

# MAPUTO BAROMETER

## State of Women's Rights in West Africa

*Citizen Scorecard and Implementation Report - 2026 Edition*

### Women Leaders Network for Development (RFLD)

Pan-African Organization with Observer Status at the ACHPR



This comprehensive report assesses the actual implementation of the Maputo Protocol across the 15 ECOWAS countries + Mauritania, through three key indicators:

Fight against GBV, Girls' Education, and Political Representation.

<https://rflgd.org/maputo-protocol/>

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction and Methodology

### 1.1 RFLD: A Key Player in Gender Justice

The Women Leaders Network for Development (RFLD) is a Pan-African force dedicated to women's empowerment and human rights protection in Sub-Saharan Africa. Empowered by its **Observer Status at the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR)** and its NGOsource accreditation, RFLD goes beyond mere advocacy: we audit, evaluate, and act.

This annual Barometer, expanded to cover all of West Africa (15 ECOWAS countries and Mauritania), is the tangible translation of our commitment. Ratifying a treaty is a diplomatic step; implementing it is a moral and legal obligation.

### 1.2 Methodology of the "Citizen Scorecard"

To avoid lengthy legal discourse that is often inaccessible to the general public, RFLD developed this "Citizen Scorecard." It evaluates RFLD's countries of intervention using a strict color code, based on field data.

#### 1.2.1 The Three Key Indicators

1. **Legal Framework Against GBV (Gender-Based Violence):** Existence, severity, and actual enforcement of laws against FGM, early marriage, and domestic violence (Articles 4 and 5 of the Protocol).
2. **Girls' Education and Retention:** Policies on access to education and the reintegration of teen mothers (Article 12).
3. **Political and Public Representation:** Respect for gender quotas in parliaments and governments (Article 9).

## 1.2.2 The Color Code (RFLD Scoring)

- **GREEN - Implemented:** Strong national laws, allocated budget, and concrete results on the ground.
- **ORANGE - Ratified but poorly implemented:** Existing laws but persistent impunity, or socio-cultural barriers blocking implementation.
- **RED - Not ratified / Ignored / Backsliding:** Countries that have not ratified, or are experiencing severe setbacks (permissive laws on GBV).

## Chapter 2

# The 2026 Regional Scorecard

This section presents the executive summary of the implementation status of the Maputo Protocol in the 16 target countries of this report.

**Table 1: From Benin to Guinea-Bissau**

COUNTRY	Anti-GBV Laws	Girls' Education	Political Rep.
<b>BENIN</b>	Green	Orange	Orange
<b>BURKINA FASO</b>	Orange	Red (Security Crisis)	Orange
<b>CABO VERDE</b>	Green	Green	Green
<b>COTE D'IVOIRE</b>	Green	Orange	Orange
<b>THE GAMBIA</b>	Red (FGM Threat)	Orange	Red
<b>GHANA</b>	Orange	Green	Orange
<b>GUINEA</b>	Red (FGM > 90%)	Orange	Red
<b>GUINEA-BISSAU</b>	Orange	Orange	Red

**Table 2: From Liberia to Togo**

COUNTRY	Anti-GBV Laws	Girls' Education	Political Rep.
<b>LIBERIA</b>	Orange	Orange	Orange
<b>MALI</b>	Red (Family Code)	Red	Orange
<b>MAURITANIA</b>	Red ( <b>Not Ratified</b> )	Red	Red
<b>NIGER</b>	Red (Child Marriage)	Red	Orange
<b>NIGERIA</b>	Orange (VAPP Act)	Orange	Red
<b>SENEGAL</b>	Orange	Orange	Green (Parity Law)
<b>SIERRA LEONE</b>	Green (2024 Law)	Orange	Green (GEWE Act)
<b>TOGO</b>	Orange	Orange	Green

# Chapter 3

## Country Profile: BENIN

### 3.1 Detailed Analysis of Indicators

Benin positions itself as a regional leader in the institutional fight against Gender-Based Violence (GBV). The government has established a particularly deterrent penal arsenal, supported by the elevation of the National Women's Institute (INF) to the rank of a state institution empowered to act as a civil party. The Court of Repression of Economic Offenses and Terrorism (CRIET) has seen its jurisdiction expanded to severely judge gender-based crimes. However, in terms of schooling, while free education for girls has been extended in several municipalities, results remain mixed in the northern regions (Alibori, Borgou), where the burden of domestic work penalizes girls' retention in secondary school. Politically, the recent constitutional reform imposed a quota guaranteeing a minimum of 24 seats for women in the National Assembly (about 22%), which is a step forward, but still falls far short of the 50% parity required by Article 9 of the Maputo Protocol.

### 3.2 Socio-Political Context and Major Challenges

Benin's main challenge lies in the striking contrast between its legal arsenal (modernist and firm) and the socio-cultural weights that persist in rural areas. Many women still hesitate to denounce their abusers out of fear of community stigmatization or loss of financial support, as economic dependence remains a major hurdle. Furthermore, specialized courts and INF branches are still perceived as too centralized and inaccessible for peasant women in remote municipalities. Period poverty and the lack of appropriate sanitation facilities in public schools in the hinterland continue to fuel the dropout rate among teenage girls.

### 3.3 RFLD Strategic Recommendations

- **Judicial and Social Decentralization:** RFLD recommends that the government accelerate the decentralization of INF services across all 77 municipalities of the country to bring legal and psychological assistance closer to vulnerable rural women.
- **Linguistic Mainstreaming:** Intensify the broadcasting of our **Goun** and **Yoruba** translations of the Maputo Protocol on community radios in the South and Center (Oueme, Plateau, Zou) to educate populations on the new penal provisions.
- **Electoral Reform:** Revise the Electoral Code to mandate alternating parity lists ("zebra" system: one man, one woman) during future municipal elections to break the glass ceiling in local governance.

# Chapter 4

## Country Profile: BURKINA FASO

### 4.1 Detailed Analysis of Indicators

The implementation of the Maputo Protocol in Burkina Faso is tragically hindered by one of the most severe security and humanitarian crises in its history. Historically, the country had a robust legal framework, notably as a pioneer in criminalizing FGM. However, the GBV indicator has turned bright red on the ground: terrorism has led to an explosion of cases involving rape, abductions, and sexual violence, used as weapons of war against Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) women. The education indicator is equally alarming. The closure of thousands of schools in the North, Sahel, and East regions disproportionately affects girls. Out of school, they become extremely vulnerable to child marriage and economic exploitation. Politically, the current military transition struggles to meaningfully integrate women into the highest decision-making spheres, particularly in bodies linked to national security and peace restoration.

### 4.2 Socio-Political Context and Major Challenges

Burkina Faso has over two million internally displaced persons, the vast majority of whom are women and children. These IDP women live in double vulnerability: they have lost their agricultural livelihoods and face a severe lack of infrastructure in the camps (absence of safe showers, dignity kits, and reproductive health services). The formal judicial system has collapsed in several provinces, leaving a legal void that favors total impunity for perpetrators of GBV. Moreover, mass psychological trauma requires a health response that the State, focused on the war effort, cannot currently fund alone.

### 4.3 RFLD Strategic Recommendations

- **Implementation of Article 11 (Protection in Armed Conflicts):** The transitional government and humanitarian agencies must prioritize the safety of women in IDP host areas by ensuring night lighting in camps, regular dignity kits, and emergency psycho-trauma support.
- **Grassroots Funding via the WAFFF Fund:** RFLD commits and encourages international partners to mobilize the WAFFF Fund to financially support local Burkinabe CSOs (Civil Society Organizations), which are often the only ones able to operate in high-security risk zones.
- **Inclusion in Peace Processes:** Demand the immediate integration of at least 30% female community leaders into all local committees for dialogue and national reconciliation.

# Chapter 5

## Country Profile: CABO VERDE

### 5.1 Detailed Analysis of Indicators

Cabo Verde stands out as the best student in the West African region regarding women's rights, displaying green across all our indicators. Since 2011, the country has had a comprehensive and pioneering law against GBV (Lei VBG), strictly enforced with a zero-tolerance policy and supported by a network of functional shelters for victims. In terms of education, Cabo Verde displays exceptional parity enrollment rates in primary and secondary schools, and there is even an overrepresentation of women in higher education, fully meeting Article 12 of the Protocol. The political representation indicator is also remarkable: thanks to the adoption of the Parity Law in 2019, Cabo Verde is one of the very few African countries to achieve near-perfect parity within its government and approach it closely in the National Assembly and municipal councils.

### 5.2 Socio-Political Context and Major Challenges

Although the institutional and political framework is exemplary, Cabo Verde is not without its challenges. The Cape Verdean paradox lies in its economy: despite a higher level of education than men, Cape Verdean women continue to face higher unemployment rates and are overrepresented in precarious sectors or the informal economy. Economic independence (Article 13 of the Protocol) remains the last major hurdle to cross. In addition, the concept of "irresponsible fatherhood" (fathers fleeing responsibilities and defaulting on child support) weighs heavily on single-parent households, overwhelmingly headed by women, keeping them financially vulnerable despite state aid.

## 5.3 RFLD Strategic Recommendations

- **Economic Empowerment:** The government must move to phase two of its equality plan by mandating strict salary audits in the private sector to ensure the application of the "equal pay for equal work" principle and promote women's access to bank loans for entrepreneurship.
- **Regional Champion (ACHPR Advocacy):** RFLD invites the ACHPR and the African Union to officially use Cabo Verde as a "Regional Champion." Immersion missions should be organized so that parliamentarians from countries with red indicators (like The Gambia or Nigeria) can draw inspiration from the Cabo Verdean model of the 2019 Parity Law.
- **Combatting Single-Parent Precariousness:** Strengthen judicial mechanisms for the forced collection of child support to relieve single mothers.

# Chapter 6

## Country Profile: COTE D'IVOIRE

### 6.1 Detailed Analysis of Indicators

Cote d'Ivoire has made significant legislative progress in recent years, propelling its GBV indicator into the green. The adoption of a new penal code drastically stiffening penalties for domestic violence, rape (which can no longer be reclassified as a simple misdemeanor), and sexual harassment shows clear political will at the highest levels of the State. On the education front, major structural investments have been made to build proximity middle schools to keep girls in school. However, the indicator remains orange because child labor, particularly in rural areas linked to the cocoa economy and cash crops, continues to penalize thousands of young girls. Politically, Cote d'Ivoire adopted a law mandating a 30% quota for women on electoral lists. Yet, enforcement is flawed because dominant political parties often prefer to pay the financial fines prescribed by the law rather than yield seats to female candidates.

### 6.2 Socio-Political Context and Major Challenges

Ivorian society remains deeply marked by patriarchal dynamics, even in urban centers like Abidjan. Family law reforms (making spouses co-heads of the household) still encounter cultural resistance. Cote d'Ivoire's challenge is translating its excellent national laws into local realities. Furthermore, access to justice for GBV survivors is often hindered by procedural costs, the slowness of the judicial system, and a recurring tendency for out-of-court settlements imposed by family or neighborhood chiefs, which bypasses the penal system and fosters recidivism.

## 6.3 RFLD Strategic Recommendations

- **Strict Political Sanctions:** RFLD recommends an immediate revision of the electoral law. The Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) must have the power and obligation to **systematically reject** any electoral list that does not meet the 30% female quota, eliminating the financial penalty option which acts as a purchasable right to exclude.
- **Legal Aid Fund:** Make the legal aid fund fully operational and free for all victims of domestic violence, covering the costs of medical certificates, lawyers, and transportation to courts.
- **Protection in the Agricultural Sector:** Strengthen labor inspections in agricultural cooperatives to eradicate the exploitation of young girls and ensure their return to the public school system.

# Chapter 7

## Country Profile: THE GAMBIA

### 7.1 Detailed Analysis of Indicators

The Gambia currently represents one of the most serious sources of concern for RFLD in West Africa. The GBV indicator is scarlet red. Between 2023 and 2024, the country underwent a major institutional crisis with repeated attempts within the National Assembly to repeal the \*Women’s (Amendment) Act\* of 2015, the landmark law that criminalizes Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). Although the law was narrowly saved, the mere fact that a repeal was debated constitutes a violation of the spirit of Article 5 of the Maputo Protocol and has created a dangerously permissive climate. Regarding education, economic barriers and early marriages keep the indicator at orange for rural girls. Politically, the Gambian National Assembly has one of the lowest percentages of women in the entire region (under 10%), illustrating an institutionalized patriarchy that structurally excludes women from power.

### 7.2 Socio-Political Context and Major Challenges

The Gambian challenge is deeply rooted in the manipulation of religious and traditional discourse. Highly influential conservative clerics run aggressive misinformation campaigns, falsely associating the practice of excision with an Islamic religious obligation, despite denials from international theological authorities. This conservative lobbying places immense pressure on male MPs, threatening their voter bases if they support women’s rights. Impunity has become the norm: despite the 2015 law, prosecutions against excisers are extremely rare due to a lack of political and police will, making the law practically inoperative in villages.

## 7.3 RFLD Strategic Recommendations

- **Sanction and Formal Notice from ACHPR:** RFLD formally calls on the ACHPR and ECOWAS to issue a formal notice to the Gambian government. It must be clearly stated that no tradition, custom, or religious interpretation can justify the torture and mutilation of girls' bodies. The State must publicly reaffirm the inviolability of the 2015 law.
- **Religious Diplomacy:** RFLD recommends organizing theological summits with progressive imams from neighboring countries (Senegal, Mauritania) to systematically deconstruct the myth of the Islamic obligation of FGM on local radios.
- **Mandatory Quotas:** Urgently introduce temporary legal quotas (at least 30%) for upcoming legislative elections to break the male monopoly in the Gambian Parliament.

# Chapter 8

## Country Profile: GHANA

### 8.1 Detailed Analysis of Indicators

Ghana presents a contrasting but overall encouraging profile. The GBV indicator is orange: the country has had a solid framework since 2007 with the \*Domestic Violence Act\*, but access to justice is severely hindered. The exorbitant cost of police Medical Report Forms, which rape victims must pay out of pocket to prove the assault, constitutes an unacceptable economic barrier to Article 4 of the Maputo Protocol. On the other hand, Ghana excels in the educational domain (Green Indicator). Thanks to the sustained "Free Senior High School" policy, the country has achieved remarkable levels of parity, offering young girls unprecedented opportunities for upward social mobility. Politically (Orange), Ghana suffers from chronic legislative sluggishness. The endless wait, for over ten years, surrounding the final passage and full operationalization of the \*Affirmative Action Bill\* demonstrates strong systemic resistance from the male political elite to share power equitably.

### 8.2 Socio-Political Context and Major Challenges

Although Ghana is a stable democracy with a very vibrant civil society, the country faces extreme monetization of the political sphere. The prohibitive cost of electoral campaigns automatically excludes the majority of women capable of running in local or national elections. Furthermore, in some northern regions, archaic cultural practices like "Witch camps" persist. Elderly, often widowed, and vulnerable women are exiled there after false accusations, which constitutes a grave violation of Article 22 of the Maputo Protocol on the protection of elderly women.

## 8.3 RFLD Strategic Recommendations

- **Free Medical Evidence (Justice Emergency):** The government, through the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Interior, must immediately decree the total and unconditional elimination of fees for \*Medical Report Forms\* for all suspected victims of GBV or rape.
- **Closure of Witch Camps:** Order the definitive dismantling of witch camps in the North, accompanied by a social reintegration program, restitution of property, and pension allocations for these vulnerable elderly women.
- **Operationalizing Affirmative Action:** Set a binding timetable for the implementation of the \*Affirmative Action Law\*, starting with appointments to executive positions in state-owned enterprises and government agencies.

# Chapter 9

## Country Profile: GUINEA

### 9.1 Detailed Analysis of Indicators

The state of women's rights in Guinea is particularly critical, plunging the GBV indicator into deep red. Despite ratifying the Maputo Protocol and having national laws firmly banning harmful practices, Guinea has the second-highest prevalence rate of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in the world, with over 94% of women aged 15 to 49 excised. The law is purely decorative against the crushing weight of custom. Educationally (Orange), strong disparities persist: while girls in Conakry access education, those in the Forest Region, Upper Guinea, and Middle Guinea suffer massive early dropout rates, often linked to arranged marriages from puberty. The political indicator is red. The ongoing political transition since the coup has largely marginalized women's voices in decision-making bodies, like the National Transitional Council (CNT), where female representation remains very symbolic.

### 9.2 Socio-Political Context and Major Challenges

Guinea's major challenge is the widespread social acceptance of GBV. Excision is not only practiced; it is socially celebrated. Not excising a daughter exposes the entire family to community ostracism. Furthermore, the practice has become medicalized: health workers now perform mutilations in clandestine clinics, complicating the fight. Chronic political instability and the weakness of state authority outside the capital prevent the enforcement of penal law. Local police and judges, themselves from these communities, often refuse to enforce the texts against customary chiefs or respected excisers.

### 9.3 RFLD Strategic Recommendations

- **Deterrent Jurisprudence and Zero Tolerance:** The Ministry of Justice must require public prosecutors to systematically prosecute, without possible mediation, perpetrators of FGM, including any involved medical personnel. Trials must be public to create psychological shock and deterrent jurisprudence.
- **Economic Reconversion via WAFFF:** RFLD calls for the targeted use of the WAFFF Fund to finance Guinean NGOs capable of offering viable micro-credits and economic reconversion training (agriculture, commerce) to traditional excisers so they lay down the knife.
- **Inclusion in the Transition:** Demand from the ruling junta the immediate appointment of female technocrats and civil society leaders to key ministerial posts and to the drafting of the future Constitution.

# Chapter 10

## Country Profile: GUINEA-BISSAU

### 10.1 Detailed Analysis of Indicators

Guinea-Bissau presents generally mixed indicators, dragged down by chronic instability. The GBV indicator is orange: the country ratified the Maputo Protocol and managed to adopt a specific law against domestic violence in 2014, as well as a law banning FGM in 2011. However, repeated political crises have prevented the effective deployment of state protection services, such as women's shelters or a police force trained in psychological care. Regarding schooling (Orange), the Bissau-Guinean education system is in ruins. The dramatic lack of sanitation facilities (separate toilets and running water) in rural schools causes significant "menstrual dropout" among adolescent girls. Finally, political representation is red. The political scene, highly militarized and marked by electoral violence, creates an extremely hostile environment for women wishing to engage publicly.

### 10.2 Socio-Political Context and Major Challenges

Guinea-Bissau suffers from its historical classification as a transit "narco-state," which has deeply weakened the rule of law and fostered corruption. In this context of extreme poverty, economic survival takes precedence over defending social rights. Women are the backbone of the informal economy (agriculture, small trades), but they have almost no access to land ownership. Moreover, maternal and infant mortality is among the highest in West Africa, illustrating a serious breach of Article 14 of the Maputo Protocol on reproductive health rights, as the State lacks the means to provide basic emergency obstetric care in isolated provinces.

## 10.3 RFLD Strategic Recommendations

- **Reproductive Health Emergency (Article 14):** The government, backed by international donors, must decree and fund fully free maternal care, deliveries, and emergency cesareans in all regions of the country to stop the carnage of maternal deaths.
- **Gender-Sensitive School Infrastructure:** Allocate a mandatory specific national budget for the construction of secure latrines and water supply in every primary and secondary school to eradicate school dropouts linked to menstruation.
- **Securing the Political Path:** ECOWAS, during its electoral observation missions, must demand specific security guarantees for Bissau-Guinean female candidates and sanction parties using physical intimidation.

# Chapter 11

## Country Profile: LIBERIA

### 11.1 Detailed Analysis of Indicators

Liberia presents a complex profile (Orange on all indicators), forged by its post-conflict history. Under the presidency of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the country set important legislative milestones. Recently, the government and the National Traditional Council of Chiefs announced the temporary "suspension" of the practices of the Sande secret societies (which practice initiation and FGM). This is a step toward Article 5, but a suspension is not a penal law, hence the orange color. In education, free policies exist, but civil society fights bitterly against the persistent scourge of sexual violence in schools ("sex for grades," where teachers demand sexual favors in exchange for passing grades), ruining the futures of many female students. Politically, the Liberian paradox is striking: despite being the first African country to elect a female President by universal suffrage, the overall representation of women in Parliament remains hopelessly stuck around 11%.

### 11.2 Socio-Political Context and Major Challenges

Liberia is a deeply dual society. On one side, Monrovia with an intellectual elite and very active NGOs; on the other, the interior counties where state authority yields to the power of traditional secret societies (Poro for men, Sande for women). Banning FGM in Liberia is not just about banning an illegal medical act; it attacks the core of the coming-of-age system and the local power of the "Zoes" (priestesses). Legally, the country suffers from the legacy of an overburdened judicial system where out-of-court settlements, even for statutory rape cases, are commonplace under family pressure.

## 11.3 RFLD Strategic Recommendations

- **From Suspension to Penal Law:** The Liberian Legislature must transform the temporary "suspension" agreement on FGM into a definitive, total, and unconditional penal ban law, backed by mandatory minimum prison sentences.
- **Zero Tolerance in Education:** The Ministry of Education must create an independent hotline and initiate immediate lifelong bans for any teaching staff convicted of sexual blackmail ("sex for grades").
- **Binding Electoral Quotas:** Adopt an electoral amendment imposing a 30% female representation quota on electoral lists, with the Electoral Commission rejecting any non-compliant list.

# Chapter 12

## Country Profile: MALI

### 12.1 Detailed Analysis of Indicators

Mali is in a major state of alert regarding women's rights, with two red indicators. Mali ratified the Maputo Protocol, but gutted much of its substance by entering serious reservations, notably on Article 6 (age and consent to marriage) and Article 21 (right to equitable inheritance), under fierce pressure from conservative religious lobbies. Consequently, the Malian Persons and Family Code maintains deeply discriminatory provisions against women. The schooling indicator (Red) is tragic: asymmetric warfare and terrorism in the North, Center, and now South of the country have caused the destruction of thousands of schools, condemning an entire generation of girls to ignorance and forced marriages to survive. The political indicator is the only nuance (Orange): a 2015 law requires 30% women in appointed and elected offices. Although its implementation is imperfect during the current transition, it provides a usable legal foundation for the future.

### 12.2 Socio-Political Context and Major Challenges

The Malian crisis is not only security-based; it is ideological. The rise of radical armed groups imposes, in areas outside state control, a reign of terror where women lose all freedom of movement, dress, and economic activity. Even in the capital Bamako, the influence of Islamic leagues on political power is so strong that no feminist reform can pass without risking riots. Human rights defenders and feminist activists work there in a climate of constant intimidation, facing death threats. Access to maternal health care is non-existent in conflict zones, causing a tragic rise in obstetric mortality.

## 12.3 RFLD Strategic Recommendations

- **Lifting Reservations (Diplomatic Advocacy):** The Malian transitional government, in its desire to rebuild the State, must officially lift the reservations entered on the Maputo Protocol to guarantee inheritance equality and protect young girls from early marriage.
- **Funding Emergency Education (WAFFF):** RFLD deploys advocacy to use emergency funds to support Malian NGOs setting up alternative education systems (radio schools, clandestine learning centers) for girls in terrorist-blockaded zones.
- **Respecting the 2015 Law:** Demand that the executive branch strictly respect the 30% quota in the formation of the government, peace delegations, and future constitutional architecture.

# Chapter 13

## Country Profile: MAURITANIA

### 13.1 Detailed Analysis of Indicators

Mauritania constitutes a major legal anomaly in our report: all its indicators are red, primarily because **Mauritania HAS STILL NOT ratified the Maputo Protocol**. It is one of the very few African countries to systematically reject this treaty. Internally, the draft framework law on gender-based violence (the "Karama Law," meaning Dignity), despite being highly watered down, has been blocked in Parliament for years by conservative MPs. Consequently, FGM, unpunished rapes, and specific practices like the forced force-feeding of young girls (to meet traditional beauty standards before marriage) remain recurring scourges. Access to schooling for girls is severely limited, notably in rural, nomadic communities and among Haratine populations, due to patriarchal barriers and poverty. Political representation of women in sovereign decision-making bodies remains marginal.

### 13.2 Socio-Political Context and Major Challenges

The Mauritanian blockade relies on an ultra-rigorous interpretation of Sharia (Islamic Law), which is the primary source of law according to the Constitution. Detractors of the Maputo Protocol and the Karama Law use the religious pretext to claim that these texts would westernize society and destroy the Muslim family. This institutionalized rejection maintains a profound denial of justice: victims of sexual violence (Zina) risk being prosecuted and imprisoned themselves for "extramarital relations" if they cannot provide impossible-to-gather testimonial evidence. Social stratification and descent-based slavery, although officially abolished, continue to create an underclass of women with absolutely no rights.

### 13.3 RFLD Strategic Recommendations

- **African Union Religious Diplomacy:** RFLD calls on the African Union and the theological authorities of Al-Azhar (Egypt) or Morocco to organize a high-level conclave in Nouakchott. It is imperative to demonstrate, using Quranic texts, that protecting women's physical integrity (Maputo Protocol) is not incompatible with Islam, in order to unblock ratification.
- **Adoption of the Karama Law:** The Mauritanian government must bypass partisan blockades and urgently adopt the framework law against GBV, guaranteeing absolute legal immunity for rape victims who file a complaint.
- **Campaign against Force-Feeding:** Launch a national public health program to eradicate the practice of force-feeding, which endangers the cardiovascular and psychological health of little girls.

# Chapter 14

## Country Profile: NIGER

### 14.1 Detailed Analysis of Indicators

Niger faces the most complex socio-demographic challenges in the region. Its GBV indicator is red due to its sad world record: Niger has the highest child marriage prevalence rate globally, with over 75% of girls married before the age of 18, and nearly a third before 15. Article 6 of the Maputo Protocol is thus massively ignored in practice, sacrificing the futures of countless young girls. As a direct consequence (Red Schooling Indicator), school dropout at puberty is cataclysmic. The country has the highest fertility rate in the world, trapping women in a perpetual cycle of poverty and health fragility (high rates of obstetric fistula). Surprisingly, the political indicator is orange: Niger has a revised quota law requiring 25% women in appointed positions and 30% in elected ones, proving that political will exists at the top, even if it struggles to assert itself at the grassroots.

### 14.2 Socio-Political Context and Major Challenges

The Nigerien challenge is an explosive mix of extreme poverty, climate pressures (droughts pushing families to marry off daughters to have one less mouth to feed), and radical religious conservatism. Customary chiefs and local marabouts have far more influence than the State in rural areas. Any attempt to reform the Family Code to set the marriage age at 18 has provoked an outcry and riots, with the State backing down each time out of fear of destabilization. In addition, armed conflicts at the borders (Mali, Nigeria) exacerbate the vulnerability of displaced girls.

## 14.3 RFLD Strategic Recommendations

*RFLD has made Niger one of its operational priorities through specific training and support.*

- **Unconditional Legislation (Article 6):** The Nigerien State must have the political courage to harmonize its Civil Code with the Maputo Protocol by unconditionally setting the minimum age of marriage at 18, and criminalize customary chiefs who celebrate religious marriages of minors.
- **Deploying RFLD Tools (Hausa/Zarma):** RFLD provides local NGOs with its exclusive audio translations of the Protocol in **Hausa** and **Zarma**. We recommend their daily broadcast on all rural radios to counter radical preaching and educate families on women's rights in local languages.
- **Creation of Protected Education Zones:** Implement community contracts where villages commit in writing to zero marriages of schoolgirls in exchange for state investments in water pumps and school canteens.

# Chapter 15

## Country Profile: NIGERIA

### 15.1 Detailed Analysis of Indicators

Nigeria, the continent's demographic giant, presents a highly heterogeneous dashboard, justifying mostly orange indicators. The country has ratified the Maputo Protocol. The major federal victory is the passage of the \*Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act\* and the \*Child Rights Act\*. However, Nigeria's federal structure makes enforcement (GBV Indicator) chaotic: while Southern states relatively apply these laws, their "domestication" by Northern states (governed by Sharia) is laborious, uneven, or even blocked. Schooling (Orange) reveals the same North/South divide. While parity is nearly achieved in the South, the North has over 10 million out-of-school girls, a situation tragically worsened by Boko Haram's tactic of mass kidnappings of schoolgirls (Chibok, Dapchi) to terrorize the educational system. The political indicator is catastrophic (Red): with less than 6% women in the bicameral National Assembly, female political participation is smothered by electoral violence and the grip of financial "Godfathers."

### 15.2 Socio-Political Context and Major Challenges

Nigeria suffers from a complex overlapping of three legal systems: civil law (colonial legacy), Islamic law (Sharia) in the Northern states, and customary law. This legal pluralism allows for all loopholes. For instance, local governors bypass the child marriage ban citing custom. GBV, especially domestic violence, is often treated as mere "family matters" by police. The cost of accessing justice is astronomical, and judicial corruption discourages survivors from going to trial. The political space is described as an extremely toxic and violent "boys' club," making electoral campaigns physically dangerous for female candidates.

## 15.3 RFLD Strategic Recommendations

- **Total Domestication (VAPP & Child Rights):** The federal government must use budgetary pressure (conditioning fund transfers) to force the last recalcitrant states of the Federation, mainly in the North, to fully domesticate and enforce the VAPP Act and the Child Rights Act without religious exception clauses.
- **Civic Orientation Campaign (RFLD Translations):** RFLD demands that the National Orientation Agency (NOA) use our full translations of the Maputo Protocol in **Yoruba** and **Hausa** (produced in partnership with Equality Now) to launch mass civic education campaigns in markets and motor parks.
- **School Security (Safe Schools Declaration):** Deploy all-female security forces dedicated exclusively to protecting girls' boarding schools in the North-East, to restore parental trust and counter the terrorist strategy.

# Chapter 16

## Country Profile: SENEGAL

### 16.1 Detailed Analysis of Indicators

Senegal offers a very solid political profile, but a nuanced one regarding reproductive health. The GBV indicator is orange: under pressure from highly organized civil society, the country passed a landmark law in 2020 criminalizing rape and pedophilia, imposing heavy felony sentences. However, FGM still exists endemically in the peripheral regions of the South (Casamance) and the East (Tambacounda, Kedougou). The major sticking point remains access to medical abortion, which is strictly prohibited, even in cases of rape or incest, in direct violation of Article 14 of the Maputo Protocol. The schooling indicator is orange with steady progress, although early pregnancies systematically lead to the definitive expulsion of young girls from the formal school system. Senegal's great pride is its political indicator (Green): the rigorous application of the 2010 Absolute Parity Law has permanently transformed the landscape, propelling the country among world leaders with nearly 44% women in the National Assembly.

### 16.2 Socio-Political Context and Major Challenges

Senegal is characterized by a strong democratic tradition that coexists with the immense social power of religious brotherhoods (Mourides, Tijaniyyah). Resistance to the full implementation of the Maputo Protocol (notably on Article 14 regarding medical abortion) comes mainly from the lobbying of conservative religious associations that accuse feminist NGOs of promoting murder. This pressure freezes political leaders who fear electoral sanction (the \*Ndiguels\*). Furthermore, although there are many women in Parliament, executive decision-making posts (sovereign ministries, state agency directorships) and local governance (Mayoralities) remain heavily dominated by men, indicating that quantitative parity is not

yet synonymous with qualitative parity of power.

### 16.3 RFLD Strategic Recommendations

- **Lifting the Reservation on Article 14 (Health Emergency):** The Senegalese government must show political courage by urgently amending the reproductive health law to authorize medical abortion strictly in cases of rape and incest. Maintaining the ban amounts to inflicting a double penalty and psychological torture on survivors of sexual crimes.
- **Support for the Maputo Taskforce:** RFLD supports the Senegalese “Maputo Taskforce” and advocates for organizing closed-door dialogues with the General Khalifas of the brotherhoods to expose them to the reality of infanticides and maternal deaths linked to clandestine abortions.
- **Keeping Teen Mothers in School:** Repeal the ministerial circular that allows the expulsion of pregnant girls, and implement school maternity leaves guaranteeing their automatic post-partum reintegration.

# Chapter 17

## Country Profile: SIERRA LEONE

### 17.1 Detailed Analysis of Indicators

Sierra Leone is the true recent success story of the sub-region, justifying bright green indicators for legal and political components. Regarding GBV (Green), the government enacted the "Prohibition of Child Marriage Act" in July 2024, a historic law that unambiguously sets the marriage age at 18 and criminalizes not only adult men but also parents, officiants, and involved village chiefs, with penalties of up to 15 years in prison. This is a masterful application of Article 6 of the Maputo Protocol. The educational indicator (Orange) is improving: after the trauma of the Ebola epidemic (which saw an explosion of pregnancies and the exclusion of teen mothers), the government instituted a radical inclusion policy, forcing schools to reintegrate pregnant girls. Politically (Green), the passage of the \*Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Act\* in 2022 is revolutionary: it imposes a strict 30% quota in parliament, government, diplomacy, and even extends to management positions in the private sector, with binding enforcement mechanisms.

### 17.2 Socio-Political Context and Major Challenges

Emerging from an atrocious civil war where mass rape was a weapon of destruction, Sierra Leone has developed an extremely resilient and combative women's civil society. The current President has made women's rights a priority of his mandate ("Human Capital Development"). However, endemic poverty and weak state infrastructure outside Freetown constitute the main challenge. Having good laws in the capital is not enough. The current colossal challenge is the dissemination of these laws into deeply traditional rural communities, where FGM (Bondo secret societies) remains endemic, as the State has not yet dared to formally ban excision among adults.

## 17.3 RFLD Strategic Recommendations

- **Implementation Support (WAFFF Fund):** RFLD applauds the courage of the Sierra Leonean government. The priority is no longer advocacy to change the law, but support for implementation. We recommend the massive deployment of grants via WAFFF to local NGOs to conduct legal awareness caravans in the provinces (Moyamba, Kailahun) to explain the prison sentences linked to child marriage.
- **Anti-FGM Legislation:** Encouraged by its successes on marriage and quotas, the State must cross the final hurdle and formally and completely ban the practice of FGM, regardless of the victim's age, to fully align with Article 5 of the Protocol.
- **Role Model for ECOWAS:** The ACHPR should invite Sierra Leone to share its experience of adopting the GEWE Act (involving the private sector) at the next African Union summits.

# Chapter 18

## Country Profile: TOGO

### 18.1 Detailed Analysis of Indicators

Togo shows measured but tangible progress, with an exceptionally green political indicator. On the GBV front (Orange), the country recently revised its penal code and adopted a much more egalitarian new code of persons and family. However, access to criminal justice remains hindered by corruption, slow procedures, and the communities' preference for customary mediation, even in cases of rape, which fosters impunity. For schooling (Orange), the government has implemented strong measures, notably total exemption from school fees for girls in public high schools. However, period poverty and early pregnancies in schools maintain a problematic dropout rate. Politically (Green), Togo stands out remarkably in the region: it is one of the very few countries where women regularly occupy the highest peaks of the State (Prime Minister, President of the National Assembly, sovereign Ministries of Defense or Investment), creating a powerful role model effect for young girls.

### 18.2 Socio-Political Context and Major Challenges

The Togolese paradox lies in the contrast between the highly feminized top of the State and the base of society, which is still very patriarchal, particularly in the Savanes and Kara regions in the North. Advancements in the family code (guaranteeing equality in marriage and inheritance) run into the wall of land realities: access to land remains a deep cultural taboo for rural women, who cultivate the land but can neither inherit nor own it, drastically limiting their economic empowerment (violating Article 19). Moreover, the influence of voodoo/animist beliefs in certain pockets of the South requires a very nuanced approach to combat ritual enslavement practices.

## 18.3 RFLD Strategic Recommendations

- **Securing Women's Land Rights:** The government, through the Ministry of Agriculture and Justice, must accelerate the popularization of the new land code and specifically train traditional chiefs on the obligation to guarantee women's right to inherit (Article 21 of the Maputo Protocol), under penalty of nullification of customary succession acts.
- **Audio Deployment (Yoruba/Goun):** RFLD encourages local branches to massively broadcast our audio versions of the Maputo Protocol in **Yoruba** and **Goun** (widely understood in southern Togo and at the Beninese border) to popularize inheritance rights and the condemnation of GBV.
- **From the Top Down:** The government must capitalize on the strong presence of women in ministerial posts to establish a binding quota law at the level of mayoralties and local councils, where governance remains very male-dominated.

# Chapter 19

## RFLD's Response: Advocacy and Direct Action

This barometer does not simply point out the shortcomings of States. As an ACHPR observer, the Women Leaders Network for Development (RFLD) takes action.

### 19.1 Democratization through Local Languages

In partnership with **Equality Now**, RFLD has broken the language barrier. We have translated and made available **AUDIO** versions of the Maputo Protocol:

- **Yoruba** (Benin, Nigeria, Togo).
- **Hausa** (Niger, Nigeria, Ghana).
- **Zarma** (Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso).
- **Goun** (Benin, Nigeria).

These audio files (available at <https://rflgd.org/maputo-protocol/>) allow non-literate populations to know and claim their rights.

### 19.2 The WAFFF Fund (Women And Feminist Funding)

Through our Africa Grant Portfolio, RFLD directly funds local civil society organizations in West Africa to compensate for the budgetary shortcomings of States.

# Chapter 20

## General Conclusion of the 2026 Edition

West Africa offers a contrasting landscape. Countries like **Cabo Verde** and **Sierra Leone** demonstrate that strong political will can transform society and apply the Maputo Protocol to the letter.

However, immense gray areas remain:

- **Mauritania's** persistent refusal to ratify the treaty.
- Threats of pro-FGM legislative backsliding in **The Gambia**.
- The devastating impact of terrorism on women in the **Sahel** (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger).

RFLD calls on ECOWAS and the African Union to move from a diplomacy of encouragement to a diplomacy of **sanction** for States that knowingly violate the rights guaranteed by the Maputo Protocol.

*Report consolidated and edited by the Monitoring-Evaluation and Advocacy  
Department of RFLD.*

*To access our data and tools (Translations, Audios):*

<https://rflgd.org/maputo-protocol/>