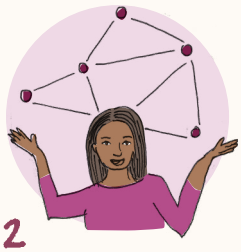


1961

Born in the Kailahun district, Sierra Leone, the year that Sierra Leone gains independence.



1992

After graduation, she becomes a member of several women's networks. In 1992 she is displaced to Freetown due to the civil war.



1994

Travels to Dakar, Senegal, for the regional preparation conference leading up to the 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing. After the conference, she joins other women to start an umbrella organisation, the Women's Forum Sierra Leone.

PeaceWomen Across the Globe
FriedensFrauen Weltweit
نساء من أجل السلام عبر العالم
Femmes de Paix Autour du Monde
Женщины мира за мир на земле
Mujeres de Paz en el Mundo
Mulheres pela Paz ao redor do Mundo
Donne di Pace nel Mondo
ピースウーマン―国境を越え平和をつくる女たち
全球和平妇女

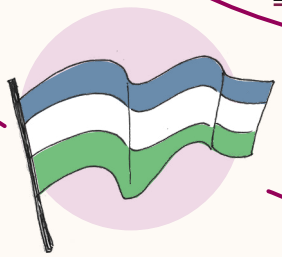


1995

She participates in the famous women's peace marches through Freetown which brought the issue of peace and women's voices to centre stage. She continues to be active with the women's peace movement through the Mano River Women Peace Network (MARWOPNET).



As a reporter, columnist and managing editor for local newspapers, Marian Angela helps women and marginalised groups and amplifies their voices.



2004 - 2007

She is a press officer in the Office of the President of Sierra Leone under the first civilian government after the civil war.



Today, Marian Angela is the chairperson of the National Commission for Democracy (NCD). She is also a member of various women's movements and acts as a trainer and facilitator for workshops, including those organised by the MARWOPNET.*



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MEET THE NETWORK

Marian Angela

CONTEXT

Sierra Leone's civil war raged from 1991–2002. The brutal eleven-year conflict was marked by mass displacement, conflict-related gender-based violence and the widespread use of child soldiers. The war formally ended with the Lomé Peace Agreement and UN-backed disarmament. The country has since held several peaceful transfers of power through elections. But the peace remains fragile due to electoral and political violence, economic instability and resource exploitation that particularly marginalises the rural communities. At the national level, women activists have pushed hard for legislative change to strengthen women's participation and leadership, winning a landmark law reserving 30% of parliamentary seats for women. But women remain underrepresented in cabinet and ministerial appointments and face targeted harassment and violence when they run for office. Continuing cross-border tensions along the Mano River, including disputes over land and resources with neighbouring Guinea and Liberia, raise fears of renewed instability.

Marian Angela was born in Kailahun district, Sierra Leone in 1961, the year the country gained independence. Growing up in a highly politicised environment, she observed early how politics shaped everyday life, particularly for women, and how women around her took on leadership roles. Running for school council, she got involved in women's leadership. During her undergraduate research into the social and economic status of women in Sierra Leone she saw a clear pattern: **women carried enormous responsibilities in families and communities, often as primary breadwinners, but they rarely received any recognition and were expected to stay in the background.** She noticed that boys and girls grew up in the same households, but only the boys were kept in school. After graduating, she joined several women's networks and worked with displaced women as an activist.

Sierra Leone's women organise for peace

Displaced during the civil war, she came to the capital Freetown in 1992. In 1994, she attended the regional preparatory conference in Dakar, Senegal, for the women's conference in Beijing. She and other delegates realised that Sierra Leone's women's organisations were too fragmented to be effective. They formed an umbrella organisation, the Women's Forum Sierra Leone, to improve their coordination as well as their chances of reaching decision-makers. With Sierra Leone under military rule at the time, one of their first priorities was building a working relationship with the minister overseeing the gender desk. Marian Angela also took part in the 1995 women's peace marches through Freetown, when thousands of women demanded an end to the war – a moment that helped catalyse a decade of civic action led by Sierra Leonean women.

"We can't leave it to the men": founding MARWOPNET

It was at the Beijing+5 review in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 2000 that the idea for the Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET) was born – out of conversations with women from Guinea and Liberia who shared the same river basin and the same war-weariness. Marian Angela recalls: "The women were tired. Your husband, brother, male child, everyone was being conscripted. You were alone, but you didn't have any means or power for yourself within society. So women said: 'this burden is on us, we can't leave it to the men.'" Despite language differences – francophone Guinea and anglophone Liberia and Sierra Leone – they found ways to reach presidents and rebel leaders, often through women with personal ties to armed groups. When peace talks convened in Nigeria, MARWOPNET was invited to the table, marking a turning point in women's influence in the process. However, Marian Angela stresses that it was not just the women at the table who brought about change – the work in the background was just as critical. Building trust and seeking dialogue both with government representatives and with armed groups were a necessary precondition for peace talks. **"To reach them, we had to find women who had a connection to a fighter, be it a husband or a brother. Especially those who were close to the leadership of the armed groups. We needed to convince them that we all needed peace and engage with all factions, not just the governments."**

Looking back, looking ahead: sustaining women's peacebuilding

Marian Angela became a journalist to amplify the voices of women and marginalised communities. She worked as a reporter, columnist and managing editor for local papers, and as a member of several journalists' associations. From 2004-2007, she served as press officer in the Office of the President under Sierra Leone's first post-war civilian government. She remains candid about the obstacles: "We are living in a male-dominated society. Most of the time, when women push for something, getting across our issues isn't easy." Today she chairs the National Commission for Democracy, after serving as its Southern Region Commissioner from 2017-2021, and continues to work with MARWOPNET, the Women's Movement for Peace and the African Women Advocacy Agenda. She names one hard-won milestone: 30% female representation in parliament for the first time in the country's history. But she also points out that ministerial appointments of women still lag behind and that women who run for office become targets. She credits two mentors, now deceased, with helping her move forward. Today, she mentors young women herself. Marian Angela is concerned about the renewed instability along the Mano River border: "What I see happening is worrisome. After the war ended, attention waned and funding for peacebuilding was reduced, but we still have armed activities along the borders." For this reason MARWOPNET has opened a peace centre and re-engages with women in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia – to head off conflicts before they escalate.

* The Mano River Women Peace Network was one of the first female-led negotiating teams in West Africa, mobilising women across Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone and successfully persuading the three countries' heads of state and armed groups to return to the negotiating table. In 2003, the network was awarded the UN Prize for Human Rights by Secretary-General Kofi Annan for its contribution to peace and human rights. That year it became a signatory to the Liberian Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

Marian Angela is a member of the Feminists Connecting for Peace network.

For more information please visit: 1000peacewomen.org/en

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