



WONGOSOL WELLNESS POLICY

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Acronym

GBV	Gender-Based Violence
HR	Human Resource
NCDs	Non-Communicable Diseases
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
WONGOSOL	Women NGOs Secretariat of Liberia

1.0 Introduction

Liberia's broader socio-economic context further exacerbates these wellness challenges.

Infrastructural constraints such as unstable electricity, limited internet connectivity, and inadequate public health systems increase day-to-day stress.

At the same time, economic hardship and cultural expectations place additional caregiving and domestic responsibilities on women leaders and staff, contributing to time poverty and emotional fatigue.

The Women NGO Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL) operates within a complex and high-pressure social and professional landscape. Staff and member organizations are routinely engaged in emotionally demanding work, including advocacy for women's rights, community mobilization, and service delivery in fragile and post-conflict environments. These roles frequently expose staff, especially women, to stress, burnout, and secondary trauma, particularly when supporting survivors of gender-based violence (GBV), engaging in peacebuilding efforts, or responding to humanitarian emergencies.

Without a structured and intentional approach to wellness, these pressures risk undermining staff morale, reducing productivity, and weakening organizational effectiveness and retention.

At the organizational level, WONGOSOL has made efforts to promote a culture of care through team-building retreats, capacity-building sessions, joint decision-making, and promoting a safe and open work environment. However, implementation of wellness initiatives has been inconsistent. While staff generally enjoy strong team spirit and feel safe to share concerns, key barriers remain. These include funding limitations, lack of staff engagement in wellness activities, delays in information sharing, and occasional lapses in enforcing policies such as standard operating procedures. The absence of health insurance further leaves staff vulnerable, which is considered a challenge, creating a financial burden on staff.

This Wellness Policy seeks to address these gaps by institutionalizing a comprehensive and trauma-informed approach to staff care and organizational wellbeing. It outlines clear strategies, roles, and commitments to create a supportive and resilient work environment, one where all staff and member organizations can thrive while advancing WONGOSOL's mission.

2.0 Policy Statement

The **Women NGOs Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL)** recognizes that the mental health and well-being of its staff, volunteers, interns, and partners are crucial to achieving its mission of promoting women's rights, gender equality, and social justice in Liberia. As an organization rooted in feminist principles and collective care, we affirm that the wellness of individuals is not just a personal matter, but a collective responsibility and a strategic imperative.

We are committed to creating and sustaining a work environment that supports the physical, mental, emotional, and social well-being of all who contribute to our work. This includes cultivating a culture of empathy, flexibility, and mutual respect, where all team members feel valued, heard, and supported in both their personal and professional lives. We understand that well-being is not only about preventing harm, but also about actively nurturing resilience, joy, and fulfillment.

WONGOSOL's work centered on advocacy, movement-building, and community engagement can be intense, emotional, and at times, overwhelming. We acknowledge the risk of burnout, vicarious trauma, and chronic stress in such environments, especially for women leaders and rights defenders working in post-conflict and fragile settings like Liberia. Therefore, we believe it is our duty as an organization to institutionalize care as a core part of our operating model, not as an afterthought, but as an intentional strategy.

WONGOSOL's wellness policy affirms that:

- a. Rest and recovery are not privileges, but rights.
- b. Mental health deserves the same level of care and attention as physical health.
- c. Work-life balance is essential for sustainable activism and leadership.
- d. Collective wellness strengthens our solidarity, performance, and impact.

This policy outlines the principles, structures, and practices that WONGOSOL will put in place to nurture a safe, healthy, inclusive, and empowering work environment. It reflects our organizational values and our vision of a feminist future where wellness is not a luxury, but a daily practice embedded in how we lead, organize, and work together.

3.0 Objectives

This Wellness Policy seeks to:

- i. Promote a healthy and supportive work environment among staff and network members;
- ii. Prevent burnout, stress, and emotional fatigue among staff and network members;
- iii. Encourage a culture of self-care, organizational care, and collective care among staff and network members;
- iv. Provide resources and practices that foster physical and mental well-being
- v. Reduce stigma around mental health and emotional challenges
- vi. Modeling best practices for member organizations, encouraging wellness initiatives across the women's rights and civil society ecosystem in Liberia.

4.0 Core Principles

WONGOSOL's Wellness Policy is grounded in principles that reflect its feminist values, its commitment to social justice, and its recognition of care as both a right and a responsibility. These guiding principles shape the design, implementation, and monitoring of all wellness practices across the organization:

a. Feminist Care and Solidarity

WONGOSOL affirms that rest, recovery, and care are not luxuries, they are feminist principles of resistance and resilience. In a world where women and marginalized individuals are often expected to over-function and self-sacrifice, we reject burnout as a badge of honour. Instead, we embrace care as collective action.

This means:

- Encouraging rest without guilt or judgment.
- Acknowledging emotional labour and holding space for healing and reflection.
- Practicing solidarity by stepping in for one another when someone needs to pause or recharge.
- Designing organizational systems that reflect compassion, balance, and flexibility.

b. Dignity and Respect

Every staff member, regardless of role, background, or identity, deserves to be treated with dignity, humanity, and care. This principle underpins our workplace culture and interactions:

- We promote inclusive language, equitable treatment, and conflict resolution practices that preserve individual dignity.
- We ensure that wellness programs are designed with empathy and rooted in respect for each person's lived experience.
- We actively discourage shaming, dismissiveness, or other behaviours that undermine individual or collective well-being.

c. Non-Discrimination

WONGOSOL ensures that wellness support is accessible, inclusive, and free from bias or discrimination of any kind. This includes:

- Ensuring participation across all staff regardless of gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, contract status, caregiving responsibilities, or organizational level.
- Providing wellness activities in formats that are inclusive of persons with disabilities and those in remote locations.
- Actively listening to the needs of historically marginalized or underrepresented staff to ensure wellness offerings are responsive and equitable.

d. Confidentiality

We understand that wellness needs and mental health challenges can be deeply personal. Therefore, WONGOSOL guarantees the confidential handling of all wellness-related disclosures and interventions, including:

- Keeping counselling records or medical referrals private and separate from personnel files.
- Ensuring that any staff member accessing psychosocial support, raising a wellness concern, or taking mental health leave is protected from retaliation, gossip, or stigma.
- Training managers and wellness focal points on ethical and sensitive response protocols.

5.0 Wellness Components

5.1 Mental and Emotional Well-Being

WONGOSOL recognizes that mental and emotional wellness is critical to the personal health, professional effectiveness, and long-term sustainability of our team. Given the emotional labour, vicarious trauma, and burnout that often accompany human rights and social justice work, especially in post-conflict contexts like Liberia, it is imperative that we center mental and emotional care as a collective responsibility. To uphold this commitment, the following practices and measures will be instituted:

a. Access to Psychosocial Support and Counseling

WONGOSOL will partner with certified mental health professionals and organizations to provide periodic psychosocial support sessions for all staff (e.g., quarterly wellness circles, confidential one-on-one counselling), including;

- Emergency referrals and mental health first aid options will be made available to any team member in distress.
- Staff will be informed about available resources during onboarding and through periodic wellness updates.

b. Promoting a Stigma-Free Culture of Care

The organization will normalize conversations around mental health by integrating wellness check-ins into regular staff meetings and retreats, including;

- Awareness-raising sessions (e.g., on stress management, trauma healing, emotional intelligence, and grief) will be facilitated at least twice annually to build emotional resilience and destigmatize seeking support.
- Managers and team leaders will be trained to recognize early signs of burnout or emotional distress and respond supportively and confidentially.

c. Mental Health Leave and Flexibility

WONGOSOL will acknowledge and respect the need for mental health rest days, allowing staff to take time off to recover emotionally without facing stigma or administrative burdens, including;

- Staff may request mental wellness leave formally or informally, based on personal needs, and such leave will be treated with compassion and confidentiality.
- Where feasible, flexible work arrangements may be provided to staff navigating grief, trauma, or emotional fatigue, without affecting job security or performance evaluations.

d. Safe, Inclusive, and Caring Spaces

Safe spaces (physical and/or virtual) for emotional reflection, peer support, or relaxation will be encouraged and protected, including;

- Internal communication will reinforce emotional safety, care, and respect, including through non-violent communication practices.
- Managers are expected to cultivate emotionally safe work environments where no one feels ashamed for expressing vulnerability, fatigue, or stress.

e. Collective Healing and Community Care

As part of WONGOSOL's feminist approach, collective healing rituals such as debriefing after emotionally difficult fieldwork, shared storytelling, or spiritual reflection (when appropriate) will be supported, including;

- Team retreats and reflective sessions will include time for collective healing, creativity, and personal growth.

5.2 Physical Well-Being

WONGOSOL is committed to ensuring that all staff, volunteers, and interns are supported in maintaining their physical health as a foundational aspect of overall well-being. These includes;

- **Health Screenings and Awareness-** WONGOSOL will facilitate **annual** health check-ups and organize health education sessions (e.g., on reproductive health, non-communicable diseases, and preventive care). Staff will be encouraged to take advantage of national health campaigns or medical outreach services.
- **Encouraging Physical Activity-** The organization will promote movement-friendly workplaces, including optional group wellness walks, desk exercises, yoga/stretching breaks, and participation in national or local fitness events.
- **Healthy Working Environment-** The physical workspace will prioritize health, safety, and comfort, ensuring proper ventilation, natural light, access to ergonomic furniture, clean and gender-sensitive restroom facilities, and compliance with occupational health standards. Periodic workplace safety assessments will be conducted to identify and address hazards.

5.3 Work-Life Balance

WONGOSOL values the personal lives, family responsibilities, and individual rhythms of its team members. We believe that enabling a healthy work-life balance enhances productivity, mental well-being, and long-term staff retention. These shall include:

- **Flexible Work Arrangements-** Where programmatically feasible, flexible work hours and hybrid/remote options will be offered. Staff facing caregiving, health, or other personal responsibilities will be supported to adjust schedules as needed, without fear of penalization.
- **Encouragement of Leave Use-** All staff will be encouraged to fully utilize their earned leave entitlements, including annual leave, sick leave, maternity/paternity leave, and compassionate leave. Line managers will support advance planning for leave and will avoid fostering a culture where taking time off is discouraged or seen as uncommitted.
- **Respect for Boundaries-** To maintain rest and reduce digital fatigue, WONGOSOL will avoid setting up meetings, sending work-related messages, or issuing deadlines outside of regular working hours, unless it is an urgent or critical matter. Staff will not be expected to respond to messages during weekends or holidays.

5.4 Nutrition and Hydration

Understanding the link between nutrition and cognitive performance, energy, and long-term health, WONGOSOL seeks to cultivate a culture of mindful and informed nourishment.

- **Healthy Refreshments-** During meetings, training sessions, and retreats, nutritious snacks and drinks (such as fruits, nuts, and water or herbal tea) will be provided when possible. Heavy sugary foods or caffeinated drinks will be limited.
- **Hydration Culture-** Staff will be encouraged to stay hydrated, and all offices will be equipped with safe drinking water stations or bottled water. Staff will also be supported to bring reusable bottles and to minimize use of single-use plastics.
- **Nutritional Literacy-** Through lunch-and-learn sessions, wellness bulletins, or posters, basic nutrition education (e.g., benefits of balanced diets, understanding food labels, or healthy eating on a budget) will be shared in user-friendly formats. Signs to be posted in the offices as reminder to staff.

5.5 Safe and Supportive Environment

Creating and sustaining a psychologically safe, inclusive, and respectful workplace is essential to wellness and aligned with WONGOSOL's values of dignity, justice, and equality.

- **Zero-Tolerance for Harassment-** WONGOSOL will maintain a strict zero-tolerance policy for all forms of harassment, bullying, discrimination, or violence, whether physical, verbal, emotional, or digital. Clear mechanisms for confidential reporting and protection of whistleblowers are in place through the Whistleblowing and Safeguarding Policies.
- **Culture of Peer Support-** A spirit of collective care and teamwork will be embedded through mentorship, team bonding activities, and affirming communication. Staff are encouraged to check in on one another and celebrate both personal and professional milestones.
- **Listening and Feedback Mechanisms-** Staff well-being needs and concerns will be assessed quarterly through anonymous surveys, reflection spaces, or feedback boxes. Results will inform improvements to the wellness program, and staff will be involved in shaping activities that meet their evolving needs.

6.0 Implementation and Responsibilities

The successful implementation of WONGOSOL's Wellness Policy depends on shared responsibility, institutional commitment, and proactive engagement across all levels of the organization. The following roles outline how each group contributes to making wellness a lived reality:

6.1 Board and Management Team

The Board and Management Team is responsible for leading and championing a culture of wellness across the Secretariat. Specifically, the Management Team shall:

- Ensure full integration of wellness principles into organizational policies, strategies, and operational plans.
- Allocate adequate financial and human resources to support wellness activities, services, and infrastructure (e.g., psychosocial support, wellness retreats, staff appreciation activities).

- Embed wellness indicators in performance management systems and staff development frameworks.
- Regularly assess staff well-being through surveys, check-ins, and evaluations, and take timely action to address any gaps or risks.
- Demonstrate leadership by modeling healthy work-life balance and promoting a culture where taking care of oneself is encouraged and respected.

6.2 Wellness Focal Points- Network Coordinator and Administrator

The Human Resource (HR) Focal Point is central to coordinating, monitoring, and communicating wellness-related actions. The HR Focal Point shall:

- Develop and update internal wellness tools and materials, such as wellness checklists, referral directories for psychosocial support, and self-care resources.
- Organize regular wellness sessions, such as mindfulness talks, stress management training, or health screenings.
- Ensure timely and confidential support is provided to staff facing personal or professional difficulties, including access to counselling or mediation support where needed.
- Maintain a wellness calendar and collaborate with team leads to schedule activities in a way that does not overload staff or interfere with key deadlines.
- Facilitate onboarding and orientation sessions that introduce new staff to WONGOSOL's wellness culture and entitlements.

6.3 All Staff (Including Volunteers and Interns)

Every team member has a role to play in upholding a positive and caring workplace culture. Staff are encouraged to:

- Participate actively and honestly in wellness activities and consultations.
- Communicate their wellness needs, limitations, or challenges without fear of stigma or retaliation.
- Respect the wellness boundaries of colleagues and foster a non-judgmental, compassionate team environment.
- Engage in practices of self-care, mutual care, and stress management.
- Uphold the organization's values of care, dignity, and respect in all interactions, and report any harmful behaviour that threatens staff well-being.

6.4 Board of Directors

The Board plays vital governance and oversight role in ensuring that staff well-being remains a priority at the highest level. The Board shall:

- Endorse and monitor the implementation of the Wellness Policy and ensure it is reviewed and updated periodically.
- Support the allocation of core and project resources to staff wellness initiatives, recognizing the link between staff resilience and program impact.
- Hold the Management Team accountable for creating a safe and enabling work environment.
- Promote a culture of ethical leadership, integrity, and care that reinforces wellness as a value of the organization.

7.0 Wellness Activities and Practices

To ensure that wellness is a practical, lived experience for all staff and not just a theoretical policy, WONGOSOL will integrate consistent and engaging wellness activities into its organizational rhythm. These activities are designed to relieve stress, build emotional and physical resilience, and foster a culture of joy, solidarity, and mindfulness across teams.

7.1 Monthly 30-Minute Wellness Breaks

Every month, WONGOSOL will dedicate 30 minutes during work hours for a collective wellness activity. These breaks may include guided meditation, group stretching, deep breathing exercises, laughter therapy, short walks, or silent reflection.

7.2 Weekly Meetings Check-in to be Installed

Staff will rotate responsibility for organizing the activity to encourage creativity and ownership across the team. These breaks will be optional but encouraged, and managers will ensure workloads are adjusted to allow full participation without stress.

7.3 Quarterly “Wellness Reflection” Half-Day

Once every quarter, a half-day wellness reflection session will be organized, allowing the team to pause, reflect, reconnect, and reset. Activities may include group sharing circles, personal check-ins, journaling, mental health talks, or sessions with a trained wellness facilitator.

The goal is to encourage collective healing, assess emotional and physical energy levels, and prevent long-term burnout. These sessions also provide a feedback loop to help HR and management identify emerging wellness trends or concerns.

7.4 Annual Staff Retreat with Wellness Component

As part of its commitment to long-term team cohesion and resilience, WONGOSOL will organize an annual staff retreat that includes dedicated time for rest, relaxation, and emotional renewal. Wellness components will include team-building exercises, mindfulness activities, nature excursions, light physical activity, reflective discussions, and creativity-focused sessions (e.g., art, poetry, music). The retreat will also create space for shared learning and gratitude, acknowledging staff contributions and promoting emotional safety and mutual appreciation.

7.5 “No Meeting Friday” Policy (Once per Month)

To reduce virtual fatigue, promote deep focus, and allow time for strategic thinking and rest, WONGOSOL will implement a “No Meeting Friday” once per month.

On this day, staff will be encouraged to avoid scheduling any internal meetings unless necessary. This time can be used for uninterrupted work, personal wellness practices, or catch up on tasks without the stress of back-to-back calls.

The HR team will monitor effectiveness and staff feedback to refine this practice as needed.

7.6 Wellness Corner (Digital or Physical)

WONGOSOL will maintain a dedicated wellness corner, either physically in the office or digitally on its shared platform that houses resources, tools, and inspiration for self-care and stress management.

This corner may include:

- Books or articles on mental health and self-care
- Inspirational quotes or affirmations
- Referrals to counselors or wellness providers
- Nutritional guides and exercise tips
- Links to mental wellness apps and relaxation music
- Staff will be encouraged to contribute materials, and the space will be updated regularly to keep it engaging and relevant.

8.0 Monitoring and Review

WONGOSOL recognizes that wellness is dynamic and must respond to evolving internal and external realities. To ensure this policy remains effective, relevant, and staff-centered, we are committed to a structured, participatory approach to monitoring and review.

8.1 Bi-annual Policy Review

The Wellness Policy will be formally reviewed every two years by the Human Resource (HR) Focal Point in consultation with the Management Team and staff representatives. The review will assess whether the objectives, principles, and practices outlined in the policy remain aligned with WONGOSOL's values, strategic direction, and the lived experiences of staff. Any changes or updates will be approved by the Board and clearly communicated to all staff through an all-staff meeting and written brief.

8.2 Continuous Feedback and Learning

Recognizing that well-being needs can change rapidly due to organizational, personal, or national contexts, WONGOSOL will remain responsive to real-time feedback and emerging trends. A short anonymous wellness survey will be conducted biannually (twice per year) to gather staff input on:

- Effectiveness of wellness activities and support mechanisms
- Emerging challenges to physical, emotional, or mental health
- Suggestions for improving wellness practices

In addition to surveys, informal listening sessions, staff debriefs, and reflection exercises during retreats or team meetings may also be used to collect insights.

8.3 Data-Informed Adjustments

The HR Focal Point will analyze feedback data and share findings with management and staff through summary reports, ensuring transparency and collective responsibility. Where issues are identified, timely adjustments will be made to wellness activities, support services, or resource allocation. Special attention will be given to intersectional and gender-sensitive insights (e.g., how wellness experiences differ by role, age, caregiving responsibility, or workload).

8.4 Documentation and Reporting

All wellness activities, feedback summaries, and improvement actions will be documented and archived, contributing to institutional memory and enabling continuous learning. Findings may also be integrated into donor reports, organizational development reviews, and strategic planning to demonstrate commitment to staff care and resilience.

8.5 Accountability

The HR Focal Point will present an annual wellness update to the Management Team and Board, including key findings from staff feedback, actions taken, and any resource gaps. Management and the Board will be responsible for ensuring that wellness is not deprioritized and that staff concerns are addressed with urgency, sensitivity, and confidentiality.

9.0 Budget Consideration

WONGOSOL affirms that wellness is a strategic investment, not an optional cost. A healthy and cared-for team is essential to achieving organizational impact, upholding values of dignity and justice, and sustaining long-term engagement in women's rights advocacy and peacebuilding. To this end, WONGOSOL commits to:

- i. Allocating a dedicated line item within its annual operational budget to cover wellness-related activities, services, and resources. This may include psychosocial support, wellness retreats, health screenings, mental health counseling, capacity-building workshops, and wellness materials.
- ii. Integrating wellness funding into donor proposals and project budgets, ensuring that wellness is not separated from programmatic work, but embedded in the delivery of all activities. Proposals will include reasonable provisions for staff care in line with the principle of "doing no harm" and safeguarding human rights defenders.
- iii. Leveraging strategic partnerships with healthcare providers, wellness consultants, government health services, and women-led enterprises to deliver wellness services in cost-effective and context-relevant ways.
- iv. Prioritizing low-cost, high-impact wellness strategies such as wellness breaks, peer-led sessions, digital wellness corners, and flexible work arrangements that do not require significant financial investment but have meaningful effects on morale and well-being.
- v. Conducting an annual cost-benefit reflection on wellness spending, drawing insights from staff feedback, to improve budget forecasting and resource mobilization efforts for wellness.

By planning for and providing resources for wellness, WONGOSOL sends a clear message that people are its most valuable asset, and that care is essential for impact.

10. Conclusion

At WONGOSOL, wellness is a principle, a practice, and a political stance. As an organization rooted in feminist values and collective action, we believe that how we treat each other internally is just as important as the external impact we seek to create. We acknowledge that Liberian women's rights defenders, advocates, and civil society workers often carry the weight of national trauma, community expectations, and under-resourced environments. For that reason, embedding care into the DNA of our organization, through wellness policies, workplace culture, and intentional practices, is essential not only for survival but for thriving.

This Wellness Policy is more than a document; it is a collective commitment to:

- Center the well-being of our people in every decision we make
- Create a culture where vulnerability is not punished but protected
- Build an ecosystem of support that sustains feminist leadership for the long term
- We commit to regularly revisiting and renewing this policy to ensure it evolves with the needs, voices, and realities of our team. In doing so, we reaffirm that wellness is not a luxury; it is a human right, a feminist imperative, and a pillar of transformative change.