women.

The book *Feminisms in development contradictions, contestations, and challenges* Cornwall, Harrison, Whitehead 2007 addresses gender myths, such as: If women gain access to political power, they will opt for politics and policies that promote social and gender equality, peace, and sustainable development. (Batliwala, Dhanraj, 2007, P.26)



Many brave women make a great difference in politics. Still, let us look at the last two decades to see how women are used to promote values by religious right-wing conservatives and fundamentalists. It is a development that really does not seem to serve the women's cause in any suitable way.

Another issue that is also unfortunate is how the single mother is portrayed as the poorest of the poor. It is believed that single mothers have a much more complicated life than families where one has a male breadwinner. When you claim this, you take it for granted that a man contributes positively to the family's finances and protects against violence, which we certainly know is not always correct. To assume that children of single mothers are worse off than other children is unfortunate and stigmatizing.

«The majority of households with a female head are not poor and have increased most in recent decades» (Arriagada 1998). Research in this and other regions also indicate that children in female-headed households can be better off than their counterparts in a male-headed unit (Chant, 2007, P.38)

Although single mothers may have somewhat lower incomes and might be more vulnerable, have smaller networks, it may be easier for them since they control their own finances. They are not subjected to violence, control, and restrictions in the home. This is important to be aware of a recurring theme seems to be that when helping poor women, one fails to look at how the private sphere affects them.

People working in different development organizations seem to search for policy friendly stories and easy solutions because that is what raises money, but the reality is more complicated. Everyone who works in development knows that they have to put gender on the program, but the results of all their effort seems a bit unclear.

It looks as we are consciously acting on prejudice to raising money for assistance, which hardly serves the African woman in any useful way with gender myths and simple generalizations.

What one really should do instead is challenge and ask questions about the power relations that create poverty and marginalization.

### **2.1.2. Acknowledgement of African feminism**

Many organizations for women and their leadership have had to provide physical evidence of links with the poor people.

It can even go to ridiculous lengths; for example, women's rights NGOs has been forced to take their grassroots poor to a UN meeting or international conference to prove they're legitimacy. ( Win, 2007, P. 82)

A western feminist will probably not be judged for not engaging and working directly on projects that support those they are researching on. We have the freedom, resources, and space to do research only. We must give the same freedom to African women so that they can develop freely. It will also be strategic so that we can become partners and leaders for future development projects together, and we also need to contribute so African female writers are published.

On the whole it is still largely northern academics or feminists who write and are published; it is their work that is used by policymakers and is quoted in international media. ( Win, 2007, P.83)

African feminists have come up with well-founded criticism of how the anti-democratic African government receives money for assistance specifically aimed at women without providing adequate support and service for the feminist goals they wanted to achieve. For example, although several governments across the region established big projects for women, these were never adequately resourced and remained mostly ineffective.

Others, development projects like those in Ghana and Nigeria, had grandiose plans run by wives of dictatorial heads of state, and so served as mere foils, set up to confer legitimacy on otherwise discredited dictatorial regimes. (Mama, 2007, P. 151)

Countries with gender equality should contribute willingly with all knowledge and competence they can provide. However, it may seem that no matter how much money we give and how much expertise about equality we share, there is minimal progress concerning how much money and resources are provided. In general, it may seem that the only thing happening is that the rich are getting richer while the poor remain poor. Clearly, we must be doing something wrong.

### **2.1.3. Income and gender roles**

International development agencies have tried to improve the quality of women's lives in rural Africa for four decades. One of the most critical development projects regarding women is income-generating projects; this is sometimes a positive experience for women and can certainly contribute to empowerment. Important issues to keep in mind with this kind of project are that they usually don't widen the participants' horizons. They typically learn female skills that are very much associated with domestic work that they usually do for free and are generally not as highly valued.

Income-generating projects tend to offer a relatively restricted horizon for participants. Typically traditional female skills, such as sewing and cooking, are called upon rather than developing less gender-defined skills. (Bryceson, 2020, P. 206)

Another fact is that there is unfortunately not any research showing that increased income positively changes gender roles in any way.

Detailed case study evidence provides no proof of a positive correlation between female earnings and a more balanced sexual division of labor within the household ( McCormack et al . 1986; Turritin 1988 ).(Bryceson, 2020, P. 206)

Research results show that women are working longer than men; they are responsible for bringing food to the table and preparing it. They take care of almost everything related to the household and children alone. Projects that development workers create are causing them to do even more.

Through this programs, as Chant has argued, a feminization of responsibility and obligation for managing poverty (with women being made to do even more to ensure household survival, when men are increasingly doing less) has occurred (2006) (Molyneux, 2007, P. 231)

An interesting study: Documenting Women's Views through Participatory Research: Diaries of Daily Activities in Rural Zambia, by Elsa Skjønberg. The participants were followed for months and showed that the women worked harder and longer hours than the men.

According to our findings, the men relaxed and socialized for six and a half hours every day, while women had less than half that time for relaxation. (Skjønberg, 2020, P. 231)

It shows that qualitative data on women's lives are sparse because they don't have time to sit down and talk with the researchers. Another important finding is how much time the women used to process food.

If food processing was simplified, several hours could be liberated each day for millions of African woman which instead could be used for other activities included leisure. The men, too, did some cooking, thirty minutes daily, but mainly to roast meat, which they subsequently ate themselves. (Skjønberg, 2020, P. 230)

As long as there is no modernization, and the men do not take enough responsibility for fatherhood and homes, we still have a long way to go before we see a significant improvement in poor African women's lives.

## 2.2. Martha Nussbaum

My main inspiration for this thesis has been Martha Nussbaum, an American philosopher and professor at the University of Chicago, and her capability approach.

In my thesis, « Do women who participate in Methodist projects in Liberia gain more knowledge of their rights and increased opportunity for a beneficial and dignified life?» I want to find out what kind of benefits women receive from participating in Methodist Church projects.

To answer my question, I need to explore what it means to have a good and dignified life. I wanted to use Martha C. Nussbaum's books as my theory. Her focus is on how people can live dignified lives and how their society offers good development opportunities to create capabilities.

I wanted to look at Martha Nussbaum's capability approach to see if the Methodist Church can provide and improve capabilities for participants of their projects. I am particularly interested in what the women achieve in terms of knowledge of rights and opportunities for a better life.

Nussbaum has made her book with ten capabilities that she primarily wants the authorities to use to ensure their citizens a good and dignified life. Since Liberia's leaders don't work optimally and lack resources, I want to look at what the Methodist Church can do through their development projects to improve people's capabilities.

The Methodist Church of Norway supports projects that help villages, but I want to see which benefits individuals receive to improve their capabilities by participating in the projects. Nussbaum believes that it is the individuals you have to research, it is important to investigate amongst the women whether the aid they receive helps as expected.

Women in developing nations are important to the project in two ways: as people who suffer pervasively from acute capability failure, and also as people whose situation provides an interesting test of this and other approaches, showing us the problems they solve or fail to solve. ( Nussbaum 2000, P. 6)

If one only measure the effect of the development on families one can miss important information about women.

Looking at larger groups and families gives inadequate truths when we acknowledge that heads of households do not allow all family members what they need, and are sometimes quite indifferent to their well-beings (Nussbaum, 2000, P.65)

Nussbaum's theory can compare development projects and look more closely at the quality of life of a particular region's inhabitants. During my stay, I was in the villages of Gebecohn and St. John in Grand Bassa county, and her theories have been applied here.

Economic growth in a country does not always positively affect an individual's life, and we need to measure the quality of life of each individual differently. Economic growth can be excellent, primarily if used to make political decisions to protect women and prevent discrimination.

Increased economic growth does not necessarily improve health and educational institutions unless specific political measures are taken. The capabilities approach focuses on individuals, what people can become, what they can do with their own lives, and what opportunities are available and possible. A good society should give its citizens basic freedom and options that people themselves can choose to take advantage of. The capabilities approach is particularly well suited to uncover injustice and discrimination by treating them as individuals with their own goals and dreams regardless of gender and facilitating each one to figure out what is a beneficial life for oneself.

Suppose we want to investigate whether a country has achieved progress in its inhabitants' quality of life. In that case, the capability approach is a useful tool to see how each individual is doing.

Women in much of the world are less healthy, less well-nourished than men, more vulnerable to physical violence, and sexual abuse. They are much less likely than men to be literate and still less likely to have a preprofessional or technical education. Should they attempt to enter the workplace,

they face greater obstacles, including intimidation from family or spouse, sex discrimination when being hired, and sexual harassment in the workplace. (Nussbaum, 2000, P. 1)

Women are particularly vulnerable to discrimination worldwide and are subject to great injustice. Another severe problem in developing countries is that when women are detained and unable to contribute to the country's development, they will also not be able to help increase the country's income and productivity.

Research shows that «Gender inequality is strongly correlated with poverty» (Nussbaum, 2000, P. 3)

Nussbaum promotes a new feminism that she claims works internationally. She developed this theory during her work in India, and I want to use it as an interpretive tool on the projects I researched in Liberia. Nussbaum's universal approach steers away from complicated abstractions. She uses specific situations in poor women's lives to determine suitable solutions for these women. The problem is that these women are, in many cases, not treated as independent persons, as their own ends with their own dreams and goals, but more as a means used to realize the wishes of others.

«Instead, they are treated as mere instruments as a means to an end of others- reproducers, caregivers, sexual outlets, agents of a family general prosperity.» (Nussbaum, 2000, P. 2)

Nussbaum stresses the importance of promoting gender sensitivity in international political debates. Women are most often disadvantaged, and one should not make decisions without knowing what women want and how the decisions can affect their lives. She claims postmodern feminism has become too abstract and too far from reality, which does not help us understand how we can help poor women, and she wants feminism to focus on women in development countries and shed light on the enormous injustice these women constantly are living in

«Some feminist philosophy, particularly the type influenced by postmodernist literary theory, has involved a type of abstraction that turns the mind away from reality, and that does not help us see or understand real women's lives better.» (Nussbaum, 2000, P. 11)

Nussbaum uses philosophical arguments about justice and explains how we should use these in practical life and political decisions.

Any political or economic approach to international development work should be recognized for its ability to address gender discrimination issues and the kind of solutions they have to address these issues, and every solution should be followed up with proper research. Feminist philosophy must have new topics on the list to make significant changes. Feminist theory should talk specifically about hunger, genital mutilation, lack of education, property rights, labor law, child marriage, and child labor.



### **2.3. The capability approach**

The theory of the capabilities approach has a long history. Thoughts concerning possibilities, choices, and what a person can do and be, have occupied people's minds at all times.

The earliest and most influential Western historical source for the Capabilities Approach is the political and ethical thought of Aristotle. Aristotle believed that political planners need to understand what human beings require for a flourishing life. (Nussbaum, 2011, P. 126)

Nussbaum's (P. 124, 2011) thinking is inspired by ancient Greece and Rome, although Smith, Kant, Mill, and Marx also have impacted her theory.

The capability approach has developed as an alternative approach to welfare economics. A need arose to measure progress in development in a better way. Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum brought together new ideas with the main focus on what individuals can do.

One particularly difficulty with measuring poverty through income is that available income measures pertain to the household; a focus on income, therefore, encourages the neglect of sex bias in nutrition, health care, and other aspects of poverty. (Nussbaum, 2011, P. 144)

Nussbaum was inspired by John Rawls theory about primary goods to write a specific list with ten points in which the authorities should secure their inhabitants to make sure that they can live a good and dignified life.

If we agree that citizens are all worthy of concern and respect, then we ought to conclude that politics should not treat people as agents or supporters of other people whose mission in the world is to execute someone else's plan of life. (Nussbaum, 2000, P.58- 59)

With the capabilities approach, one wants to find out what women can do and who they can become. If you do not educate a woman, you will never know what she could have done in the

world. I want to see if women are given more opportunities when they participate in the Methodist Church projects. I do this by following Nussbaum's theory, where I view each person as their own end with their own goals and dreams. I am interested in what individuals gain out of using the projects and whether they can take advantage of the offers that been given.

The capabilities approach sets freedom high, and one wants to give adult people room to find out what gives them meaning and dignity in their own lives. However, in order to make free choices, one must be free from political tyranny and unhealthy restrictive traditions.

During my interviews, I asked, among other things, what they think is a worthy life for women, and I received many different answers. Nussbaum has developed ten points that she thinks are necessary to live a worthy life. Initially, she wants the authorities to provide this satisfactorily. The authorities in Liberia is not capable of doing this at the moment, so I will look at what the Methodist Church is doing to increase the participant's capabilities.

Some developing countries may have a certain degree of resistance against phrases such as human rights and words such as feminism. It may seem like privileged Western ideas do not fit in their local context so their skepticism is understandable.

«Theories often come from nations that have been oppressors, or from classes in poorer nations that are themselves relatively privileged. (Nussbaum, 2000, P. 35)

One must be aware of one's own culture and context and respect different opinions on a good and dignified life. The capability approach values freedom and gives room for different choices and ways of living as long as it all is totally voluntary.

### **2.3.1. Central human functional capabilities**

I will present the 10 points on the current list.

1. Life. Being able to live to the end of natural human life, not dying prematurely, or before one's life is so reduced as to be not worth living.

2. Bodily Health. Being able to have good health, including reproductive health, to be adequately nourished, to have adequate shelter.

3. Bodily Integrity. Being able to move freely from place to place, having one's bodily boundaries treated as sovereign, i.e., being able to be secure against assault, including sexual assault, child sexual abuse, and domestic violence, having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and choice in matters of reproduction.

4. Senses, Imagination, and Thought. Being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason- and to do these things in a «truly human» way, an informed and cultivated way by means of an adequate education, including, but by no means limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training. Being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing self-expressive works and events of one's own choice, religious, literary, musical, and so forth, being able to use one's mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression with respect to both political and artistic speech and freedom of religious exercise. Being able to search for the ultimate meaning of life in one's own way and being able to have pleasurable experiences and to avoid unnecessary pain.

5. Emotions. Being able to have an attachment to things and people outside ourselves, to love those who love and care for us, to grieve in their absence, in general, to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger. Not having one's emotional development blighted by overwhelming fear and anxiety or by traumatic events of abuse or neglect.

6. Practical Reason. Being able to form the inception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning for one's life.

7. Affiliation.

A. Being able to live with and toward others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction, to be able to show empathy toward others and to have compassion for specific situation, to have the capability to provide justice and friendship.

B. Having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation, being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. At a minimum, this entails protection against discrimination based on race, sex, sexual orientation, religion, caste, ethnicity, or national origin. Working as a human being, exercising practical reason, and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other collegas.

8. Other species. Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature.

9. Play. Being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities.

10. Control over one's environment.

A. Political. Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life, having the right of political participation, protection of free speech and association.

B. Material. Being able to hold property, not just formally but in terms of real opportunity, and having property rights on an equal basis with others, having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others, having the freedom from unwarranted search and seizure. (Nussbaum, 2000, P. 78-80)

Nussbaum claims that these capabilities are needed to live a good and dignified life. All points are related to each other and affect each other; if removing one, it will also affect the others.

Of course, even if the authorities follow the list, one cannot guarantee that all citizens will stay healthy and happy, but they can definitely contribute to make the situation for the women easier.

The government cannot make all women emotionally healthy, but it can do quite a lot to influence emotional health through suitable policies in areas such as family law, rape law, and public safety. (Nussbaum, 2000, P. 82)

Her theory of capability approach, is divided into basic capabilities, in which the individual has basic skills to develop further advanced capabilities. And we have internal capabilities, which are about our internal ability to act; this is influenced by our freedom and ability to express the internal capabilities. Further, we have functioning capabilities, which are the active realization of one or more capabilities. A woman who has not suffered genital mutilation has the internal capability for sexual pleasure. Most adult human beings have the internal capability for religious freedom and freedom of speech.

But even when people have developed a power, they may be prevented from functioning in accordance with it. (Nussbaum, 2000, P. 84)

Finally, she mentions combined capabilities, which consist of the internal capabilities and the opportunities one has for using them. Some countries educate their citizens to debate and think critically, but in reality, they are denied using these capabilities in society.

Citizens of repressive non-democratic regimes have the internal but not the combined capability to exercise thought and speech in accordance with their consciences. (Nussbaum, 2000, P. 85)

Nussbaum talks about functioning capabilities, the functions of a person describe what that person does, has, and is, the possibilities that exist for that person right now. It will always be interesting to look more closely at what realized functions a person has concerning what opportunities are available and what choices people make.

To inspire other people to change behavior, one must first understand why people choose as they do. And whatever the individuals may think of themselves, one adheres to the theory that each human being is the means to their own end and should be treated with the same respect.

This approach considers each person worthy of equal respect and regard, even if people don't always take that view about themselves. The approach is not based on the satisfaction of existing preferences. (Nussbaum, 2011, P. 35)

The capability approach is very suitable for gender equality and discrimination, as any form of discrimination, regardless of whether the bias comes from gender, ethnicity, or religion, most differential treatments will affect one or more of Nussbaum's 10 points. Nussbaum's focus also gives a different result as one has often viewed the family as a unit. With the capability approach, one must go to each family member and examine their options individually. This approach also shows deep respect for diversity in different religious and secular thoughts and desires to live your own life.

### **2.3.2. The main focus capabilities**

I have chosen three of the points that I will look into more closely, Bodily Integrity, Senses, Imagination and Thoughts, and Controls over one's environment. I chose this point out of interest, and the information I needed for my thesis, not of importance. It would be impossible to decipher which topics are most important as the different capabilities influence each other, overlap, and work together.

#### **2.3.2.1. Bodily integrity**

Bodily integrity, being able to move freely from place to place, secure against violent assault and domestic violence, and have opportunities for sexual satisfaction and choice in reproduction matters. (Nussbaum, 2011, P. 33)

I want to know if the Methodist Church projects were safe to use, especially for women. I want to know if any limiting factors hindered or restricted the use of the projects. Nussbaum writes about the importance of having real choices. The Methodist church works to provide women with education and their sources of income, as Nussbaum writes.

When we think about domestic violence, we have to think about exit options and bargaining power in the marriage, so that when a woman can leave, she doesn't have to endure being beaten. And when the husband knows she can leave because she has employment opportunities or control over property, she is at least somewhat less likely to be beaten. (Nussbaum, 2011, P. 8)

Education and work have a direct relationship for women being less likely to be subjected to violence, providing jobs that can be essentially lifesaving. Research also shows that women's property rights are directly related to women being less exposed to violence, which shows how crucial clear policy and legislation must be to ensure justice for women.

Agarwal's necessary research shows that landownership is the single most important factor explaining why some women in a region suffer domestic abuse and others don't. A woman who owns land is less likely to be victimized because she can leave the marriage, and when she leaves, she will be taking something of great value with her. (Nussbaum, 2011, P. 8)

Pressure on the authorities to bring about a complete ban on genital mutilation is of utmost importance. It seems plausible for government to ban female genital mutilation, even when practiced by adults without coercion, for in addition to long-term health risks, the practice involves the permanent removal of the capability for most sexual pleasure. (Nussbaum, 2000, P. 94)

Nussbaum puts high value on freedom, and that an adult who chooses to live a life of celibacy is, of course, okay. On the other hand, it is not okay to remove the ability to be sexually satisfied physically forever. It is no less than cruel to expose a defenseless child to this. Nussbaum supports adults' right to live a traditional life, but one must always discuss whether some traditions are just

harmful and should be stopped. In some villages, the bush schools are the only real option, a lot of what happens at these schools is secret to outsiders, but we know the girls are genitally mutilated. Having access to a properly competitive school to offer an alternative to the bush schools can be lifesaving. It can prevent a life of utterly unnecessary pain and health problems.

The right to live a traditional life must never stop us from daring to discuss what is worth preserving and what must be waived. And what is justified by the fact that it is natural for women is never static and fixed, which fortunately and hopefully means that attitudes about what suits women are entirely possible to change with education and enlightenment.

#### 2.3.2.2. Senses, Imagination, and Thought.

Being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason - and to do these in a «truly human» way, a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education. Being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing self expressive works and events of one's own choice. Being able to use one's mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression. Being able to search for the ultimate meaning of life in one's own way. Being able to have pleasurable experiences, and to avoid needles pain. (Nussbaum, 2000, P, 79)

Nussbaum describes how difficulties and obstacles affect everything in women's lives. When women's potential is completely underestimated, and they are not allowed to develop their abilities, when they do not have the right to decide in their own lives, it naturally affects the whole person negatively. Women in developing countries are often deprived of freedom at an early age, and the only plan they have to deal with is marriage.

These circumstances affect the inner lives of people, not just their external options: what they hope for, what they love, what they fear, as well as what they are able to do (Nussbaum, 2000, P. 31)

Education is necessary for everyone to live together in a sustainable society, and it is essential to develop the existing capacities into advanced internal capabilities. To generate ideas of freedom, independence to find their abilities and develop their independence, girls must have access to education. By creating several capabilities, they can more easily make free choices about what they want to do in life. People who have received even a basic education have greatly enhanced employment options, chances for political participation, and abilities to interact productively with others in society on a local, national, and even global level. (Nussbaum, 2011, P. 152)



Nussbaum wants the country's authority to be responsible for education, but not all leaders are capable of this responsibility and rely on help from NGOs. Illiteracy is such a significant obstacle to developing one's capability and must be taken seriously.

Illiteracy is an enduring disability. The inability to read and write will handicap the individual deprived of a basic education each and every day of their life. (Nussbaum, 2011, P. 154)

#### 2.3.2.3. Control over one's environment.

Political. Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life.

Material. Having property rights on an equal basis with others, having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others Having freedom of unwanted search and seizure. (Nusbaum, 2000, P. 809)

To engage politically, to discuss gender equality, religious freedom, and freedom of speech at all require some basic knowledge, which many of the women don't have.

Lack of knowledge and the experience that women are not used to being listened to can decrease political participation. The women living in countries characterized by corruption, where it is difficult to accomplish change, where women may be at risk of being threatened and harmed for political expression could easily be enough to make political commitment low.

Women in many nations have a nominal right of political participation without having the right in sense of capability; for example, they may be threatened with violence should they leave the home. (Nussbaum, 2000, P. 98)

Even though NGOs make a formidable effort, it is essential to emphasize that health and education must, in the long term, be organized and maintained by the government in a proper way. Another topic that must be noted is that there is a need for a global ethic as a base to build upon, where women are the main focus in the development project, and they get to have a voice to secure women's rights and stop inequality.

Considerations of justice for women have been disproportionately silenced in many debates about international development; it is only fitting, then, that they should be a central focus of a project aimed at constructing basic political principles for all (Nussbaum, 2000, P. 33)

Combined with the rest of the capabilities Nussbaum writes about some principles that should guide public action.

1. The importance of options. Women often have inferior exit options in marriage. If she can read if she can get a loan, she is far more likely to stand up to abuse or end it by leaving if she can get a job. Options give women alternatives to marriage.

- 2 The importance of perceived contribution. Another vital determination of women's bargaining position in the family is their perceived contribution to the household's well-being. Women's domestic labor is frequently undervalued. Programs targeting women usually raise their status in the family.

3. The importance of a sense of one's worth. Significant importance of strengthening a women's bargaining position in the family is her perception of her value and her projects' worth. (Nussbaum 2000, P. 283-288)

## 2.4. Summary

In this chapter, I have argued that gender inequality has proven to be much more complicated than anticipated. In several areas, women's capabilities and quality of life have worsened. Legislative reform is not matched by changes in political and economic realities to enable women to use new laws. Gains in one sphere may produce new harmful forms of gender inequality,

Fortunately, we see signs of improvement in health, education, and political participation for women. But there are still problems in the private sphere when the woman starts working outside the home, and their work load is doubled. Even if they have started to contribute financially, the men don't help out in the house, and violence against women is increasing instead of decreasing worldwide.

For some reason, the increased international focus on women has not led to any particular improvement for the poorest women. When we send money to projects for poor women without following it up in countries that have not developed democracy and to countries that violate human rights, we are accomplices of the wrongs done to the women. It clearly shows how assistance must always be followed up by research to determine if the chosen approach has had a positive effect.

Nussbaum wants us to be conscious of our background when coming to developing countries with new theories about what is best for those who live there. A universal model will naturally face criticism, partly because one will be questioning if it takes enough cultural considerations. Still, some values, rights, and freedoms are difficult to not regard as universal. It is also understandable if some people think little respect is shown for human freedom by coming up with a universal theory that I believe everyone should use. Still, the approach's value is precisely that everyone should have the freedom to think and choose for themselves.

We want an approach that is respectful of each person's struggle to flourish, which treats each person as an means to an end and as a source of agency and worth in her own right. (Nussbaum, 2000, P. 69)

The goal is not that everyone should act the same way. One should appreciate diversity and understand that not everyone wants the same life. It is only problematic if some of the diversity harms others. Nussbaum shows how women are mistreated, both socially and politically, and how this contributes to giving women unequal human capabilities. With her philosophical arguments, she wants to meet women's practical needs and further create opportunities for everyone. She emphasizes the willingness to support human freedom. Adults should be able to choose what is a good life themselves, as well as respecting the choices of others. All people should be recognized as individuals with their own goals and rights. There are many ways to live a valuable life, but for women to make a real choice, some basic freedoms and rights must be established. The theory supports a woman's right to live a traditional life as long as she has chosen it herself. But if a woman who is unable to live another life says that she does not want another life, then that is something that must be reflected upon without necessarily concluding.

If someone who has no property rights under the law, who has had no formal education, who has no legal right of divorce, who will very likely be beaten if she seeks employment outside the home, says that she endorses traditions of modesty, purity, and self-denial, it is not clear that we should consider this the last word on the matter. (Nussbaum, 2000, P. 43)

Nussbaum's theory gave me the background information I needed to understand what is required to live a truly dignified life. It also made me more aware and enabled me to find and focus on injustice.

### **3. Method**

The Methodist Church in Norway wants a study of their projects in Liberia. They provided financial support for my journey, but this research was independent and based on my own independent choices.

In this chapter, I present reflections and decisions about methodological choices. Starting by explaining why I think a qualitative design is best suited for this study, further illustrating the scientific paradigm around feminist research, then methodological justification, and a description of how the study is conducted, before ending with research ethics related to the task.

#### **3.1. Choice of method**

In this thesis, I want to get to know the participant's thoughts, feelings, and experiences, and my goal is to gain a deeper understanding of the topic. Silverman explains the differences between qualitative and quantitative research. «Quantitative research involves a numerical analysis of the relationship between variables. Qualitative research involves a verbal description of real-life situations». (Silverman, 2014, P. 4)

The qualitative method is best suited to getting hold of the participant's views and gaining knowledge about social processes and interactions. I will use in-depth interviews, focus group interviews, and observation. The goal is that the methods will complement each other and provide in-depth knowledge

#### **3.2. Research paradigm**

The ultimate goal in feminist research is to give emancipation and empowerment and to promote social justice and create positive change for women.

«A feminist standpoint is a way of understanding the world, a point of view of social reality, that begins with, and is developed directly from women's experiences.» ( Brooks, 2007, P. 60)

Feminist standpoint epistemology believes that hierarchical society gives different knowledge on how social life is perceived. Based on Hegel's views, the oppressors have less understanding of those they oppress, were as the oppressed develop a dual perspective of experience both about themselves and those who oppress them to adapt to the best of their ability.

«Standpoint is based on the Hegelian idea that the oppressed have developed a dual perspective, their personal perspective developed through experience and their perspective of their oppressors, which they develop to survive.» (Hesse-Biber, Leavy, Yaiser, 2004, P. 15)

It seems to be a good idea to research the bottom up, focusing on the oppressed to gain better insight. If one focuses only on those in power, one may lose important information, as the oppressors simply do not have the oppressed's perspective. It has never been necessary for those at the top to learn about the downtrodden. Those who have power do not need to adapt to the same degree.

«They know the workings of not only the female world but also much of the male world. Problems that women face on a daily basis are often invisible to or ignored by the male eye». (Hesse-Biber, Leavy, Yaiser, 2004, P. 16)

(Biber, 2004) writes on page 135 that race, class, gender, and sexuality hierarchies are power relationships; they are socially constructed and carry different privileges and restrictions. One should find out who has socially sanctioned power in the situation.

What group gains and what group loses, this must not be confused with personal power. Some individuals can be influential, achieve a lot, and get others to do things for them, but still lack socially sanctioned ability.

I use Martha Nussbaum's universal capability approach to evaluate Methodist church projects and individual participants. The capability approach is more of a flexible framework than a paradigm. It is not just about the individuals' abilities, but also about opportunities and freedoms created by the environment combined with personal skills.

The best approach to this idea of a basic minimum is provided by an approach that focuses on human capabilities, that is, what people are able to do and to be, in an informed way, by an intuitive idea of a life that is worthy of the dignity of human being. (Nussbaum, 2000, P. 5)

I will use the capability approach as a tool for measuring individual's opportunities for a dignified life. Moreover, I will use it to evaluate how the Methodist Church can create capabilities for every person. I have chosen three out of the core capabilities, which I will look closer into, 1. Bodily integrity, 2. Senses, imagination, and thought, and 3. Control over one's environment. (Nussbaum, 2000 P. 78-80)

I share Pale's (2001) view that the people I am working with are not passive research subjects but active collaborators who are experts on their communities and lives. (Buch, Staller, 2007 P. 218) Furthermore, I traveled to Liberia to learn from women. Reflection is part of the research process. Their backgrounds influence the women I research, and my experiences influence me. One is a product of society, and unfortunately, as a woman researching women one is not automatically provided with an inside perspective.

The feminist reflective researcher's perspective makes me constantly aware of my attitudes. My goal is to gain knowledge of women's attitudes, feelings, and experiences from participating in the Methodist Church projects. Whether I have an insider or outsider perspective is a compelling case. As a woman, I have different access to the women's community than a man would have. It is not a problem that we talk alone. Furthermore, there is some information a woman would be more comfortable sharing with another woman than with a man.

Nevertheless, one must realize that other things create outsiders, such as religion, ethnicity, class, and culture, that can generate just as much confusion and challengers as gender. Wether or not a

privileged white, middle-aged woman from the west can be a voice for poor women in rural Liberia is questionable.

### **3.3. Research strategy**

I want to know if women who participate in Methodist church projects in Liberia understand their rights and accomplish increased opportunities for a fair and dignified life. The ultimate goal of women's research is to develop knowledge which will eventually change the subordinate position of women in male-dominated societies.

I stayed in a village called Gbechon, in the guesthouse supported by the Norwegian Methodist church. I conducted two in-depth interviews with women, one focus group interview with only women, and one focus group interview with only men. I lived in a private guesthouse in St. John, where I conducted two in-depth interviews with women, one focus group interview with only women, and one focus group- interview with only men. Throughout my stay, I used observation to substantiate findings and claims. Interviews are an essential part of my data collection. . One of the most significant benefits of interviews is that one can go straight to the source and question what one wants to explore.

The participants allowed me to use recording during the interviews; this facilitated transcribing and analyzing. I used semi-structured, open-ended interviews with pre-set questions. To allow for easier observation of the differences in their answers, I asked the same questions in the same order. After the interview, I transcribed the audio recordings, wrote notes, and analyzed what emerged during the interview.

### **3.4. Methods for collection of the research material**

#### **3.4.1 Selection**



In Gbechon, I had the opportunity to talk about my project in the church and encourage people in the congregation to participate in the project. I wanted eight women and eight men in the project group interviews. I ended up with a few more, but I did not want to reject anyone who wanted to participate. My only criteria were that they somehow had experience with one of the Methodist church's projects in Gbechon which was the water pump and the guesthouse. I conducted the interviews in the church and the guesthouse.

In St. John, everything was more chaotic, my translator talked to the village leader who shouted something in a loudspeaker, and I was informed when my groups would show up. The projects in St. John were a school and a water pump. I conducted the interviews in the guesthouse where I was staying.

In both villages, I got my translators to explain that it is entirely voluntary to participate and that they only need to answer what they want to answer and leave the room at any time without reason.

### **3.4.2 Focus groups**

I wanted to interview a group of women and another group of men in both the villages. Gbechon, and St. John. I tried to create a welcoming environment and gave the participants information to make sure they understood that everything is voluntary. They can respond just to what they want, and I will anonymize everything. I asked the same questions in the same order to both the women and the men to see any differences between them. Focus group interviews consist of small groups that possess some characteristics of interest. In this study, they must have experience with one of the Methodist Church's projects.

I follow an open-ended interview guide. It is vital to allow all the participants to speak out and not be interrupted. I want to be as flexible and open-minded as possible. Focus group interviews as a method can be a source of profound knowledge for specific areas, which can further provide ideas and inspiration for improvement or whether one should do things differently. Discussions can bring out participant's feelings and attitudes about the topic.

According to Silverman; «The participants are seen as coming to the focus group with fundamental orientations and ideas (held truths) that may be better elaborated through interactions with others, but that may also be suppressed by group dynamics that can encourage conformity or silencing of particular viewpoints» (Silverman, 2014, P. 207)

Of course, the dangers in very patriarchal societies are that there will be no discussion and that everyone agrees with the person with the highest rank. It is essential to pay close attention to what is not being said.

### **3.4.3 In-depth interview**

In order to collect deeper data on the women's lives, I had some questions I only asked the women. I conducted two in-depth interviews with women in Gbechon and two in-depth interviews with women in St. John. I decided to use the same questions during all the interviews, mainly to find differences. I also felt a need to clear up misunderstandings due to cultural differences and sometimes problematic translation. A more peaceful atmosphere during the in-depth interviews can provide room and time for more information on the same topic. I also had some additional questions that I only asked the women during the in-depth interview. All the interviews are open-ended semi-structured in their form, with pre-made questions.

During the interviews, I want to learn about the experience of women in different situations. It is vital to pay careful attention to the participants avoidance of certain themes or if something is not said.

### **3.4.4 Observation**

I wanted to investigate if my observation matched my interview findings and theory. Unfortunately, I became ill, and I was also concerned about my security, which hindered me in my observations. I only stayed three days in Gbechon and three days in St. John because my translators were eager to go back to Monrovia.

Still, I think observation has been essential and given me much-needed information. I have noted and observed throughout my stay. I have followed the Methodist Church projects and, more generally, the interaction between the genders, focusing on injustice and unequal distribution of power.

I should mention that observation can present challenges when one differs so much from the people one observes that their behavior changes when they notice you. However, it is nevertheless a useful tool that provides more depth and complements the interviews interestingly.

### **3.4.5 Use of translators**

I was completely dependent on translators. Some participants spoke English, but an English that I, unfortunately, do not understand. During the interviews, I asked my questions in English. The translator translated this to the participants and then translated the answers. I had many questions, it was hot, and many wanted to participate.

The participants spent a lot of time thanking God and thanking the Methodist Church in Norway for the projects. I have written down the information I found relevant to my project as directly as possible.

## **3.5. Method for analyzing the material**

This thesis is an ongoing process where I continually work with data, theory, and analysis to try to figure out what I have learned and what exactly is going on. My main goal is to be accurate and

honest in my transcription and analysis and be aware that what I register is my interpretation of the information.

«Qualitative research is in part about finding and describing patterns and structures, observing routines. When you see the same thing again and again; you may be onto something». (Silverman, 2014, P. 124 )

In the analysis work, I am looking for common denominators. Are there any repetitive patterns that can give satisfactory answers to what the women who participate in the Methodist Church projects get out of their participation? This work continues until no new information is released.

«When fresh data or new settings no longer produce new insights, your research circle is finally closed.» (Silverman, 2014, P. 123)

### **3.6. Reliability and validity**

I want to emphasize that my work is completely independent. The Norwegian Methodist Church has not provided input or laid any guidelines for my work. I definitely have no need to deliver a positive report. My goal is to deliver honest and transparent research as far as I am able with my limited knowledge and abilities.

Reliability says something about how reliable my study is. If someone else comes and performs the same research in the same place, do they get a similar result? It is important to be transparent and clear in my descriptions of the research method and research strategy. Furthermore, I must be conscious and explicit in my choice of theory and explain my analysis and interpretation. Transparency and honesty throughout the research process ensure reliability.

«The two central concepts in any discussion of the credibility of scientific research are validity and reliability. Reliability refers to the stability of findings, whereas validity represents the truthfulness of findings (Altheide and Johnson, 1994)» (Silverman, 2014, P. 83)

Validity says something about the possibility of generalizing the research. Can the answer be transferred to other situations? Moreover, have I received answers to what I ask for in my hypothesis, do I have an overview and control of possible bias.

Proposing an allegedly accurate statement involves the possibility of two kinds of error.

Type 1 error is believing a statement to be true when it is not.

Type 2 error is rejecting a statement which, in fact, is true. (Silverman, 2014, P. 90)

It is essential to have a clear explanation of all choices and methods and that everything is transparent and accurate to uncover errors and shortcomings.

My main concern is the language and misunderstandings caused by cultural differences. I also have a problem with my study supported by the Methodist church of Norway and my translators being hand-picked from the Methodist church. Even though I am not from the Methodist Church, my participants might still feel the need to answer what they consider right on the questions to continue to keep up the goodwill from the Norwegian Methodist Church and receive more aid money for needed projects.

### **3.7. Research ethics**

Feminist research ethics is described by (Buch, Staller, 2007, P. 205) as self-conscious frameworks for moral decision making- helping decide whether decisions are right or wrong by feminist values

and standards and that the framework involves justice for women, care for human relationships, and commitment to finding the political in the personal - this is at the root of all my ethical thinking. All research must subordinate to ethical and juridical guidelines, whose purpose is to protect the participants or other persons affected by the study. I have an independent responsibility to evaluate the ethical implications of my research.

The most critical points in the research ethics for my research are informed consent, confidentiality, and protection. The translators from the Methodist Church helped me find participants for my interviews. It is not ideal for my study, as many of the participants live in poverty and are reliant on the help of The United Methodist Church, which could make it difficult for them to decline an invitation because of their connection to the Methodist Church..

«For many poor third-world interviewees, local norms make it difficult to turn down a request from a visitor to be interviewed, or they do not know the potential implications of participating in research.» (Silverman, 2014, P. 156)

As this is the only possibility I have to acquire information, I need to emphasize to the participants that they participate in this study voluntarily and that they only answer the questions they want and stop the interview at any point without any consequence for them. I also told the participant that I will anonymize their answers. Many of my participants have little or no education, making it challenging to convey the necessary information to the participants. I am dependent that my translators understand how important this is for me and my research and dutifully share this with the participants.

It is also essential that they understand the study's purpose, which is to find out what kind of benefits women get from participating in the Methodist Church projects. I made a general informed consent model paper to be signed before the interview.

«Informed consent should mean that you do not pressure people into agreeing to participate in your study.»(Silverman, 2014, P. 147)

Each participant signs an informed consent; on this paper, they sign that they participate voluntarily and that I will anonymize all data. Those who were not able to sign in writing submitted fingerprints. Mainly women can not write their names, and it could be the women who find the whole research concept challenging.

It is difficult, possibly impossible, to understand how different it is to be a woman in Norway compared to rural Liberia. (Buch, Staller, 2007, P. 204) describes that when the researcher is a woman, it is likely that community members will expect that she play roles similar to those of other women in the community. It can be difficult for a woman traveling alone to avoid completely unwanted attention. She writes further that it is relatively common that single women doing ethnographic fieldwork are approached as possible partners for marriage, dating, or sexual activity. Nevertheless, she urges female researchers not to overlook such behavior but rather use it in research. It can be quite descriptive of how women are viewed in the society being researched. «Moreover, conscious attention should be paid to the processes involved when a community places the ethnographer in particular social roles, for these processes can illuminate a great deal about gender and other roles in community life.» (Buch, Staller, 2007 P. 204)

My job is to be object, and certainly not to judge. If one wants to contribute to change, one must first understand how others think. It is important to me that my participants should be able to recognize themselves in my observations and analyses, they do not have to agree with my thoughts and interpretations, but the data must be recognizable.

«Even the most well-intended ethnographers sometimes describe communities or people in ways that those they write about find unfair or hurtful» (Buch, Staller, 2007, P. 218)

It is essential to understand that even with the best intentions, my presence can create difficulties for those I want to help. Moreover, it does not matter that one writes a feminist paper when you come from a privileged place yourself and can return home to safety and freedom after the interviews are over. I have to be aware that what I write can have consequences for those I have interviewed and that utmost care is required, as the absolute most crucial point of the research ethic is that it should not cause any form of harm to your participants.

## **4. Findings.**

Do women who participate in Methodist Church projects in Liberia gain more knowledge of their rights and increased opportunity for a beneficial and dignified life.

### **4.1 Introduction to findings.**

This chapter seeks to present findings from my collected data from project-group interviews, in-depth interviews, and observations in Gbechon and St. John. I traveled to Gbechon a day trip from the capital Monrovia on extremely bad roads, into the jungle to have a look at two projects, a water-pump and a guesthouse, and three days later I drove a couple of hours further to St. John, where I stayed for three days and looked at two projects, a water pump and a school.

I want to explore the lives of women who participate in Methodist projects in Liberia to see if they gain more knowledge of their rights and an increased opportunity for a beneficial and dignified life.

My participants did not have to belong to the Methodist Church. My only request was that they had some experiences from at least one of the Methodist Church projects.

I am also interested in exploring if the men and women participate in the projects as equals and I wanted to link my findings to Martha Nussbaum's theory of the capability approach, which supports the principle that each person is its own end. (Nussbaum, 2000, P. 6)

Please bear in mind that my data was translated by translators from the Methodist Church. I have done my best to reproduce my translations as accurately as possible. The English used in Liberia is a bit abbreviated and different from what Norwegians are used to, and I have chosen to keep the language as authentic as possible. I hardly understood any Liberian English and was completely dependent on my two translators.



I organized the presentation into five parts—three of the principles of Martha Nussbaum's central human functional capabilities. One with knowledge about human rights and one with what my participants think is a beneficial and dignified life for a woman. My wish to explore if women participated in Methodist Church projects on an equal footing with men is integrated in the five different parts.

**1. Senses, imagination, and thoughts:**

One of Nussbaum's capabilities that emphasizing the right to education, development and looks at what kind of opportunities one has to cultivate and develop.

**2. Bodily integrity:**

One of Nussbaum's capabilities emphasizes the right to move freely as well as being secure against violent assault and domestic violence.

**3. Control over one's environment:**

One of Nussbaum's capabilities emphasizes the rights to participate in political choices that govern one's life, political participation, protection of free speech, freedom to seek employment, and work. (Nussbaum, 2000, P.78-79)

**4. Human rights.**

I tried to find out if the women had knowledge about the fact that all human beings all over the world have certain fundamental entitlements.

**5. What is a good and dignified life for a woman?**

As I use a feminist approach to this research project, I found it essential even though I use Nussbaum's capability approach, to investigate what the women think for themselves is a beneficial and dignified life.

I begin with an introduction before I present each focus group's answers, starting with the project group interviews of male and females, the individual interviews of two women, and ending it with my observations.

## **4.2. Introduction Gbechon.**

I started my stay in rural Gbechon, a day trip from the capital Monrovia. The car seemed also to be a gift from the Norwegian Methodist Church since it was written Norwegian Method Church on the side of the car. If we did not have a proper car we would not have gotten to Gbechon, the roads gets ruined by the rain and we would be stuck in the mud. I drove with a translator, the driver and the Director of the Department of Community Services of UMC Emma Okai-Wleh All the people I met on the journey showed tremendous gratitude for the Methodist church's projects and thanked and praised God for the work the Methodist Church in Norway had done for them. The projects I looked at in Gbechon was a water pump and a guesthouse. I was welcomed and placed in the guesthouse, built with the Methodist Church's funds. The guesthouse had its employee, a skilled woman who kept everything in excellent condition. The residents of Gbechon live mainly on farming, rice and vegetables, and production of red palm oil. Some of the women keep chickens. The Methodist Church built the guesthouse to boost trade, to have a place for the residents' guests, and a place for professional staff working in Gbechon. (Information from the Methodist Research Center in Monrovia) I got to meet the head of the village, a man. And I attended a church service, where I was allowed to talk about my project.

The day after I arrived, a Methodist Church employee gathered the men in the Church, and we started with a project- group interview of 10 men, they were polite, eloquent, and everyone except one could write their name. The men want more development; some support women's

empowerment and are happy to help me. The next evening, a Methodist church employee gathered 12 women in the guesthouse. All except one woman could write their name. The women engaged because of the guesthouse, some came to listen, and some want more development. It heat is sweltering, and the women are impatient. I do not think they actually have the spare time it takes to do. The interviews. On the third day, two women come to the guesthouse for individual interview. The women are eloquent, interested, and both can write their names. Both of the women listened when I talked in Church and wanted to participate.

### **4.3. Senses, imagination, and thoughts Gbechon.**

Being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason in an informed and cultivated way by adequate education. To produce self-expressive work of one's own choice. Being able to use one's mind by guarantees of freedom of expression, searching for the ultimate meaning in one's way, having pleasurable experiences, and avoiding unnecessary pain ( Nussbaum, 2000, P. 78).

#### **4.3.1. Male project group Gbechon.**

I asked the men what they enjoyed most in the project and if the project had empowered them. If they had noticed a change in women's self-confidence and self-esteem, and if their attitude and thoughts about women had changed after participating in the project?

The men tell me that they are pleased with the water pumps and the guesthouse. They inform me that they had no place to have guests earlier and that the water provides better health and hygiene. One man emphasizes that «The Methodist church's projects give us the strength to continue.» (1. Interview November 3. 2019) All the men claim they have been empowered; and that they are happier and make more money. «They have built the guesthouse themselves, showing that they are a dedicated and robust community» (1. Interview November 3. 2019). The men tell me that there has been a change in women's confidence. After participating in the MC workshops, the women cooperate better. «They make us proud; we can see that the women are in front.» (1. Interview November 3. 2019)

The men claim to have noticed that their attitudes towards women have changed. Before to the Methodist Church projects they thought the women were aggressive, they also emphasize that they appreciate that the women love and obey the leader. Before the existents of the Methodist Church projects, only the men worked; now they work together, they stand together, they tell me. «Some of the women work even harder than the men.» (1. Interview November 3. 2019). They tell me that now they trust the women, which they did not do before, and that the Church makes them unite.

«What can a man do that a woman can't do?» (1. Interview November 3. 2019), one of the men asks me.

#### **4.3.2. Female project group Gbechon.**

I asked the women what they enjoyed most in the project if the project had empowered them. Have they noticed a change in their self-confidence and self-esteem? Has their attitude and thoughts about women changed after participating in the project.

During the interview, the women show the most gratitude towards the water pumps. The guesthouse has brought pride to the villages they say. After participating in the MC projects, a woman says, «We are no longer afraid to talk; we have attended workshops through the Methodist church and received training.» (2. Interview November 4. 2019). Everyone claims that the projects have empowered the women. Business is growing, and strangers are paying more at the market than acquaintances. They tell me that they have gained new knowledge and new ideas about development. All the women say they have achieved more confidence and better self-esteem after the projects. The village has become more developed, and they are no longer embarrassed. Everyone wishes for more development and they compare themselves with neighboring villages and what kind of help they have received.

### 4.3.3. Individual interviews of two women Gbechon.

I asked two women what they enjoyed most in the project, if they had been empowered, if they had noticed a change in their self-confidence and self-esteem, and if their attitude and thoughts about women had changed after participating in the project. I also asked who in their house has access to education.

They tell me that they are most grateful for the water pump, before they could be without water for days. The guesthouse allows them to meet new people, which they like. Both women say they have been empowered and have learned how to bake bread (a sweet cake) through training from the Methodist Church. They have both graduated baking class, and one of the women got a stove to continue the baking. Both claim there have been significant changes in terms of self-esteem. «Before certain men forced their opinions on women, but it is not like that anymore». (3. Interview November 5. 2019)

When asked when these changes appeared, one woman answered 2016/2017, the same time the water pump came and the Methodist church project started. They also seem to have learned some new skills; «The women were building the foundation wall of the guesthouse; they managed it and we are proud. (3. Interview November 5. 2019)»

They tell me that attitudes towards women have changed, now women cooperate, they also have greater self-confidence and manage to do things on their own «Men must respect us now». (3. Interview. November 5. 2019). They tell me that now they have their women's groups and work together. The women say that everyone in the household, except for one of the women have had access to education. Still, the woman without education says «I have baking course from the Methodist church and a job thanks to the Methodist church, so I am proud and grateful. (3. Interview. November 5. 2019)»

#### **4.4. Bodily integrity Gbechon.**

This is what Nussbaum refers to as having ones bodily boundaries treated as sovereign. To be able to move freely, be secure against assault, sexual assault, child sexual abuse, domestic violence, and having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction (Nussbaum , 2000, P. 78)

##### **4.4.1. Men project group Gbechon.**

I asked the men if they had experienced any problems or difficulties with the project, if they thought there are different problems for men and women and if they had any suggestions for improvement.

The men claim that there is no danger or any problems for women regarding the project.

«The women fetch water, and they have no issues with this. The pump is closer to the housing, and the water is always there. (1. Interview November 3. 2019) «

##### **4.4.2. Women project group Gbechon.**

I asked the women if they had experienced any problems or difficulties with the project, if they thought there are different problems for men and women, and if they had suggestions for any improvements. The women say they have no problems with any of the projects. Prior to the Methodist Church projects, they had to walk long distances to fetch water, especially during the drought period. They tell me that it was not good for the kids to walk the long distances alone, and it could be dangerous. «They would get into fights (2. Interview November 4. 2019)» . They say that the water is safe and accessible. «Before we drank water from the river, all the children had diarrhea, we always had to take medication, but now everyone is healthy. (2. Interview November 4. 2019)». But they would like to have iron door, a fence around the guesthouse and light. «Lights provide security» (2. Interview November 4. 2019). Concerning the guesthouse they mention that;

«We don't have to have strangers in our homes anymore. (2. Interview November 4. 2019)», which seems to be a relief for everyone.

#### **4.4.3. Two individual interviews Gbechon.**

I asked the women if they had experienced any problems or difficulties with the project, if they thought there are different problems for men and women, and if they had suggestion to improvement. I also asked how they fix challenges and if they have someone they can go to for help, and who in their home has access to health services.

Both women want an iron door to the guesthouse, and a fence around it. They have been promised this, but have been told that it may take time. In case of major challenges and conflicts occur, they tell me that they have a women's group where the leader help them solve problems in the group. All members of both households have access to health care. «We have a clinic in the village for minor issues, and for big problems, we go to the neighboring town. (3. Interview November 5 2019)» The women emphasize that the most important difference after participating in the MC project is that the men have stopped beating them. «Men no longer abuse us. (3. Interview November 5 2019)» They explain that the improvement of men's behavior is related to their economic contribution to the household. «After I started making money and contribute financially, I am respected. (3. Interview November 5. 2019)»

## **4.5. Control over ones environment.**

To be able to participate effectively in political choices that govern ones life, property rights, having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others and having the freedom of unwanted search and seizure. (Nussbaum, 2000, P. 80)

I asked the men if the men and women have different responsibilities in the project? Do they have the same power and influence? How is it determined who will lead the project? Did the project improve the economic situation? Who benefited most from this project? How do they feel about women earning and managing money? And have they become more interested in politics?

### **4.5.1. Men project group Gbechon.**

During the project the men tell me that the women were in charge of fetching water and cooking, while the men were responsible for the money and the construction. Now the women are cleaning and maintaining the guesthouse. One man claims that «the men and women did the same thing», that the women also picked up sand and participated in building the guesthouse.

The men and women come up with ideas for the project and everyone votes. If the women get more votes, they get it. Because there are more women, they get what they want. (1. Interview November 3. 2019)"

The men believe the women have 50 % representation in leadership positions and had the same power and influence as the men. They claim they have equal rights, work equally, they have female leaders, and now work together and share everything with the women. When asked directly, they say that the leader was a man. Regarding who had the financial responsibility for the project, they tell me that it was only women. Everyone thinks women have been given better opportunities to make their own decisions. They say they are proud that women make money and believes that women can spend their own money on whatever they want.



One also claims that women are good at managing money because they are more concerned about security. In the planning of the project, they say that both women and men participate alike. The leader (a man) was responsible for reporting information regarding the projects. They claim that men are more responsible and decide more than women, but women support them.

The men tells me that they have not become more interested in politics, they do not want politics in the Church, but everyone thinks it is essential and useful to vote. They hope and pray for a good leader. They receive information about society and politics from the media, radio, and telephone calls.

#### **4.5.2. Female project group Gbechon.**

I asked the women if the men and women have different responsibilities in the project? Are men and women equally represented in leading positions? Do they have the same power and influence? How do they determined who will lead the project? Is it possible for a woman to lead the project? Has the project improved the economic situation? Who benefited most from this project?

The women tell me that the men and women worked together and participated 50/50 in the project, the women brought water, and the men worked with the sand. The women say their choice of project was decided equally. They work together, «The man supports the woman, and the woman supports the man. (2. Interview November 4. 2019)»

The women believe they were equally represented in leadership positions and have the same power and influence, but the leader this time was a man, and they tell me that it is vital to obey the leader. One woman tells me that she led another project in another city so women can be leaders. The men and women vote on who will lead the project. The women say they were in charge of the economy, and everyone claims that women are better at managing finances. The reporting was done by the leader (a man). The women believe they have become better at making decisions, after participating in the project, they say they have learned to discuss and can make decisions together. All the women think it feels good to have their own money. «I hide cash from the man, and if he asks for money, he may not get it». (2. Interview November 4. 2019)»

The women say that they not only save money on their own, but they save money together, so they have a more considerable amount available if someone needs to borrow money. They have created a private bank. Everyone believes that they have achieved this thanks to the MC who has taught them to discuss and find solutions together. «Before, when the men were in meetings, the women were not included. Women were not allowed to speak, and the men kept things hidden from women. (2. Interview November 4. 2019)» They also tell me that it is now possible to start a new business because of the guesthouse.

They claim that they have not become more interested in politics, and they do not feel they have the knowledge needed to discuss politics. They receive information about politics from radio, and some have children with smartphones who let them know if something extraordinary happens.

#### **4.5.3. Two individual interviews Gbechon.**

I asked the women if the men and women have different responsibilities in the project, who has the most say in deciding what kind of project, the economy, planning the project, reporting the project? Are men and women equally represented in the leading positions? Do they have the same power and influence? How do they determine who will lead the project? Is it possible for a woman to lead the project? Has the project improved the economic situation? Who benefited most from this project?

Both believe women and men had equal responsibility in the project. They worked together 50/50 and are proud of this. In this project, the women decided they wanted the guesthouse, they cooperated, and voted for it they tell me. «We knew we would get it because there are more women than men. (3. Interview November 5. 2019)»

When asked if women and men were equally represented in leading positions, they answer 50/50, but the leader was a man. The choice of the leader is determined by choice. «We chose a man with a good attitude towards women, who respects women and who is a good man. (3. Interview November 5. 2019)»

They tell me that the women were responsible for the finances during the project; both of them claim women have better control over finances. When asked who has the most say during the planning of the project, both women answer women. The women decide for themselves what they want, and they have ideas that men listen to and follow. «Everything has changed. Women are more respected than men now. (3. Interview November 5. 2019)»

They both believe that women have been given the capacity to access decision making, and both women have previously held leadership positions. Both women claim to have gotten better finances after participating in the projects. Through the project, one woman got a job. The other woman learned how to sew, bake, and make soap which she sells on the market. «Before, men said that women could not live without them, and women were entirely dependent on men. (3. Interview November 5. 2019)» it is not like that anymore for these women. The other woman tells me, "My husband doesn't even remember the size on my sandals anymore. I buy what I need now myself. (3. Interview November 5. 2019)» No one has become more interested in politics, but both also claim; «Discussing politics can be risky; one can be threatened. (3. Interview November 5. 2019)»

## **4.6. Women's right.**

### **4.6.1. Men project group Gbechon.**

I asked the men if they have gained more knowledge about human rights after participating in the project

The men claimed to have gained a better knowledge of rights after the MC has shared experience with them. Before the project, they thought entirely differently they tell me. «Now we try to understand rights, cooperate, and understand each other. (1. Interview November 3. 2019)» One man says; «Before, we didn't have rights, but everyone has rights. It's not just for men (1. Interview November 3 2019)» and another man emphasizes «Even the children have rights! (1. Interview November 3. 2019)» They tell me that before women did not vote, but now they do. They say it is essential that women are empowered so that not everything is a burden to them. «Before, women were underestimated by men, but now women can join the community. (1. Interview November 3. 2019)»

### **4.6.2. Women project group Gbechon.**

I asked the women if they have gained more knowledge about human rights after participating in the project?

The women tell me that they have gained more knowledge of their rights after attending training sessions and have been informed of their rights. «We are no longer afraid to sit with the men. (2. Interview November 4. 2019)» Everyone says that men and women should have equal rights. One of the women even claims that; «Now women have more rights than men. They are no longer dependent on men. (2. Interview November 4. 2019)» «People from the Methodist Church gave us training in things we knew nothing about; now we know we have rights. (2. Interview November 4. 2019)»

### **4.6.3. Individual interviews with two women.**

I asked the women if they have gained more knowledge about human rights after participating in the project?

Both believe they have gained more knowledge of their rights after participating in the project. The women tell me that they get essential information through the Church. If there is something that the village should know about, the leader will be notified on the phone, and he will ring the church bells, and they will gather in the Church and receive information. Both of them answer, «Women and men should have equal rights. (3. Interview November 5. 2019)»

## **4.7. A beneficial and dignified life for a women.**

### **4.7.1. Male project group Gbechon.**

I asked the men what they think is a beneficial and dignified life for a woman?

«The woman must respect the home and make their man proud, and it is important to obey the man. (1. Interview November 3. 2019)» The men think a woman should have the opportunity to work and attend school.

### **4.7.2. Female project group Gbechon.**

I asked the women what they think is a beneficial and dignified life for a women?

«How you dress, where you live, how you take care of your husband and children is important. (2. Interview November 4. 2019)» They tell me that women must provide education for the children, and they think it is vital with empowerment, especially for the girls. They say it is important to treat the other women in the community well, and to save and help each other.

#### **4.7.3. Individual interviews of two women Gbechon.**

I asked the women what they think is a beneficial and dignified life for a woman?

The women tell me that your character and education are essential for women. They claim you will be respected when you get married and get your own home. Both women agree that the man is still the boss, the man is the leader in the home, and they prefer it to be that way. «The man is the head. I follow the Bible. (3. Interview November 5. 2019)»

#### **4.8. Observations Gbechon.**

Due to the fact that there is not much spare-time for the women their development of senses, imagination and thoughts is limited. But I observed the women in Church and I think the Church gives them a space I did not see any other places. The service is clearly led by a man, but several women came up to preach. To have a place where one can hear women's voices loud and clear is indeed hopeful. The leader of the church music was a talented woman, so it is possible to practice leadership in Church, and it is also a place where the women can sing and dance and have a break from every day struggles. When I asked, they responded that the women began to participate more actively in the Church after the last war (2003). The theme of the preach was about Zacchaeus and the need to «get down.» Money was collected twice because the preacher did not seem too happy with the first result.

On my second night in Gbechon, a mob rally outside the guesthouse and cried "bring out the white woman" and other things I didn't understand that didn't seem particularly friendly. I found myself wishing there were fences and iron doors, so I understood the women's need for an iron door and railings. The women walked with bare arms and visible legs. One day I wore a dress where the legs were visible, and immediately the outside of the house were filled up with men. I did not feel safe, so I spent the rest of my stay in Gbechon with long arms and long pants even though the temperature was above 40 degrees. On the second day in Gbechon, I start throwing up. None of the

medication I brought with me works, so I am a bit reduced the rest of my stay in Liberia. A woman walks with me and shows me her house. I think one can see a difference between the Methodist homes and the other homes. The women in the Methodist Church have received training in cleanliness and home-care. It is challenging to communicate with the women in Gbechon as most of them speak Perre. I never knew where my translators were, but they show up when I had interviews. The women and children brought me fresh fruit, held my hand, smiled, and made me feel welcome. The children followed me everywhere. The women worked unstoppably, they fetched water, worked in the field, cared for homes and children, which was exceptionally time-consuming without electricity and inlet water.

They walked to different markets to sell their vegetables. They walked long distances with a heavy loads of goods. I'm not sure what the men were doing. When I was about to leave the village, a group of the oldest men came to say goodbye. They suggest that I talk about this village to my husband, so maybe my he can help them.

#### **4.9. Introduction St. John.**

An hour drive from Gbechon is the village St. John. I get to meet the head of the village, a man.

St. John's population is ca ten thousand, almost fifty percent of which consists of children. St. John did not have schooling opportunities until 1974, and then the war came and ruined the education system. In 2002 the school was reestablished; by this time, the government provided support and salaries for the teachers. But a growing student population, with only three teachers and two volunteers in a small building, with no furniture, lightning, or ventilation, made it difficult to provide service. The project fitted for PID partnership, and the goal is to provide quality education. (Information from the Methodist Church Research Center in Monrovia)

I asked to speak with the women first, I had the feeling that it was better to talk to the women first so no one could try to influence their answers. An employee of the Methodist Church gathered 10 women. None of the women could write their names, but they were positive, polite, and curious. Later I talked to a woman from the Methodist Church she claimed that some of the women probably could write their names, but the interview situation made them uncertain and shy and it may seem safest to sign with the thumbs. I colored their thumbs with ink from my pen and made a print of it on the paper for voluntary participation.

Some women say they attended because of the children and the importance of school, and some were inspired by the fact that I had traveled so far to talk to them, it was important for them that I was there. The second day an employee from the Methodist Church gathered 8 men. A couple of the men could write their names. They wanted to attend because they received information from the village chief about attending. Others just wanted to participate. On the third day, I had two individual interviews with women. They arrived because they received information and wanted to participate, one was involved in the planning of the school, and both are members of the Methodist Church. None of the participants arrived on time and I spent a lot of time waiting.

#### **4.10. Senses, imagination, and thoughts.**

This is what Nussbaum refers to as being able to use the senses, to imagine, think and reason in an informed and cultivated way by adequate education. To produce self-expressive work of one's own choice. Being able to use one's mind by guarantees of freedom of expression, and search for the ultimate meaning in one's own way, and being able to have pleasurable experiences, and to avoid unnecessary pain ( Nussbaum 2000 Page 78).



#### **4.10.1. Female project group interview, St. John.**

I asked the women what they enjoyed most in the project, if they had been empowered, if they had noticed a change in their self-confidence and self-esteem, and if their attitude towards and thoughts about women had changed after participating in the project.

There is great appreciation for the school. They think education is essential. «Before, some of the children did not attend school, but now they go to school.» (4. Interview November 6. 2019) several of the women claim this particularly benefits the girls compared to earlier. «My daughter is going to school now because the school is cheap». (4. Interview November 6 2019) They show me the old school which is small and shabby, and they describe it as being bad. They tell me that before the projects they were worried about what would happen to the children, but now they think the city has become better because of school. The women say they have been inspired and empowered by the projects. They were cooking for the workers when the school was built, so they feel they were included in the project, which empowered them. An important factor for the women is increased sales at the market. «After the school came, there has been more business». (4. Interview November 6. 2019). When asked if the self-esteem has improved, they answer yes, because business is better.

#### **4.10.2. Male project group interview, St. John.**

I asked the men what they enjoyed most in the project, if they had been empowered, if they had noticed a change in women's self-confidence and self-esteem, and if their attitude towards and thoughts about women had changed after participating in the project?

They appreciate that children can go to school every day and that the school is free. They tell me that they are inspired by the teachers who work voluntarily. They also mention that there are

children in school who do not belong to the Methodist church, so the school helps many. The men tell me that they are in great need of a hospital, but as one man mention, «We need education first you can't have a hospital without doctors.» (5. Interview November 7. 2019), so they agreed that the first Methodist Church project should be a school.

They say the project coordinator has empowered them, and those who were building were empowered by attending. Since the project started, they have begun to like their sisters (the women) more, and claim that changes have been made about how the women can live and behave around the men. They have also noticed that the women are more eager to send the children to school. «Before, they were shy and would not go to school, but after motivation from the Methodist Church and teachers, more children go to school.» (5. Interview November 7, 2019) They tell me that they appreciate the results of Methodist Church work-shops. "The women have gained more knowledge, and they can bake bread and make money.» (5. Interview November 7 2019). They also claim that the women's behavior has changed. «Before they were not respectful to their men, now they are polite». (5. Interview November 7. 2019) And they tell me that their attitude towards women has improved because the women behave better. The men say that now the women participate in discussions about social development.

#### **4.10.3. Individual interviews of two women St. John.**

I asked the women what they enjoyed most in the project, if they had been empowered, if they had noticed a change in their self-confidants and self-esteem, and if their attitude towards and thoughts

about women had changed after participating in the project. I also asked who in their household has access to education.

Both of the women have to sign with their thumbs and they said that they want their kids to be able to sign in writing. One of the women said «When there is no school, hope is gone, and society is blind». (6. Interview November 8, 2019) They tell me that the women feel empowered, the volunteers from the Methodist Church have workshops and teach them how to take care of the home and the children, and the importance of children attending school and that the girls also have

to go to school. Both women say they have gained more confidence. Now they have learned how to dress properly, how to wash the children, hair care and how to take care of school uniforms. Before the projects, the women were aggressive towards each other when discussing things; they began to fight with each other, now they have learned to talk peacefully together.

Most people have changed and are doing things differently; now, everything is clean. I wash the house and make sure the children are clean before starting my business (selling homegrown food at the market) (6. Interview November 8. 2019)

They also tell me that they have better conversations with their men. They are no longer the same, and now they are doing things to improve society together. It seems especially noticeable that more girls are attending school. «Before only the men had access to education, but now all the children go to school.» (6. Interview November 8. 2019) One of the ladies shares that she was not allowed to go to school, and one can tell that it is important for her to send her daughters to school. «My father did not let me go to school, but now I send my girls to school. (6. Interview November" 8. 2019

One of the woman is a beautiful looking older lady and she tells me she previously thought she was too old to take proper care of herself, but now she wears beautiful clothes, fixes her hair every morning, and is proud of herself.

#### **4.11. Bodily integrity St. John.**

Having one's bodily boundaries treated as sovereign. To be able to move freely, be secure against assault, sexual assault, child sexual abuse, domestic violence, and having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and choice in matters of reproduction (Nussbaum, 2000, P. 78)

#### **4.11.1. Female project group St. John.**

I asked the women if they had experienced any problems or difficulties with the project, if they thought there are different problems for men and women, and if they had suggestions to improvement.

Everyone claims that they are satisfied with the projects, the distance is short for the children, and the children are safe. They are more dissatisfied with the water- pump. It is too far away.

#### **4.11.2. Male project group St. John.**

I asked the men if they had experienced any problems or difficulties with the project, if they thought there are different problems for men and women and if they had suggestion for improvement.

The men tell me that the school is safe, but the teacher residence is far too small, the volunteer teachers have to use the principal's office, so the principal no longer has an office. The water pump is too far away. The road to the school is not safe, and they want a path through the village for the children, so they do not have to walk along a road where big cars with lumber drive as it can be dangerous for the children.

#### **4.11.3. Individual interviews with two women St. John.**

I asked the women if they had experienced any problems or difficulties with the project, if they thought there are different problems for men and women, and if they had any suggestion to improvement. I also asked how they solve major challengers and if they have someone they can go to for help, and who in their home has access to health services.

If they have problems, they can go to the Methodist Church female head, who acts as a counselor. Regarding access to health care, they say that no one has it. Some go to the nearest hospital when

birth is approaching, but it is very far. Most give birth at home with the help of traditional midwives. They are grateful that the school also distributes medicines and sanitary products. They both emphasize that the most important thing is that «The men have stopped beating us». (6. Interview November 8. 2019) The improvement in men's behavior seems to be connected with the women's ability to contribute to the household. The women tell me «when the man is happy with the house, and you contribute financially, your husband will not hit you». (6. Interview November 8. 2019)

#### **4.12. Control over one's environment St. John.**

To be able to participate effectively in political choices that govern ones life, property rights, having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others and having the freedom of unwanted search and seizure. (Nussbaum, 2000, P. 80)

##### **4.12.1. Female project group St. John.**

I asked the women if the men and women have different responsibilities in the project? Are men and women equally represented in leading positions? Do they have the same power and influence? How do they determined who will lead the project? Is it possible for a woman to lead the project? Has the project improved the economic situation? Who benefited most from this project?

The women tell me that women and men had different responsibilities in the project. Decisions are made together. All the leaders were men.

The men decide everything, they oppress the women. No women were informed about the meetings where the decisions were made, the men are the leaders, and the women were not invited to participate. (4. Interview November 6. 2019) She emphasizes that the men who did this are not the teachers.

(Afterwards, some men told me that this woman is not from the village and has no idea what she is talking about. It is difficult for me to figure out, so I'm just mentioning it. The other women were nodding and agreeing when she spoke, so I found it truthful).

When asked who had financial responsibility, the women answered that it was the men, that the women were not invited. Another woman says there was one woman at the meeting.

When asked who benefits from the project, men or women, the answer is everyone.

Men do not control everything anymore. We are equals. When we contribute financially to the household, things change. Before, we had to ask men for money, but now the men come and ask us for money. (4. Interview November 6. 2019)

Most of the villagers are not concerned with politics, but one woman says she became interested in politics after learning about women's rights, now she can talk about it, something she felt she didn't have enough knowledge of before. The sources for information concerning politics are mostly from the telephone and radio.

#### **4.12.2. Male project group St. John.**

I asked the men if the men and women have different responsibilities in the project? Do they have the same power and influence? How do they determine who will lead the project? Did the project improve the economic situation? Who benefited most from this project? How do they feel about women earning and managing money? And have they become more interested in politics

The men tell me that the women and men had different responsibilities during the project; the men carry sand, and the women fetch water. The men did the most work, but they also claim they needed the work more. When deciding which project they wanted, the men had meetings in the village before deciding together. Women were involved. They believe that men and women were equally represented in leadership positions since the women had their own leader. When asked directly

about how many women there were in a leadership position, they answered one, the leader of the women, and thirteen men. (There are 13 districts in St. John, so I guess the men lead each area ) «We are not quite where the Methodist church wants us to be, but the volunteer sister is working on the matter (5. Interview November 7. 2019) They say they like the fact that women make money, and tell me that before the women were a burden. The men say that after the school came they noticed a change in the women, before the women sent only some of the children to school because of finances, but now they send all of them.

Regarding politics a man says «Voting for a person who becomes a leader, does not help.». (5. Interview November 7. 2019)

They tell me that they receive information on news and politics, mainly from the radio and from the Church.

#### **4.12.3. Individual interviews two women St. John.**

I asked the women if the men and women have different responsibilities in the project, who has the most say in deciding what kind of project, the economy, planning the project, reporting the

project? If men and women are equally represented in leading positions? Do they have the same power and influence? How do they determined who will lead the project? Is it possible for a woman to lead the project? Has the project improved the economic situation? Who benefited most from this project?

They say that the men did the building and that the women cooked and fetched water. Both women felt that the women decided the type of project. Both believed that women and men were equally represented and had the same influence; because everyone was equally happy to have a school. The choice of a leader was carried out by a group of women and men who voted. The person in charge of the economy was a man. «When something is good for the community; we do it together.» (6. Interview November 8. 2019)

One woman sells oranges, gets money to buy fish, and sells with profit at the market. Straight after the interview both women were going to work. «After the school came; business improved». (6. Interview November 8. 2019). They are also happy to have their own money. One woman says she previously had no money, but now she can support her children. «I don't share everything with my man, but hide some.» (6. Interview November 8. 2019)

«Now, I can now support my husband financially. I can surprise my husband and give him presents. Now I can buy him a suit. (6. Interview November 8, 2019)

None of them have any knowledge or interest in politics. When there is a political election, the volunteers come to the village and show them how to vote.

## **4.13. Women's rights St. John.**

### **4.13.1. Female project group St. John.**

I asked the women if they have gained more knowledge about human rights after participating in the project?

They say that thanks to school meetings and parent meetings they have learned a lot about rights, the children behave better and have more respect, there is less bad behavior. When I asked if women and men should have equal rights in society, the answer was no. They all said that men should have more rights.



#### **4.13.2 Male project group St. John.**

I asked the men if they have gained more knowledge about human rights after participating in the project?

The men believe they know their rights, but they don't believe the women do.

A sister from the Methodist Church goes from village to village to give people knowledge, but where there could be a hundred women, only ten show up, so it's complicated. (5. Interview November 7. 2019)

One man thinks women should have more rights, and one says he discusses equal rights with his wife. One does not agree because he is an African man, and an African man can have two wives; therefore, men should have more rights for it to be equal. One man claims "When you get married you become one and should have equal rights». (5. Interview November 7. 2019)

#### **4.13.3. Individual interviews two women St. John.**

I asked two women if they have gained more knowledge about human rights after participating in the project?

One tells me that the sister of the Methodist church has given them knowledge of their rights. Both think women and men should have equal rights. But it is not like that - one woman says - the man has more power.

#### **4.14. A good and dignified life St. John.**

##### **4.14.1. Female project group St. John.**

I asked the women what they think is a beneficial and dignified life for women?

They tell me that «She must mostly stay home, but she must have a serious business» and «She must be married and raise a family. She should have education, respect others, comply with the dress-code, do housework and most not gossip». (5. Interview November 7. 2019) They emphasize that it is important to respect yourself, then you are respected.

##### **4.14.2. Male project group St. John.**

I asked the men what they think is a beneficial and dignified life for a woman?

They say that the women must be satisfied, and they should have education, one points out that it is more important that they are decent than that they have gone to school, since many of the women do not have education, but they can still live beneficial and dignified lives.

##### **4.14.3. Individual interviews two women St. John.**

I asked the women what they think is a good and dignified life for a woman?

It is best for the woman if they have a man at home. The woman should not argue or make chaos and should avoid conflicts. Women should have access to education. (6. Interview November 8, 2019)

#### **4.15. Observation St. John.**

I was lucky enough to participate in one of the Methodist Church workshops, the women were taught to bake bread (a sweet cake they can sell at the market). The instructors were enthusiastic and skilled. They talked about empowerment, women's rights, and the economy while they were baking. It is quite clear that these projects can positively change women's lives. They empathized the importance of only using materials that are easy and cheap and that the women already knew how to use, and most have in their homes. And they thought a basic knowledge of economy like when you sell, you first have to buy new ingredients for more cakes before you spend your money is important. Sadly, not that many women participated. The women probably need to see some results before more of them find it useful to attend the classes.

In the evening the men and boys gathered to play football together. I did not see that the women had any leisure time or hobbies they pursued.

I met a woman who told me about the Sande community (a women's secret society) and their bush school. Methodist Church is working to get the girls to go to school to avoid being sent or choose to go to the bush school, where they are mutilated. When a girl has been to the bush school, it is impossible to get her back to school, and she is just interested in getting married the woman says. The girls who have been to the bush school will not interact or talk to someone who has not attended bush school. The girls they manage to motivate to participate and stay at the Methodist Church school do not go to the bush school and therefore avoid mutilation of their genitals.

A very skilled female voluntary teacher shared some stories from school with me. When the child is going up to a new class at school, they have a ritual where an older child gives the younger student a burning light while the older student says that the knowledge will continue to grow. On the exam day, the mothers often buy a brand new dress and put the dress on the ground and let the child step on it as a sign of respect for the higher education the child has completed. The school also arranges dance competitions, beauty competitions and graduation parties for the students so that everyone in the village will want to send their children to the school. She also gave me some beautiful necklaces

and bracelets of African pearls that she made herself to sometime sell at the market, she also thought the girls in the school how to make necklaces and bracelets.

I went for a walk with my translator across the river. On the way back, there are some young men, they catch me, but my female translator saves me. I notice that my illness causes me to be as vulnerable as I was in Gbechon. I have been sick for 5 days and I am very tired and dehydrated and a very easy target. I do not want to stay in St. John any longer. The translator and the driver also want to go home to Monrovia, so we leave the next day. I got to experience the market in St. John before we left, and I bought some of the soaps the women make at the Methodist Church workshops. The soaps were the only thing one could buy as a souvenir otherwise it is vegetables and palm oil. I could not see any men selling anything at the market.

Another thing that surprised me in rural Liberia was that even though there was hunger, sickness, no electricity, sanitation or running water, several of the men owned motorcycles and scooters. I could not see that the men used bikes to transport fruits and vegetables to the markets. The women were walking long distances with heavy loads on their heads, while the men were driving around.

When I arrived in Liberia a talented man working in the Methodist Church research center showed me all relevant research that had been done earlier on Methodist Church projects and allowed me to sit and work with him in his office. He even took me to the National museum of Monrovia that showed a lot of Liberian history, an overview of the different ethnic groups, old masks probably copies since so much got ruined in the wars. There were also pictures from the civil wars, and most surprisingly the Swedish embassy had a photo exhibition on the top floor with various portraits of Swedish and African fathers playing, feeding, and caring for their children.

## **5. Discussion.**

### **5.1. Introduction Discussion.**

In this chapter, I will discuss my findings from the villages Gbechon and St. John.

Do the women who participate in Methodist projects in Liberia gain more knowledge of their rights and an increased opportunity for a beneficial and dignified life?

I use Martha Nussbaum's capability approach to explore if the women improve their capabilities and increase their opportunities to live a beneficial and dignified life.

I will start this chapter to see if the capability of senses, imagination and thoughts, bodily integrity, and control over one's environment has improved. Then I explore if they have gained more knowledge about human rights and what my participants think is a good and dignified life for a women before ending this chapter by questioning if the women and men participate in the Methodist Church project as equals.

### **5.2. Senses, imagination, and thoughts.**

Being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason - and to do these things in a truly human way, a way informed and cultivated by adequate education, including, but by no means limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training. Being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing self-expressive works and events of one's own choice, religious, literary, musical, and so forth. Being able to use one's mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression with respect to both political and artistic speech and freedom

of religious exercise. Being able to search for the ultimate meaning of life in one's own way. Being able to have pleasurable experiences and to avoid unnecessary pain. (Nussbaum, 2000, P.78-79).

### **5.2.1. Gbechon.**

In Gbechon, the men seem to have experienced that it is a good thing to involve the women. Their attitude towards women have improved, they now trust the women, and they all cooperate better. Women's participation in women's groups and in the projects from the Methodist Church does not seem to be a problem for the men because they also gain from it, and the village as a whole has improved. The men did not trust the women and found it difficult to cooperate with them before the project, but after the project, there is trust and cooperation. The woman have gained new knowledge, new skills they bake cake and make soaps, and have gotten new ideas about development. They have learned about their rights, and they start new businesses. Now they are included and listened to and can make their own decisions. The women cooperate better with each other and manage to do things on their own, and they get more respect from the men. Women have access to education. They have their own women's groups, and they work together. They claim these changes started at the same time as the project began 2016/2017.

### **5.2.2. St. John.**

The men in St. John claim that they like the women more after the participation in the Methodist Church project. The reason they like them more is that they have gained more knowledge. They think women behave better and respect men. They like that the women bake bread and make more money. The men also say that the women now dare to talk. Before, they were afraid to speak, but now they participate in discussions about social development. The women send their kids to school because they are happy with the quality of education, and the school is cheap. They can afford it. They feel they were involved in the project, and they had their female leader. The school leads to more people coming to the village, which creates better business for the women, leading to

increased self-esteem and feeling better about themselves. These women claim that they are asked for development advice, and they are more involved in decision making.

### **5.2.3. Discussion senses, imagination, and thoughts Gbechon, and St. John.**

The women in Gbechon impressed me in so many ways. The fact that they cooperated and voted together for the guesthouse is indeed a decisive move. As in Gbechon, one can see that the men in St. John are positive about the women making more money and becoming more educated. But the women groups in St. John have not yet become as successful as in Gbechon.

Nussbaum writes that it is quite common when establishing women's groups.

Women's development groups typically encounter resistance initially because women are afraid that change will make things worse (Nussbaum, 2000, P. 43)

The women need to see results before they put in time and effort. They don't have any extra spare time to put into an experimental project. They have to almost have a success guarantee before putting in the effort.

Nussbaum writes about women projects in India, where the men welcomed change and gained a new respect for their wives. Traditions of deference that once seemed good, have quickly ceased to seem so (Nussbaum, 2000, P. 43)

I could notice the same response among the men in Gbechon and St. John, and they are positive about women participating as long as it benefits the men as well.

One concern is that an elite group of people exists in every village and every place on earth. In Gbechon, it is the village leader and his family who are the elite. The leader's wife was responsible for finding places for guests to sleep, so I would say it was absolutely in her interest that a guesthouse was built, and I am not sure if there were other projects that less privileged women would have benefited from having. But in the end, it seemed to me that all the women I met were

genuinely proud and happy about the guesthouse. The women's group in Gbechon has done tremendous work. The fact that they have organized their private bank to help and support each other is impressive. When I

went on a walk, I even saw something I believe was a kindergarten, I walked with one of the women, and we could not communicate that well, but I think that is what she tried to show me, Which shows how the women now find new solutions and are working hard to improve their lives. One challenging aspect is that Gbechon and St. John's leader for the women's group is also the village leader's wife. There does not seem to be any democratic election or the possibilities to take turns so that more of the women could practice leadership skills.

One concern with encouraging women to send their children to school is that it gets even worse for the women who depend on help from their children, helping fetch water, wood, take care of younger siblings, and help out in the field. Everything concerning the children seems to be the women's responsibility. And it seems to be only the women's job to send the children to school. Women need to see results that improve their life to educate girls. In Liberia, there are no jobs for the girls after finishing school making the value of education less important.

There is less time for imagination, ability development, and cultivation of the mind. Living in great poverty does something to people. It isn't easy to make plans for improving one's life when you are struggling to survive.

But all in all, I believe the capability of senses, imagination and thought have increased. The women have been offered education from the Methodist Church women's- group and given possibilities they did not have before. The women groups give them more options on how to live their life. The kids, especially in St. John, have had a massive upgrade in this capacity because of the school. The fact that money comes a little easier with more people coming to the village because of a guesthouse and a new school makes business better and gives the women more possibilities. In the women's groups, they learn about human rights. They learn to bargain and cooperate to get better results. They claim they are treated with more respect and are listened to better after participating in the projects. Most of all, I believe it has given the women hope for a better future for their daughters, especially in St. John, where the conditions for women were disheartening. The



men mentioned that the school already was too small and that there were no rooms for the teachers. I think it is essential when you have teachers working for free or for a low salary that they are given adequate rooms to work. The water pump in St. John is too far away for the women, so it has not improved the women's lives in any way I could notice.

### **5.3. Bodily integrity.**

Being able to move freely from place to place, having one's bodily boundaries treated as sovereign, i.e., being able to secure against assault, including sexual assault, child sexual abuse, and domestic violence, having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in the matter of reproduction. (Nussbaum, 2000, P. 78)

My primary focus on this subject was to discover if the Methodist Church projects felt safe to use, especially for women.

#### **5.3.1 Gbechon.**

The men in Gbechon think all the projects were safe and had made an improvement, especially for the women. The women especially mention the water pump as life-changing. Previously, they had to walk long distances during the drought to find water, which they noted was especially dangerous for the children. One of the women looked me in the eye for a long time before saying that «the children would get in fights» before the projects. The translation I was given seemed to be that the children could do a little fighting with each other along the way. No matter what she said about fighting it is quite apparent that there is still a high the level of abuse and rape in Liberia. There is an enormous sense of freedom in not having to send young girls out alone over long distances to fetch water. Thanks to the Methodist Church in Norway, it is now more comfortable, safer, less time consuming to fetch water. They always have access to clean water.

The women in Gbechon wanted an iron door and a fence around their guesthouse to make it safer. I fully understand after a very uncomfortable night, where I did not feel safe at all. They also want more light. Light gives security. If they experience difficult situations, they can go to their women's group and get help from their group leader. I have mentioned earlier that there should be a rotation of leadership in the women's group so more women can practice leadership to make sure it is not

only the elite's interests which are given priority. Wives of men in leadership positions are more likely to be given leadership roles.

The most significant relief for the women seems to be that the men have stopped abusing them after making more money. Several of the women mention that earlier they were dependent on their man, which is difficult for me to understand because, to me, it looks like they would manage very well without the men. The feeling of being dependent on a man who doesn't carry out his responsibility properly must be horrible. Thanks to the Methodist Church workshop, the whole situation has been improved for the women.

The women in Gbechon seems relatively healthy. Even though their lives are hard, they have access to health care for themselves and their children if they are in need of it.

### **5.3.2. St. John.**

In St. John, the men want a safe path for the children to walk on. The men pointed out to me where they would like the path, and they hoped and prayed that some Norwegians would come and make that path for them.

The water pump is too far away, and as I understand, they still use the river water. When everyone uses the jungle as a lavatory, the drinking water is polluted which makes them sick. The lack of medication and medical care does not help the situation. I am not sure if the women have understood the positive health effect if they use the water pump instead of drinking from the river water.

The women are satisfied with the school. The school hands out sanitation products for the girls, pain killers and tablets to stop diarrhea. One of the voluntary teachers told me that even though she worked for free, she always stashed up with as much medication as possible which she bought with her own money before going to the rurale area because she knows she will need it. The women believe the school is safe and suitable for the needs of the children.

If the women have major challenges, they can go to the female head of the Methodist Church, who acts as a counselor.

None of the women in St. John seem to have access to health care. Several of the women I met needed health care. They usually give birth at home with traditional midwives as helpers.

### **5.3.3. Discussion bodily integrity Gbechon and St. John.**

The women have also experienced, just as in Gbechon, that the men have stopped beating them when they contribute more financially.

I must say that I think we have failed quite profoundly when people are waiting for Norwegians to come down to build a fence in Gbechon and a path in St. John. I am not sure what we are doing wrong here, but the people in the villages should be encouraged and given self-esteem enough to believe that they can fix small projects like building a fence and a path together on their own.

The Norwegian Methodist Church claims that the work against sexual and gender-based violence is long-term, and achieving long-term changes in culture and attitudes takes time. Therefore, they say that preventive work and the involvement of local and religious leaders is vital. But they have a big task ahead of them.

(Fedøy, 18.03.2020)

Except for an abolished poster outside the school in St. John, I did not see any signs of this work against sexual and gender based violence.

We need to discuss the most critical issue which is genital mutilation, and that President George Weah allows it. And the fact that we can't even put enough pressure on Liberia to stop cutting off body parts on healthy young girls, I don't know if the rest of the development work we are doing makes any sense at all. Pressure on the authorities to bring about a complete ban on genital mutilation is of utmost importance.

I must also be honest in saying that I wonder about many things that I did not dare to talk about, such as contraception, genital mutilation, child marriage, lack of a crisis center, divorce, safe abortions, homosexuality, rape, etc. These are essential topics which lead to women dying when we are not discussing this openly.

Still, it is quite clear that the Methodist Church has managed to improve the capability of bodily integrity and enhanced the women's possibility for a beneficial and dignified life. When it comes to domestic violence, the importance of exit options, and bargaining power, it can certainly seem that the Methodist Church has given women some negotiation tools where significantly higher income seems to correlate with being beaten less. And the water pump in Gbechon makes them much less exposed to the dangerous of having to walk far in order to fetch water.

#### **5.4. Control over one's environment.**

A. Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life, having the right to political participation, protection of free speech and association.

B. Material. Being able to hold property (land and movable goods), not just formally, but in terms of real opportunity, and having the right to seek employment on an equal basis. With others having the freedom from unwanted search and seizure. (Nussbaum, 2000, P. 80).

#### **5.4.1. Gbechon.**

The men in Gbechon say that the men and the women participated, 50/50. They claim women are better with finances, but after the project was finished, the men took responsibility for the guesthouse's finances while the women cleaned the guesthouse. The men don't want any political discussion in the Church, but they think it is important to vote. They get their information from radio and telephone calls. The women say they participated 50/50 in the project. They were in charge of the economy during the project, and everyone claims that women are better at managing finances. The women believe they have become better at making decisions. They are not interested

in politics. They don't feel they have enough knowledge, and they also mention that it can be risky to discuss politics, and one can be threatened.

#### **5.4.2. St. John.**

The women in St. John admit that they had different responsibilities, but that decision was taken together. All the leaders were men, and men had the financial responsibility. One tsays that she has become interested in politics after she learned about women's rights. They get their information from radio and telephones. Everyone feels things have changed because women contribute more to the household. They also seem to keep some of the money for themselves.

The men claim they did most of the work. They believe women and men were equally involved, and the women had their leader. They admit that they have not come as far as the Methodist Church would have liked them to, but they imply that it is the women's fault because they don't show up at the workshops. But they don't think women are such a burden anymore, and more kids are being sent to school. They receive news about politics from radio and the Church but seem a little disillusioned about politics in general.

### **5.4.3. Discussion, control over one's environment Gbechon, and St. John.**

Although it is fantastic that women have their income, send their children to school, and take care of the family, ways must be found to hold men accountable. It is not optimistic that although both the men and the women agree that women are better at taking care of the finances, it seems that the men have taken over responsibility for the guesthouse's finances after the project was completed. The women are responsible for cleaning and cooking.

There has occurred through these programs a feminization of responsibility and obligation for managing poverty with women being made to do even more to ensure household survival, when men are increasingly doing less (2006) (Molyneux, 2007, P. 231)

It seems like a lack of knowledge and living in countries characterized by corruption is the cause of women's lack in political interest. It is difficult to get through changes, where women may be at risk of being threatened and harmed for political expression which could easily contribute to low political commitment. To engage politically, to discuss gender equality, religious freedom, and freedom of speech at all, requires some basic knowledge, which many of the women don't have. It should be said that the fact that they now have knowledge of their rights, and some of them feel that they now have the ability to discuss politics, and one of the women who says she has become interested in women's rights is hopeful.

It is difficult to get answers on exactly how many women were on the board, the answers are uncertain, and again it was the wives of leaders who were represented, which is unfortunate in providing a democratic environment enabling more training for female leadership.

There have been some changes for the women in the villages, and they are adjusting rapidly. Their increased participation in the economy is a powerful way of improving their lives. They have learned new skills which makes them more important in society. Organizing them in groups increases their bargaining position. The men seem positive now that they have experienced what the women can do for the village.

It worries me that CODEVPRO seems to give men, usually one of the leaders, training to fix and maintain the water pump. The women who should be in charge of the water pumps. The women truly understand the worth of the water and should be responsible for every aspect of it. We have heard enough stories about broken water pumps that never get fixed by less reliable men worldwide. I listened to a story about a water pump that had not been used for two years not far from where I

stayed because a man never managed to get the missing part that was needed to fix the water pump. Women from the Methodist Church managed to fix it. Teach the women to maintain the pumps themselves.

I would still say the capability for control over one's environment has been improved. The women have gained more significant influence after participating in the project. Their opportunities for a fair and dignified life have increased.

## **5.5. Women's right.**

### **5.5.1. Gbechon.**

In Gbechon, the men have gained more knowledge of human rights, they know it is not just for the men, and they have even heard about children's rights. The women have gained more knowledge of their rights after attending the Methodist Church training sessions. They believe they should have equal rights, and some of the women even think they now have more rights than men. They receive information from the leader who rings the church bells and give information in the Church if something important happens.

### **5.5.2. St. John.**

The women in St. John have learned about rights during school meetings and parent meetings, but most of them do think men should have more rights. Those who believe that there should be equality admit that there is none now. The men believe they know their rights but don't think the women do. Some men believe women should have more rights, and some say it should be equal, and one man says men should have more rights.

As I experienced from participating in one of the workshops in St. John, the women were taught a new skill and at the same time taught about economy and human rights. I would claim they are doing an excellent job in educating women. By getting more self-esteem after learning a new skill and earning their own money, and simultaneously discussing equal rights with the other women they have more to put up on the table at meetings with the men. In areas where one really can't use the word feminism because they think it is a bad word, it could be more appropriate to use a human rights-based approach.

### **5.5.3. Discussion women's rights Gbechon and St John.**

Again there is a difference between Gbechon and St. John. The women in Gbechon seem to know more about their rights than the women in St. John. But all the women have gained more knowledge about human rights. They now know they have rights, which gives hope and is very helpful in order to bring about change. Their understanding of human rights seems to be a consequence of the Methodist Church projects and the Methodist Church women's groups.

Generally the women in Gbechon have better capabilities than the women in St. John. The women in Gbechon have access to health care, and the Methodist Church women's groups there have been active longer than in St. John.



## **5.6. A good and dignified life for a women.**

### **5.6.1. Gbechon.**

The men in Gbechon think women must respect the home, make their man proud, and obey the man. They believe women should have the opportunity to work and attend school and became empowered and not burden the men. The women think how they dress is essential, where you live and how you take care of your husband and kids. You must provide education for the children, especially the girls and treat the other women in the community respectfully, and save money together. In order to be respected you must be married and have your own home, and the man should be the leader in the house.

### **5.6.2. St. John.**

In St. John, the women think one should mostly stay at home but have a serious business, and one must be married and raise a family. As well as have an education, respect others, follow the dress-code, take care of the house, don't gossip, don't argue, or make chaos and avoid conflicts. To be respected it is important to respect yourselves. The men think the women must be satisfied and have access to education.

### **5.6.3. Discussion, a good and dignified life for a women Gbechon, and St. John.**

Both St. John and Gbechon emphasize that it is vital that women have access to education and want women to have the opportunity to work; this is very positive. The men repeatedly say that it is good that women are no longer a burden, which to me seems completely incomprehensible. How one can look at a woman who takes care of the house, children, fetches water and firewood, makes all the food, and takes care of everything that has to do with food production as a burden is indeed a mystery to me. It is also a bit disturbing to me to see that only option the women have is to marry and raise a family, no one talks about having a career, or just not getting married it is no an option.

Nussbaum writes that it is difficult for women to hold leadership positions and be taken seriously by men who mostly are used to that women just exist to fulfill the men's needs.

It is incomprehensible that people will treat women as ends in themselves and as equals in social and political life if they are brought up, in the family, to see women as things for man's use. (Nussbaum, 2000, P, 244).

The women seems to agree with the men, but I think it is important to remember what Martha Nussbaum writes about how culture can form opinions. Traditional lives can create flourishing lives for women but there must be alternatives for the women for it to be a voluntary choice.

Culture contains powerful norms of female modesty, submission, obedience, and self-sacrifice that have defined women's lives for centuries. We should not assume without argument that those are bad norms, incapable of constructing good and flourishing lives for women. (Nussbaum, 2000, P. 41)

The women tells me that you have to be married to get respect which makes me wonder if unmarried women find themselves valuable and worthy of respect of others. I tried to look but I could not find any alternatives to getting married and having kids in rural Liberia. It also worries me how the women repetitive where described as a burden for the men when it is in fact the women who do most of the work and the heaviest work, besides taking care of home, children and the man. This indicates how little appreciated the vital work the women are doing every day is in society.

Nussbaum emphasizes the willingness to support human freedom. Adults should be able to choose what is a good life themselves, and further more they should respect the choices of others. All people should be recognized as individuals with their own goals and rights. As a western feminist, one must avoid thinking that one's way of living is the only right way, there are many ways to live a valuable life, which is something one must respect that. But for women to make a real choice, some fundamental freedoms and rights must be established.

When women's potential is completely underestimated, they are not able to develop their abilities. When they do not have the right to make their own decisions, the whole person is naturally affected

negatively. Women in developing countries are often deprived of freedom at an early age, and the only plan they have to deal with is marriage.

These circumstances affect the inner lives of people, not just their external options, what they hope for, what they love, what they fear, as well as what they are able to do. (Nussbaum, 2000, P. 31)

### **5.7. Equality during the project.**

My final question is did the women and the men participate in the project as equals?

Most of the women and men answered yes to this question, but this truly only resonates if one thinks that there are specific jobs for women and certain jobs for men. The women were mostly fetching water and cooking for male workers. Some of the work was described as too heavy for the women. Which does not make any sense since the women seemed in all other situations to be stronger and lifting heavier loads than the men all day long. The different answers and uncertainty about the numbers of female leaders make me question the process of equal participation in the projects. I am confident that the women had their female leader and that they felt empowered and proud after participating in the Methodist Church project.

## **6. Conclusion.**

### **6.1. Introduction.**

Do women who participate in Methodist Church projects in Liberia gain more knowledge of their rights, and increased opportunity for a beneficial and dignified life?

I want to explore whether Norway's assistance empowered the women and whether they had better opportunities to get a beneficial and dignified life. It was easier than I thought to find positive effects from the Norwegian development assistance. But one has to keep in mind that when women are in a terrible situation, it does not take too much effort to make them feel that they are given help for a better life.

The women's answers could also be a bit influenced by gratitude towards the Methodist Church and the hope of receiving more aid. I think it was an advantage that I am not a Methodist, I have nothing to do with the fundraising and the projects, and the methodists I met felt less need to impress me or show the best side of everything. But although I have no affiliation with the Methodist Church, it could be difficult for the people in the village to fully understand this. The meetings they have had with white women in the past has probably mainly been missionaries.

The liberation of women in the West has gone hand in hand with modernization. We started working outside the house simultaneously as we acquired electric items such as fridge, freezer, washing machine, dishwasher, vacuum cleaner, electric kitchen appliances, and cars, combined with good health care and kindergartens. The women of rural Africa have no running water and no sanitation. They have to fetch water, collect firewood, make fires, grow food and make food. They do not have electricity. They have nothing of what we take for granted today which simplifies everyday tasks.

We can not expect the same progress as the women in the west for the women in rural Liberia are using all their time and effort just to survive- it is not comparable.

It is a feminist research, and my main inspiration has been Martha Nussbaum and her capability approach. My goal is to empower and promote social justice and positive change for women. My analytic unit consist of volunteer women and men who have participated in a Methodist Church project in Gbechon or St. John.

I traveled into the rural Liberia to interview people who have participated in the Methodist Church project and used observation to see if I could see any effect of the projects in the villages. I have used a qualitative method with group interviews, individual interviews, and observation to find my answers.

## **6.2. Results.**

Do the women who participate in the Methodist Church project in Liberia gain more knowledge of their rights and increased opportunities for a beneficial and dignified life? Yes, they do. Do they still have challenges that need to be solved? Certainly.

I find the Norwegian Methodist Church's engagement and commitment to the projects inspiring. They are in close touch with Liberia's congregation, they visit each other and share experiences. It seems like they look at each other as sisters and brothers from the same Church who help each other during hard times. This removes some of the complex white savior problematics and also removes some of the Liberians' understandable skepticism to foreigners coming to help. The concept of letting the participants of the project vote and choose the project they need seems to help women, even if the aid is not directed towards them. The Methodist Church has, as far as I understand, transparency and control over the money in an impressive way in a country that deals with much corruption. And the fact that they are supporting students to do independent research of their projects is admirable and should be an example for other organizations who do similar development work.

### **6.2.1. Better knowledge about human rights.**

I wanted to find out if the women knew that all human beings have certain fundamental entitlements.

In Gbechon the women claim they have learned about their rights through the Methodist Church woman's groups. They have attended training sessions and had been informed about their rights . All the women in Gbechon think men and women should have equal rights. One women even claims that now women in Gbechon have more rights than men. They emphasized that before the Methodist Church training they did not know they had rights, but now they do. The women are a bit afraid to talk about politics they are afraid they might be threatened. The men told me that earlier the women did not vote but now they do vote.

In St. John the women told me they learned about rights in school meetings and parent meeting in the Methodist Church school. I participated in the Methodist Church women group in St. John where they learned to bake cake, and the teacher talked about women's rights. Almost all the women in St. John believe that men should have more rights. The women seems a bit afraid to discuss politics, and some feel they don't have enough knowledge. But as they told me, they have gone from not hardly knowing anything about rights to have some information about rights, and they now know that women have rights. One women in St. John told me that she had become interested in women's rights, and now felt that she now had acquired knowledge to discuss politics.

### **6.2.2. Increased opportunities for a good and dignified life.**

I wanted to look at Martha Nussbaum`s capability approach to see if the Methodist Church gives the participants of their projects better capabilities to achieve a beneficial and dignified life.

All the women claim that the projects have empowered them. They say they are no longer afraid to talk, and they have gained new ideas about development, have been better at making decisions and cooperate, and achieved better confidence and self-esteem. The women have learned new skills, and several have increased their income. They get more respect from the men, have more control over their own money, and are less exposed to domestic violence. The women have learned how to take better care of the home, the children, and themselves. In St. John, several women claimed that after the new school was built, girls' participation has increased. The women claim the changes are correlated with the Norwegian Methodist Church supported projects.

Nussbaum writes about women's need for exit option and bargaining power in the marriage « When a woman can leave, she doesn't have to endure being beaten. And when the husband knows she can leave because she has employment opportunities or control over property, she is at least somewhat less likely to be beaten» (Nussbaum 2011, P. 8).

Education is essential to develop the existing capabilities into internal capabilities. In Gbechon and St. John women have learned to bake bread and soaps they can sell on the market, and get better income. More visitors to the village due to the school and guest house lead to more sales in the market, and increased income for the women. During the interviews, the women also talked about being more proud, they had new wishes, plans and hopes for a better future. The capability approach wants the researcher to see what kind of effect development work has on individuals. Every single woman I spoke to had experienced some personal positive effect in connection with the Methodist Church project.

### **6.2.3. Equal participation in the Methodist Church project.**

The women claim they participated 50/50 in the project, but it seems like most of the time, the women were cooking and fetching water while the men were building. But some of the women participated in building the foundation of the guesthouse, and the women in Gbechon cooperated to achieve the guesthouse. The men did not even want the guesthouse in the beginning, but they are

very satisfied with the project now. The women in Gbechon were in charge of the economy during the project. Also, in Gbechon, even though the women chose a man as a leader, they emphasized

that they chose a man who respects women. In St. John, I do not think the women were included in the same way, and the answers about their participation were unclear. I think the women were involved in the planning of the project, and they did have a female leader that were responsible for cooking and water supplies, they cooperated, and felt they were involved in the development of the village.

I do not have the exact year of when the Methodist Church women's group in Gbechon was established, 2016/2017? I know the women's group in St. John was quite new. And although it is just my opinion I do think it is the women groups that make the differences in Gbechon and St. John. In Gbechon the women seemed to cooperate better, help each other and achieve better progress together. This might be of the bonding and learning to respect, and accept that they have different meanings and goals, they come tighter and compromise without arguing. In St. John they told me it used to be a problem that the women were fighting with each other, and that they just recently have been able to sit down and discuss peacefully. I do believe the work with teaching new skills, learning women's rights and how to cooperate creates promising results for the women.

In both the villages the women explains they're submission to the man as biblical. The women told me that the man must decide the most because they are christians. The man is the head and when one is christian that is how it is supposed to be. And the women do not want to change that.

### **6.3. Summary.**

Significant changes have been made over few years in Gbechon and St. John regarding women's rights. Women's opportunities for beneficial and dignified life have increased. The women's group empowers women, teaches them new skills, baking cakes and making soaps they can sell on the market, and provides them with an extra income. The Methodist Church projects create pride and provide women with more and better business opportunities, when more people are coming to town because of the guesthouse in Gbechon and the school in St. John, the women gets more sales of their vegetables and fruits on the market. The change that made the most impression on me is that



several of the women shared without me asking specifically about it that the men had stopped beating them after the women started to contribute financially to the household. They described the decrease of domestic violence as the most important change that had happened. The Methodist Church teach the women about human rights in the workshops, through school and parenting meetings. The women learn to discuss together, make decisions and work together for more development and a better future, and the men are not negative to all these changes as long as the men continue to be leaders, especially in the home, and as long as the changes benefit the whole community. I hope and pray this perhaps could be a start of a change to the better in the life of the villagers of Gbechon and St. John.

#### **6.4. Suggestions for improvements.**

These suggestions are my own personal assessments based on what I have learned and observed during and after my stay in Liberia. I will not rule out that my limited experience, lack of background knowledge about what is possible and impossible to do in Liberia make these suggestions invalid. Still, sometimes an outsider can have useful observations and see things in new ways, so I leave it at that.

1. Norway should not give Liberia development money until President George signs a ban against female genital mutilation.
2. Women groups seem to work. If we teach the women to build roads, improve infrastructure, sanitation, water, electricity, and improve crops the results might be significant. We should stop teaching the women to bake cakes and soap and teach them how to constructive skills, engineering skills, and agricultural planning. We must stop reinforcing gender roles that we have abandoned long ago.
3. CODEVPRO must teach women to maintain and repair equipment made for women. The men can be taught how to maintain the water pump when they start to collect water.
4. Since there are some difficulties involving female leaders, CODEVPRO should demand that the project leader, the person responsible for reporting the project, or the person in charge of the economy is a woman.

5. Martha Nussbaum strongly believes education should be the government's responsibility, not charity organizations with different goals and agendas. The goal for for all the projects, especially the schools, should be to transfer responsibility to Liberian authorities. I found a case from a Methodist Church hospital in the Boway community that is now driven by Liberian authorities. This should be the goal for all projects
6. This master thesis should be written by a Liberian woman. The support from the Norwegian Methodist Church should go to a Liberian female student.
7. All Churches should have courses where they teach men morality and responsibility.
8. All Churches should offer a safe place for women who have been exposed to domestic violence and rape.
9. Everyone with connection to development work must be trustworthy people and never take advantage of the poor and vulnerable women and children. As the situation is today, It would be safest to use mostly female personnel.
10. Every project should have to make the beneficiary self-reliant and able to help others in need. It is not worthy for a human being to always be the receiver.

## **6.5. Listen to Liberian women.**

I observed a church service in Gbechon. I could see that women hold leadership positions in music. Even though the pastor were a man, several women came up to preach and were respectfully listened to. The Church also gives room for the women to pray, sing, and dance, and I am sure the Sunday service is a highlight of the week for many of the women. Still, I feel that the Church can do so much more in supporting vulnerable women. The respect shown from the congregation when a woman was preaching shows that Liberian women can speak up and be heard in the Methodist Church. It is an arena where the women could bring up difficult subjects and be respectfully listened to by the congregation's men. The Methodist Church of Liberia leaders has great power and

the possibility to improve women's conditions by teaching men to respect and enhance Liberian women's lives.

There are so many strong and powerful women in Liberia. Let their voices be lifted and heard. I will finish this thesis with some words from the brave women running the blog [liberianjue.com](http://liberianjue.com). In this matter, the Church could make a massive difference if they want to. Please do.

«The silence of the church on rape

#ThursdayinBlack

#WeAreUnProtected

Lately, I have been reading a lot of speeches and writings from the past. One was Dr. Martin Luther King's Letter From Birmingham Jail.

The letter was in response to a group of other "men of God" who wrote chastising Dr. King's role in the civil rights movement and protest in Birmingham, for which he was arrested and jailed.

Too many things stood out to me especially about leadership in times of need and difficulties. I will not be going into all of them here. What I want to draw attention to, in this piece, was his comment about his disappointment in the leaders of the church (white), and their general lack of action, "appalling silence", as black brothers and sisters were engaged, beaten, jailed and even killed in the fight for equality, social justice, and civil rights.

As I read the letter, a long-held and nagging thought took even clearer and compelling shape in my mind. What has been the role of the church in Liberia as rape, sexual violence and abuse has continue rob many of Liberia's women and children of innocence, dignity and even life itself? Where is the Liberian Church? How can the church be so silent and turn away as babies become mothers and children know not whom to trust? How can the Liberian Church look away as the staggering statistics of deaths of infants and girls, on account of rape, continue to haunt the society with increasing impunity? How can this not be a concern of the Liberian Church?

All about us, I hear loud silence – the “appalling silence” of the Liberian Church!

Where is the voice of the Council of Churches on members of that body who have been accused of rape, or are victims of rape, sexual violence and abuse?

Where are the sermons condemning these dastardly acts against innocent women and children?

Where are the calls to action of our Pastors and Bishops – the supposed moral consciences of the society? Where are the mentoring sessions for boys and young men to teach positive behaviour?

How can our pastors and bishops claim to care about our souls and show no care about our agonizing and raped bodies housing our souls?

Why are the silence and lack of care for victims not supportive of the increasingly unpunished crime of rape? How can any “man of God” be quiet as the society lay blames on the victims “for the way they were dressed”, and excuse the rapist?

How can the Liberian Church conscionably preach the promise of heaven and ignore the raping hell of earth for women and children, including babies?

Indeed, pulpits are great spots to advice, stimulate conversations and counsel good behavior. They are, and must continue to be elevated places for the advocacy of social justice and change, like Jesus advocated!

And yes, rape and the sexual abuse and violence increasingly perpetrated against women, girls, boys, children and babies violate the sanctity of life and stands counter to the moral code. Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ would condemn rape today, as he condemned social injustices yesterday.

And so, why is the Liberian Church silent? Why are the pulpits seemingly unconcerned and uncaring? How many more babies have to die for the Liberian Church to be awakened to the inhumanity and cruelty of rape?

I am not trying to condemn – although I am deeply disappointed. I am trying to understand.

No doubt, the Church has a role to play in our collective efforts to address violence and its causes and impacts on all of God’s children. It is long overdue that the Liberian Church is heard on the growing incidents of rape, sexual violence and abuse. And the voice of the Church cannot be ambivalent or uncertain. It must be loud enough to be heard, as it must be strong in condemnation.

There are those who know my personal life’s story and say “but your ma was reverend” and insinuate that because of that, I should not be questioning the silence of the church on rape.

I will say it BECAUSE of exactly that I am asking the Church to stand up against rape. The church has a role to play, and that it should wake up and play it’s role – loudly.

The rape of our girls needs to end, and the Church can help, as it has a duty to assist the society through moral challenges.

Rape is immoral. A survivor of sexual abuse, I know it defiled the body and blemishes the soul. It must end now!

#weareunprotected

#ThursdayInBlack

#SilenceEnablesRape»

(LiberianJue,2020)

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## **8. Appendix.**

### **8.1. Appendix I.**

1. In what way were you selected to participate in the interview, and why did you say yes?
2. Have you been empowered by any of the projects you have participated in? Explain how?
3. Has there been a change in women's self-confidence and self-esteem after participating in the project? Explain.
4. Have your attitudes and thoughts about women changed in any way after participating in the project? Explain.
5. Do you have any problems or difficulties on your way to the projects, or during the day?

6. Is it the women or the men who have the most to say in deciding what kind of project to choose?  
Why and what do you think of this?
7. In the project are men and women equally represented in leading positions?
8. How is it determined who will lead the project? Explain.
9. Is it women or men who are responsible for the project's finances? Explain.
10. Who makes most decisions in the planning of the project, men or women? Examples.
11. Who makes most decisions in reporting the project men or women, explain?
12. Has the project in any way improved the economic situation for men and women?
13. Who benefits most from the project men or women?
14. Have any of the projects you have participated in given you more knowledge about your rights?  
Explain.
15. Have you become more politically interested after participating in the project, if so how?
16. What are your most important sources for information about politics?
17. Has this project strengthened women's capacity to access decision making positions in any way?
18. How do you feel about women managing money?
19. Do you think women and men should have equal rights in society, why or why not?
20. What do you think is a beneficial and dignified life for women?

**Questions only asked during in-depth- interviews with women**

Who in your house has access to education?

If big conflicts arise, how do you fix them, do you have someone you can go to for help or advice?

Who in your house has access to health services?

Does this project have a positive impact on gender relations or does it maintain traditional gender roles?

8.2 Appendix II.

# **Would you like to participate in the research project?**

*Do women who participate in Methodist Church projects in Liberia gain more knowledge of their rights and increased opportunity for a beneficial and dignified life?*

In this paper, we will give you information about the goals of the project and what participation will mean for you.

**Purpose:**

The Methodist Church wants an independent study of its projects in Liberia, and I have chosen to write a master's thesis on women in Liberia. I write the thesis from the perspective of a women, and the goal is to improve women's lives.

**Menighetsfakultetet, Oslo, Norway is responsible for the project.**

The Methodist Church makes contact with suitable participants

I wish to conduct a qualitative research paper with semi-structured interviews of women and men who have participated in projects held by the United Methodist Church. The interview will take about 1 hour. I want to make audio recordings of the interviews, these will be transcribed, anonymized and deleted. The notes will be stored electronically where they will be anonymous.

**It is voluntary to participate**

It is voluntary to participate in the project. If you choose to participate, you can withdraw consent at any time without giving any reason. All information about you will be anonymized. It will not be any negative consequences for you if you do not want to participate or later choose to withdraw.

**Your privacy- how we store and use your information**

We will only use information about you for the purposes we have stated in this writing. We treat all information confidentially and in accordance with the privacy policy.

**What happens to your information when we finish the research project?**

The project is scheduled to end 15.11.19 all data will be anonymized.

**Your rights**

As long as you can be identified in the data material you have the right to:

- - Access which personal data is registered about you
  
- - To have your personal information corrected
  
- - Get information deleted about you

- - Get a copy of your personal information and
  - - To submit a complaint to the privacy ombudsman or the Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data
- On a mission from Menighetsfakultetet have NSD – Norwegian Center for Research Data AS considered that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with the privacy regulations.
- If you have any questions about the study, or wish to exercise your rights, please contact:

With best regards

- 
- Roar G. Fotland. Candidate 3507
- Førsteamanuensis/supervisor. Student
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## Declaration of consent

I have received and understood the information about the project: *Do women who participate in Methodist Church projects in Liberia gain more knowledge of their rights and increased opportunity for a beneficial and dignified life*, and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I agree to:

To participate in an interview *To participate in observation*  
I agree that my information will be processed until the project is  
complete. *15.11.19*

•

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(Signed by the project participant, date)

**8.3 NSD Form**



**Ekstern finansiering**

- Offentlige myndigheter

**Type prosjekt**

Studentprosjekt, masterstudium

**Kontaktinformasjon, student****Behandlingsansvar**

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**Behandlingsansvarlig institusjon**

MF vitenskapelig høyskole for teologi, religion og samfunn

**Prosjektansvarlig (vitenskapelig ansatt/veileder eller stipendiat)**

Roar G.Fotland , Roar.G.Fotland@mf.no, tlf: 95219013

**Skal behandlingsansvaret deles med andre institusjoner (felles behandlingsansvarlige)?**

Nei

**Utvalg 1**

---

**Beskriv utvalget**

Kvinner og menn som har deltatt på metodist kirkens prosjekter

**Rekruttering eller trekking av utvalget**

Kirken tar kontakt med mulige deltagere

**Alder**

18 - 70

**Inngår det voksne (18 år +) i utvalget som ikke kan samtykke selv?**

Nei

**Personopplysninger for utvalg 1**

- Navn (også ved signatur/samtykke)

- Lydopptak av personer
- Religion

### **Hvordan samler du inn data fra utvalg 1?**

#### **Gruppeintervju**

#### **Grunnlag for å behandle alminnelige kategorier av personopplysninger**

Samtykke (art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav a)

#### **Grunnlag for å behandle særlige kategorier av personopplysninger**

Uttrykkelig samtykke (art. 9 nr. 2 bokstav a)

#### **Redegjør for valget av behandlingsgrunnlag**

#### **Informasjon for utvalg 1**

#### **Informerer du utvalget om behandlingen av opplysningene?**

Ja

#### **Hvordan?**

Skriftlig informasjon (papir eller elektronisk)

### **Utvalg 2**

---

#### **Beskriv utvalget**

Kvinner og menn som deltar på Metodist kirkens prosjekter

#### **Rekruttering eller trekking av utvalget**

Rekruttering

#### **Alder**

18 - 70

#### **Inngår det voksne (18 år +) i utvalget som ikke kan samtykke selv?**

Nei

#### **Personopplysninger for utvalg 2**

- Navn (også ved signatur/samtykke)
- Lydopptak av personer

**Ikke-deltakende observasjon**

**Grunnlag for å behandle alminnelige kategorier av personopplysninger**

Samtykke (art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav a)

**Grunnlag for å behandle særlige kategorier av personopplysninger**

Uttrykkelig samtykke (art. 9 nr. 2 bokstav a)

**Bredegrjør for valget av behandlingsgrunnlag**

**Informasjon for utvalg 2**

**Informerer du utvalget om behandlingen av opplysningene?**

a

**Hvordan?**

Skriftlig informasjon (papir eller elektronisk)

**Utvalg 3**

---

**Beskriv utvalget**

Uvinner som deltar på Metodist kirkens prosjekter

**Rekruttering eller trekking av utvalget**

Kirken velger ut passende deltagere

**Ulder**

8 - 70

Nei, data vil bli oppbevart uten personopplysninger (anonymisering)

**Hvilke anonymiseringstiltak vil bli foretatt?**

- Personidentifiserbare opplysninger fjernes, omskrives eller grovkategoriseres

**Vil de registrerte kunne identifiseres (direkte eller indirekte) i oppgave/avhandling/øvrige publikasjoner fra prosjektet?**

Nei

**Tilleggsopplysninger  
Hvilke personopplysninger skal du behandle?**

- 
- Navn (også ved signatur/samtykke)
  - Lydopptak av personer

**Type opplysninger****Skal du behandle særlige kategorier personopplysninger eller personopplysninger straffedommer eller lovovertridelser?**

- Religion

**Prosjektinformasjon****Prosjekttittel**

Får kvinner som deltar på Metodist kirkens prosjekter i Liberia, bedre kunnskap og mulighet for et godt og verdig liv?

**Prosjektbeskrivelse**

Metodist kirken ønsker en uavhengig studie av sine prosjekter i Liberia. Jeg ønsker å skrive en masteroppgave om kvinner i Liberia. Jeg har fått tilbud om å være en uke på en skole i en uke på ett gjesthus drevet av kvinnene i menigheten, oppholdet vil være i tidsrommet 15.11.19. Jeg vil utføre en kvalitativ undersøkelse hvor jeg intervjuer menn og kvinner. Jeg vil gjøre noen dybdeintervjuer av kun kvinner, og observasjon. Studien vil ha et kvinneperspektiv. Martha Nussbaum sin universelle feminisme.

**Begrunn behovet for å behandle personopplysningene**

Jeg trenger navn til samtykkeerklæringen. Jeg ønsker lydopptak av intervjuene, disse skal lagres og slettes. All data vil bli anonymisert.

**Totalt antall registrerte i prosjektet**

1-99

**Tillatelser**

---

**Skal du innhente følgende godkjenninger eller tillatelser for prosjektet?****Behandling**

---

**Hvor behandles opplysningene?**

- Maskinvare tilhørende behandlingsansvarlig institusjon

**Hvem behandler/har tilgang til opplysningene?**

- Student (studentprosjekt)
- Prosjektansvarlig

**Tilgjengeliggjøres opplysningene utenfor EU/EØS til en tredjestat eller internasjonal organisasjon?**

Nei

**Sikkerhet**

---

**Oppbevares personopplysningene atskilt fra øvrige data (kodenøkkel)?**

Ja

**Hvilke tekniske og fysiske tiltak sikrer personopplysningene?**

- Opplysningene anonymiseres

**Varighet**

---

**Prosjektperiode**

02.11.2019 - 15.11.2019

**Skal data med personopplysninger oppbevares utover prosjektperioden?**

### **Hvordan samler du inn data fra utvalg 3?**

#### **Personlig intervju**

##### **Grunnlag for å behandle alminnelige kategorier av personopplysninger**

Samtykke (art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav a)

##### **Grunnlag for å behandle særlige kategorier av personopplysninger**

Uttrykkelig samtykke (art. 9 nr. 2 bokstav a)

##### **Redegjør for valget av behandlingsgrunnlag**

#### **Informasjon for utvalg 3**

##### **Informerer du utvalget om behandlingen av opplysningene?**

Ja

##### **Hvordan?**

Skriftlig informasjon (papir eller elektronisk)

#### **Tredjepersoner**

---

##### **Skal du behandle personopplysninger om tredjepersoner?**

Nei

#### **Dokumentasjon**

---

##### **Hvordan dokumenteres samtykkene?**

- Manuelt (papir)

##### **Hvordan kan samtykket trekkes tilbake?**

Det kan trekkes når som helst, uten noen form for konsekvenser.

##### **Hvordan kan de registrerte få innsyn, rettet eller slettet opplysninger om seg selv?**

Personopplysninger vil bli slettet og innhold anonymisert. De kan ta kontakt med Menighetsfakultetet for mer informasjon eller endringer.

- Religion

**Hvordan samler du inn data fra utvalg 2?****Ikke-deltakende observasjon****Grunnlag for å behandle alminnelige kategorier av personopplysninger**

Samtykke (art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav a)

**Grunnlag for å behandle særlige kategorier av personopplysninger**

Uttrykkelig samtykke (art. 9 nr. 2 bokstav a)

**Redegjør for valget av behandlingsgrunnlag****Informasjon for utvalg 2****Informerer du utvalget om behandlingen av opplysningene?**

Ja

**Hvordan?**

Skriftlig informasjon (papir eller elektronisk)

**Utvalg 3****Beskriv utvalget**

Kvinner som deltar på Metodist kirkens prosjekter

**Rekruttering eller trekking av utvalget**

Kirken velger ut passende deltagere

**Alder**

18 - 70

**Inngår det voksne (18 år +) i utvalget som ikke kan samtykke selv?**

Nei

**Personopplysninger for utvalg 3**

- Navn (også ved signatur/samtykke)
- Lydopptak av personer
- Religion