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Football star and UN envoy Marta spotlights efforts to empower Sierra Leone's women



UNDP Goodwill Ambassador Marta Vieira da Silva, a Brazilian national known to her soccer fans as Marta

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The world's top female football player and United Nations advocate Marta Vieira da Silva is on a mission to Sierra Leone to highlight efforts to empower women in the West African nation that is recovering from years of conflict.

The three-day visit that began yesterday is the first trip to Africa for Ms. Vieira da Silva, a Brazilian national known to her fans as Marta, since her appointment last year as a Goodwill Ambassador for the UN Development Programme ([UNDP](#)).

As part of the visit, the five-time winner of the FIFA Women's Player of the Year title is promoting local efforts that empower women, one of the eight internationally-agreed Millennium Development Goals ([MDGs](#)) which seek to end extreme poverty by 2015. Gender equality and women's rights are vital issues for the post-conflict nation, where 73 per cent of women are illiterate

"We all need to contribute to help defeat poverty," said Marta, who is currently a forward player with the Western New York Flash.

"UNDP works around the world making a positive difference in people's lives, and I am proud to add my personal commitment to its work," she added.

She is visiting UNDP programmes, and meeting with young women and advocacy groups that are lobbying the national parliament to enact laws that ensure women's quotas at all levels of political decision making, according to a [news release](#) issued at the start of the visit.

"Women's full participation in leadership and decision making is critical for the consolidation of peace and security, as well as meaningful for overall development in Sierra Leone," said Mia Seppo, UNDP Country Director. "Marta's visit will showcase some of the good work that has been done towards achieving these goals."

UNDP has been helping Sierra Leone to establish legal services aimed at women who experienced sexual violence or abuse, providing them with aid and advice on their rights and options for pursuing justice.

Gender equality and women's rights are vital issues for the post-conflict nation, where 73 per cent of women are illiterate, and females currently occupy only 37 per cent of secondary school places, and only 19 per cent of university slots.

Marta is part of an elite roster of UNDP Goodwill Ambassadors that also includes soccer stars Ronaldo, Zinedine Zidane, Iker Casillas and Didier Drogba, Russian tennis star Maria Sharapova and Spanish actor Antonio Banderas, among other world-renowned personalities.

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