



**Convention on the Elimination  
of All Forms of Discrimination  
against Women**

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination  
against Women**

**Pre-session working group**

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**Responses to the list of issues and questions with regard to  
the consideration of the combined initial, second, third,  
fourth and fifth periodic reports**

**Sierra Leone\***

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\* Issued without formal editing.



## **Reply by Sierra Leone to the list of issues and questions with regard to the consideration of the combined initial, second, third, fourth and fifth periodic report under the CEDAW Convention**

### **Sierra Leone**

#### **General**

**1. The report contains limited statistical data disaggregated by sex on the situation of women in areas covered by the Convention. Please provide information on the status of data collection in the country in general, and to what extent such data collection takes place on a sex disaggregated basis. Please indicate how the Government intends to improve the collection of data disaggregated by sex pertaining to areas of the Convention so as to support policymaking and programme development and to measure progress towards implementation of the Convention.**

There is a big gap in disaggregating data by sex apart from attempts made in census/population reports, Sierra Leone MDG report 2005, and the PRSP. This could be blamed on limited capacity on application of appropriate gender analysis tools in data generation, both at the level statistics Sierra Leone and line ministries. This was an issue discussed at the national validation of the CEDAW report and an action plan was put in place, part of which was to set up a gender/sex disaggregated data base which would be used for research and programmes implemented by Sectoral Ministries and other agencies and develop gender sensitive indicators for all research in the country.

#### **Articles 1 and 2**

**2. The report does not provide information on the status of the Convention vis-à-vis the Constitution and the other national laws. Please provide information on whether the Convention is directly applicable and whether there are instances of cases where the Convention has been cited in the Courts.**

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women document is not directly applicable in Sierra Leone. Our Constitution provides that for any International Convention which alters the law of Sierra Leone, that Convention will first of all have to be ratified and then domesticated into local legislation which has to be enacted by Parliament. Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women is now in the process of domestication as several Bills related to it have now been drafted awaiting the approval of Parliament.

At the moment the Law Reform Commission is not aware of any instances of cases where the Convention has been cited in the Courts.

**3. Section 27 (4) (d) of the Constitution provides that the guarantee against non-discrimination does not apply “with respect to adoption, marriage, divorce burial, devolution of property on death or other interests of personal law”. While the report notes that the process of constitutional reform will be “long, cumbersome, time-consuming and expensive” (para.8.7), please provide information on the Government’s concrete plans and timetable for reforming the**

**Constitution and the priority it intends to place on ensuring that all its provisions are in accordance with the Convention.**

The Constitutional Review Commission established by the Government commenced sittings on the 29<sup>th</sup> February 2007 and was mandated: “To review the Sierra Leone Constitution of 1991 with a view to recommending amendments that might bring it up to date with the economic, social and political developments that have taken place nationally and internationally since 1991.

The Constitutional Review Committee set up by government with representation from legal experts, women’s groups and civil society representatives, have already commenced work on the Constitutional review. It is expected that Section 27 (4d) of the Constitution will be expunged. A referendum to accept the reviewed Constitution would rather be done alongside the voting of the Presidential and Parliamentary elections on July 28<sup>th</sup>, 2007, which will address the issue of the process being “long, cumbersome, time-consuming and expensive”. As a new government comes in after July 28 2007, the reviewed constitution capturing obligations of CEDAW would be ready.

The time table for reforming this Constitution is from February to the first week of May 2007. The conclusions reached by this review Commission will be put in a referendum for approval during the General elections on the 28<sup>th</sup> July 2007.

**4. According to the report, many laws discriminate in purpose or effect against women, including the Matrimonial Act of 1960, the Administration of Estates Act and the Citizenship Act of 1973 (para. 4. 5. 1 and 9. 1. 10). Please provide information on what steps the Government has taken or intends to take to identify and amend all laws that are discriminatory against women and not in compliance with the Convention, including the progress made in this regard by the Law Reform Commission.**

The steps Government has taken to identify and amend all laws that are discriminatory against women are: firstly, by reviving the defunct Law Reform Commission and empowering it to review all the laws of Sierra Leone including Statutory and Customary laws. Secondly, government has in addition recently set up a Constitutional Review Commission to review the current Constitution of Sierra Leone with a view of expunging all discriminatory laws against women.

The progress made so far by the Law Reform Commission in this regard is that it has reviewed almost all of the laws that discriminate against women and those not in compliance with CEDAW. Some of the laws already reviewed by the Commission in this regard include:

- 1) Devolution of Estate Act;
- 2) Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce;
- 3) Domestic Violence Act;
- 4) Sexual Offences;
- 5) Offences against the Person;
- 6) The Sierra Leone Citizenship (Amendment) Act 1973;
- 7) The Christian Marriage (Amendment) Act;
- 8) The Muslim Marriage (Amendment) Act;

- 9) Civil Marriage (Amendment) Act;
- 10) Family Law; and
- 11) Customary Law.

Those already at the office of the Attorney General and Minister of Justice for onward submission to Parliament include all of the above-mentioned bills except those in numbers (5) and (11).

**5. Please provide information on what measures are in place to enhance access to justice for women; to encourage women, especially rural women, to use the courts to enforce their rights; and to raise awareness and sensitize judges, lawyers and law enforcement officers with regards to the State party's obligations under the Convention to achieve gender equality.**

The Law Reform Commission carried out a nation-wide consultative seminar aimed at getting not only recommendations for reform of these laws but also sensitizing the rural population on issues of gender parity.

In addition to the above, the bills drafted also make provisions to ensure and enhance access to justice for women for instance The Devolution of Estate Bill 2006 is now applicable to “every citizen of Sierra Leone irrespective of religious or ethnic origin”. The provisions in the Domestic Violence Bill 2006 also put measures in place to enhance access to justice for women.

The reforms therefore go a long way to fulfill the Government's obligation in achieving gender equality.

### **Article 3**

**6. The report notes that the capacity of the national machinery for the advancement of women is limited due to lack of financial and human resources (paras. 10. 3. 1 and 10. 4. 1). Please explain the measures the Government is taking or intends to provide the national machinery for the advancement of women with adequate decision-making capacity and financial and human resources**

It is indeed true that the National Machinery for the Advancement of Women is limited due to lack of financial and human resources. Ten professional staff came onboard in December 2003 with a Director, Deputy Director, five Programme Officers and three Regional Desk Officers. However due to poor conditions of service the Director and two Programme Officers left for greener pastures elsewhere. Currently the Division is grossly understaffed. The Division is the least funded in the country. As part of government's commitment in providing the National Machinery for the Advancement of Women with adequate decision making capacity, a female Permanent Secretary has been posted specifically for the Gender and Children's Division of the Ministry. The issue of the professional staff vacancies are yet to be addressed as the new Permanent Secretary has promised taking the necessary steps in that direction. It is hoped that government's consideration in the increase of financial support can be made to the Division to effectively advocate and lobby for women and children of Sierra Leone.

Another measures taken by government to strengthen decision-making capacity and financial and human resources, is devolving functions of the ministry among other key ministries to the local

councils, who have capacity to mobilize more resources towards the advancement of rural women in particular through the decentralization process.

**7. The report states that the regional desk officers are based in Freetown due to logistical problems and their presence is not felt in the regions (para. 10. 4. 1). Please outline the nature of the logistical difficulties encountered and provide details on the Government's plan and timetable to deploy the desk officers to the regions.**

The logistical difficulties encountered by the Division in getting the Regional Desk Officers in their respective regions include the following:

Finance in the area of locating these staff from the Capital to their regions vis-à-vis resettlement package for them, office space, equipping these offices spaces with modern office materials, transportation facilities to facilitate their work effectively in their regions are lacking.

The government has however asked the Regional Desk Officers to get into their regions and ascertain the myriad of the difficulties experienced on the ground and make necessary report to the government for action. Before the close of this current year their presence will be felt in their regions amidst all the constraints envisaged. Remember government infrastructure was completely destroyed during the 10 - 11 years civil year in Sierra Leone. The new Permanent Secretary assigned to the Gender and Children's Affairs Division of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs has promised meeting with donor partners highlighting the numerous challenges faced by the Division in particular.

**8. The report does not provide any information on the results achieved in the implementation of the National Policy on the Advancement of Women and the results achieved in the Gender Mainstreaming Policy. Please provide information about progress in their implementation, how implementation is monitored and evaluated and the impact of these policies in terms of achieving the goals of the Convention.**

The results achieved in the implementation of the twin policies; namely the National Policy on the Advancement of Women and the Gender Mainstreaming actually records minimal rate. The policies came into existence in 2000 at a time when our country was still experiencing civil unrest. When the war eventually ended in 2002, government priority was actually on rehabilitation, reintegration and resettlement programme for its populace. The government and donor partners actually funded post – war development programmes.

Secondly, as it was mentioned in the report, the National Machinery for the Advancement of Women receives less than 1 per cent of the total budget of the country. The implementation of this twin policy involves money which the Ministry can not afford on the meager resources available.

The monitoring and evaluation of the policies is also a set back as the Ministry cannot boast of tools for monitoring and evaluation processes. Tools such as transportation facilities, equipped staffed knowledgeable in monitoring activities are lacking. The first core of Professional Staff for Gender and Children's issues came onboard in December 2003. Hence trained personnel in the implementation of these policies are crucial.

Publicizing and sensitizing stakeholders who should be key implementers and beneficiaries of provisions of both policies has not been effectively done. Reason for this is blamed on limited

financial resources and technical capacity of the ministry in strategizing ways of ensuring the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of these policies. What could be referred to however, as impact of these policies is the fact a lot of references is being made to them in designing strategic national documents, for instance the PRSP, the child rights bill, the national HIV strategic framework, among others. All these documents addressed issues of women and girls from the economic, health, education, domestic violence, and other the related issues.

We are thinking of popularizing the existing policies and reviewing them since they are little over five years in existence. We have approached donors and they are willing to help us in the review process. With political stability in the country and the enthusiasm of the Professional Staff progress can surely be made in the shortest possible time starting with the review process and implementation thereafter.

#### **Article 4**

**9. The report provides little information about temporary special measures in Sierra Leone. Has consideration been given to using temporary special measures, such as the establishment of quotas, incentives, to accelerate the achievement of equality in areas other than education and local government, taking into account the Committee's general recommendation 25 on article 4, paragraph 1 of the Convention?**

The report was very precise and to the point in the area of temporary special measures in Sierra Leone. It is but necessary that we give factual report on the status of women in the country. At the moment no other concrete temporary special measures is put place and operational. Efforts are on the way to lobby government and the Political Parties for special quotas or incentives to accelerate the achievement of equality in the area of political representation. The 50/50 Group works for gender parity in politics is actually leading this campaign for the 30 per cent seat of elective positions in line with the Commonwealth recommendations. The Ministry of Labour is currently working on a policy for employment which is expected to be gender sensitive and possible temporary special measure.

#### **Article 5**

**10. The report highlights the persistence of stereotypical attitudes in Sierra Leone, and certain cultural and traditional practices and customs are cited as the major obstacles to achieving de facto equality for women (for example paras. 4. 5 and 12.1). Please provide information about any comprehensive strategy that may exist to create a socio-cultural environment that is conducive to gender equality, including education and awareness- raising targeted at the general public and any collaboration with non-governmental organizations in this regard. In responding to this question, kindly give particular attention to initiatives taken or anticipated for rural areas.**

The comprehensive strategies for creating socio-cultural environment for gender equality includes but not limited to the following:

Improvement in educational standards through special scholarships so that rights to employment and decision making processes can be enhanced for successful beneficiaries;

Adequate sensitization over community radios in parts of the country in Sierra Leone on Police and Family Support Units' role in gender-based violence and other male-female relationships in place and effectively utilized;

Entry requirements to the National Training Centre at Njala are relaxed for female candidates;

Agriculture sector policy encourages the release of land to female house-hold heads; and

Mechanized crop processing emphasized in Agricultural policy removes the burden of using the mortar and pestle in rice milling from women and children.

**11. Given the impact of the war on women and girls, please provide details on the steps that are being taken to provide rehabilitation and support programmes, including psychological recovery and social reintegration, for women and girls who were victims of violence taking into account the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Special Court for Sierra Leone.**

Women and children were more vulnerable to the dangers of the rebels. Many women and children were killed, raped and trafficked to the neighbouring countries. During the height of the civil war, human trafficking across the borders of neighbouring Liberia and Guinea was very common. Such women and children were engaged in commercial sex and pornography in the countries they were trafficked.

The Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs is a strong pillar in advocating for vulnerable women, children and even men who are marginalized in the society. The Ministry has taken the lead to advocate, coordinate and collaborate with all child protection issues in the country.

Furthermore as part of measures to ensure the implementation of laws related to violence against women in the country, the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, and the Sierra Leone Police, on 12 December 2003, signed a Memorandum of Understanding for a collaborative action towards minimizing gender-based violence. In the agreement, the Family Support Unit within the Sierra Leone Police and the Ministry agreed to jointly respond to the needs of victims of violence, with social attention to the victims and punishment for the perpetrators. We also agreed to raise awareness about these happenings and encourage community and institutional action to minimize domestic violence in the country.

Key areas of collaboration and coordination under this MOU include the development of operational guidelines for involving the Ministry's social workers and the Police in the investigation of alleged violence against women and children; data collection and programme design for the sensitization of local communities as well as the general public regarding the legal, medical and psycho-social consequences of violence against women and children in the country.

Aside from working with the Ministry of Social Welfare Gender and Children's Affairs, the FSU is partnering with the Ministries of Health, Education, and Justice among others. It also works in close collaboration with both Local and International Non-Governmental Organizations including the Department for International Development, International Rescue Committee, United Nations Children Fund, Defence for Children International, and United Nations Peace Keeping Mission in Sierra Leone which completed its draw down in December 2005.

In this regard, the FSU and IRC have jointly established 'Rainbow Centres' at the Princess Christian Maternity Hospital otherwise known as Cottage in Freetown, as well as the Government Hospital in Kenema and in Koidu in the Eastern Province. These three centers offer free medical and counseling services to victims of sexual violence or abuse, and provide legal services with the help of Legal Assistance for Women Yearning for Equal Rights.

Over seventy Social Workers of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs have been trained and attached to the Family Support Unit of the Police in order to achieve the aim and objectives of the establishment of the Family Support Unit.

Rape victims are immediately referred to the Family Support Unit Police who give them medical paper for medical examination and treatment at Rainbow Centres. The victims are interviewed and provided with psychosocial counseling and the matter referred to court for legal action.

The perpetrator is usually arrested by the Police, interviewed and then referred to court for legal action.

**12. Please provide more details on the Domestic Violence Bill 2006, including when it is expected to be passed into law and obstacles, if any, the Bill is likely to face before Parliament.**

The object of this Bill is to prohibit persons in domestic relationships from engaging in domestic violence and to provide remedies and protection for the victims of domestic violence.

The Bill introduces the crime of domestic violence that covers violence occurring in a domestic relationship i.e. between couples, partners, parents and children and other family members. It seeks to address the high incidence of domestic violence in Sierra Leone which sometimes results in death. Some of these acts of violence can be prosecuted under the general law, but the existing law did not provide mechanisms such as a protection order to prevent repetition of the abuse. The situation is further worsened if the victim's livelihood and survival depends on the perpetrator.

The domestic violence bill and the other draft bills on the Intestate succession, and Registration of customary and divorce are recently reported to be at the Attorney General's Office. The women of Sierra Leone used the opportunity provided by 2007 International Women's Day to demand for the enactment of these bills into law.

It is hoped that this Bill will be passed into law this year before parliament dissolves and before the end of term of office. His Excellency The President of the Republic of Sierra Leone in his Keynote address on this year's International Women's Day celebrations on the 20<sup>th</sup> March 2007 informed the women that he has given a Certificate of Urgency to the Attorney General and Minister of Justice to send the three draft bills to Parliament for passage. The Law Reform Commission does not envisage any obstacles to these bills if they are put before Parliament.

**13. The report states that there were no convictions in rape cases in 2004 (table 2. 0), that wife chastisement is an acceptable practice (para. 12. 15) and that the criminal law is not regarded as applicable to the forms of violence that the husband may exert on his wife (para. 9. 1. 13). Bearing in mind the Committee's general recommendation 19 regarding violence against women, please describe steps taken to develop a comprehensive strategy to combat all forms of violence against women, including prosecution of perpetrators, provision of assistance to victims and introduction of capacity-building and awareness-raising programmes for various**



**groups (such as the police, lawyers, health and social workers and the judiciary) and the general public.**

The only steps taken so far is the establishment of Family Support Unit and training of the police on dealing with issues of gender based violence and women's human rights specifically. The United Nations is championing these trainings for the police. They are now empowered to deal with gender-based violence issues country-wide. The Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs have trained social workers assigned alongside the Police in handling cases of domestic and gender-based violence nation-wide.

## **Article 6**

### **14. Please provide details on the steps being taken to fully implement the Anti-Human Trafficking Act of 2005 and results achieved to date.**

After the enactment of the Anti-Human Trafficking Act in 2005, a National Taskforce was formed within the framework of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs in June 2005. the membership of the trafficking in persons taskforce include NGOs, International Agencies such as United Nations Fund for Children, International Organization for Migration, Faith Consortium, Talking Drum, United States of America Embassy and Women's Forum. Government Institutions such as Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Youths and Sports, Sierra Leone Police (Interpol), Immigration, Law Officers Department and the Ministry of Development and Economic Planning. As part of the implementation strategy, the following has been put in place:

- Trafficking in Person Secretariat has been established and equipped
- A plan of activities for 2007 has been developed and approved by the Inter-Ministerial Committee. The Minister of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs has already discussed the plan of activities at Parliament and Finance so as to provide allocation for the implementation of the activities.
- Some of the activities include assessment of the trafficking situation, identification of notorious areas for Human trafficking, identification of trafficked victims and training of taskforce members.

Members of the taskforce meet twice every month in order to work strategies to combat Human trafficking in Sierra Leone. Presently Sierra Leone is identified as transit point, country of origin and at the same time as country of final destination. Trafficking in Person taskforce is in high collaboration with the Police (Interpol), Immigration and International Organization of Migration to develop effective strategies to abolish Human Trafficking. The Minister of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs has asked the taskforce to start effective implementation of the plan of activities.

## **Article 7 & 8**

### **15. Given the significant under-representation of women in decision making positions in public and political life and in international activities, what concrete measures are envisaged to achieve women's full and equal participation and representation at all levels of Government, in**

**Parliament and the Judiciary, as well as at the international level, taking into account the Committee's general recommendation 25, on article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention, and general recommendation 23, on women in public life? In particular explain what awareness raising and capacity-building programmes or policies are in place or envisaged to encourage and facilitate Sierra Leonean women's further participation in public and political life.**

In 2000, the 50/50 Group was formed as a non-partisan organization has through sensitization improved the public perception of women in politics. In 2002, The British Council together with the 50/50 Group held a workshop with a cross-section of female Parliamentarians from Commonwealth countries such as Canada, Britain, Ghana and Nigeria as resource persons. These women shared their experiences with the women of Sierra Leone challenging them not to relent in their quest for equality in governance and decision making positions. The challenges inspired the 50/50 Group which was a newly formed group with the aim of advocating and lobbying to increase the participation of women in democratic politics and decision making positions at all levels. The British Council has mentored the group up to date.

Series of trainings for female aspirants for both the Parliamentary and Local Government elections in 2002 and 2004 respectively were conducted nation-wide for all women belonging to registered political parties and even independent aspirants. The trainings entail skills in overcoming some of the barriers which have prevented women from taking active part in politics in the past. Skills in building up their self confidence, public speaking, campaigning dealing with the media, and finally skills in fund raising considering the fact that finance has women's participation and representation in the past and even does today. Women are usually not financially strong hence the aims of the trainings are to empower the women to measure up to their male counterpart who have been old in the game of politics.

The 50/50 Group, in its strive for gender equality have worked other partners to ensure that the laws which are discriminatory against women in the Constitution are seriously looked at and the necessary reforms made.

Awareness-raising campaigns in lobbying and advocating both government and the political parties for the 30 per cent quota for women is still on-going. Women of Sierra Leone are also using the 2004 Population and Housing Census figures as the trump card for the 30 per cent quota for women as they form about 51 per cent of the total population.

The Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs in 2001 embarked on the formation of a Taskforce for Women in Politics. This project aimed at reducing barriers to women's entry into politics by mobilizing women for active participation in politics, increased registration of women as voters, advocating for women's political empowerment. TAFWIP would have been in better position to lobby and advocate for an increase of women in decision-making positions in the country. However, due to financial constraints the sustainability of this advocacy group could not be achieved by the Ministry.

## Article 10

**16. The report states that 29 per cent of females were literate in 2004 (table 25, para. 17. 9. 2). Please provide describe any initiatives that are under way or envisaged to increase women's literacy and access their efficacy and outcomes to date.**

Level of female literacy is actually low in the country. However, a lot of initiatives are put in place by the government and its partners in increasing women's literacy. Forum for African Women Educationalist Sierra Leone chapter is currently providing literacy and numeracy for youths and women country-wide. Functional literacy (literacy combined with skills for the improvement of the functions of the individual) is also provided for women in the country. As a policy document, Vision 2025 prepared by the Ministry of Development and Economic Planning makes provision for the education and empowerment of women. Similarly, Education for All also makes a very strong stress on the provision of education (literacy) to cut across the board including women in particular. Local Non-governmental Organizations such as the People's Educational Association also provide special literacy for their women's groups nation-wide.

The Non-Formal Education Division of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology is engaged in Literacy and Civic Education for women in the country. This programme is sponsored by the United Nations Educational, Science and Cultural Organization.

The Sierra Leone Adult Education Association also offers Adult Literacy and HIV/AIDS education which is also nation-wide. All of these interventions are envisaged to increase women's literacy in the short run.

**17. Please provide data on the rate of teenage pregnancies in Sierra Leone, its impact on the education of girls and what strategies are in place to encourage girls to return to school after giving birth.**

There are no data currently in the country on the rate of teenage pregnancies in Sierra Leone. Girl mothers are not prevented going to school after delivery. Vocational Institutions are located all over the country to cater for girl mothers.

## Article 11

**18. Please indicate how the poverty reduction strategies that are in place in the country integrate a gender perspective and contribute to the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.**

The poverty reduction strategy considered gender to be a cross cutting issue in all the pillars with deliberate effort of referring the principles of CEDAW.

The preparation of the poverty reduction strategy was all-embracing and holistic. It involved an open dialogue among key stakeholders: ministers, parliamentarians, local authorities, NGOs, civil society, the private sector, development partners, beneficiary groups and citizens including women, youth and children, supported by radio and television. Focused groups gave stakeholders' perceptions about poverty reduction. thematic and sector working groups reviewed and designed programmes, identified gaps, and developed monitorable indicators. The approach developed popular ownership; it generated

poverty information to define policy priorities, including mainstreaming gender and child-rights issues.

The current poverty reduction strategies in the country integrate a gender perspective and contribute to the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. In fact pillar three of the poverty reduction strategy supports human development which addresses education, health and water and sanitation which when addressed will contribute to the implementation of the Convention. Action has been taken for gender equality and empowerment of women but more radical progress is required. Gender issues were mainstreamed into each pillar's strategies. As with all cross-cutting issues, government will provide coordination and advocacy. Much as gender was regarded as a cross-cutting issue, an annex was provided specifically for gender interventions as they are peculiar to the National Machinery for the Advancement of Women. The first objective under gender annex is to domesticate CEDAW and establish a legal framework to address Gender-Based Violence in the country. Specific activities included:

- Undertake a study to increase understanding of the issue of gender-based violence in Sierra Leone;
- Enact a law to protect women and girls from gender-based violence;
- Sensitize the public on the issue and impact of gender-based violence (drama, flyers, posters, jingles and community theatre) and organize public education awareness raising programmes on issue of gender-based violence at community, district and national as well as in the schools;
- Provide appropriate support services for victims of domestic violence and other forms of violence (counseling, medical, legal education, information); and
- Support the Family Support Unit of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs and child abuse investigation teams and existing service providers.

**19. The report points out that women have little access to non-traditional employment (para. 18.1) but does not provide any further details. Please provide information on what steps have been taken, including temporary special measures and the provision of vocational training to enhance compliance with article 11.**

There have been limited measures and provisions for vocational training facilities to enhance women's employment in the rural areas. Very limited vocational training opportunities are available and most of them provided by NGOs or private persons.

Women's access to employment market in Sierra Leone has been very low, which has long affected gender equality in such market. There have been also no policies and legal frameworks to overcome the obstacles of women in the employment sector as well as protect them against discrimination in employment. However the Ministry of Labour is working on a policy on employment which when completed and enforced will make women have access to non-traditional employment in the country. There are at the moment no temporary special measures in this direction.

**20. Given the high percentage of Sierra Leonean women working in the informal sector and their precarious position, please indicate what outreach programmes are in place to inform low-**

**income and poor women, particularly in rural areas, of opportunities to gain access to markets and technology.**

It is a reality that there is high percentage of Sierra Leonean women working in the informal sector, however some outreach programmes are put in place for such women particularly in the rural areas to avail them of opportunities to gain access to markets and technology. These include but not limited to the following:

Within the mandate of the Women's Unit in the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, women benefit from all facilities available to farmers including extension, training and input support etc.

Good percentages of women are in the Farmers Field Schools, Agricultural Business Unit and other extension approaches as small scale farmers.

## **Article 12**

**21. Sierra Leone has one of the highest maternal and infant mortality rates in the world. Please provide information on what measures are in place or planned to reduce maternal and infant mortality, including details of the safe motherhood programme to reduce mortality and morbidity (para. 19. 6. 1). Please also indicate what special measures are envisaged for women in the rural areas and any progress achieved towards meeting targets.**

Sierra Leone has one of the highest estimated rates for Infant and Maternal Mortality world-wide. Recent steps taken to address this situation include the following:

Conduction of situational Analysis to provide information for developing policies, strategies and plans (done);

Elaboration of reproductive Health and Child survival Policies to provide the framework for formulating strategies and plans (almost completed);

Development of a strategic plan for child survival and maternal reduction (in progress);

Mobilization of resources to support efforts to reduce Infant and Maternal Mortality Rates, UNICEF, WHO, UNFPA have pledged continuation of support; World Bank has approved thirty million United States Dollars (USD 30M) for a four year Accelerated Child Survival and Maternal Mortality Reduction Project; DFID has pledged fifty million pounds sterling (BP50M) for a ten year strategic plan for sexual and reproductive health; and

Many Primary Health Care activities have been devolved to the District Councils, and are therefore more focused on the needs of women and children in the rural areas.

**22. Please provide details of the steps that Government is taking or planning to eradicate the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM). The response should also discuss whether the Government intends to investigate the link between vesicovaginal fistula and FGM and educate and raise awareness amongst the general public regarding the effects of FGM.**

The Ministry of Health and Sanitation is leading the campaign to raise awareness about the negative side-effects of female genital mutilation (FGM), including vesicovaginal fistula.

The Deputy Minister of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs attended a conference on FGM in Cairo, Egypt in 2003 and she presented the outcome of the conference to Cabinet. Cabinet advised that the Ministry collaborate with Civil Society Organizations in addressing the issue of FGM. In 2004 and 2005 International Women's Day celebrations in Makeni (North) and Kenema (East) respectively the Ministry engaged the Societal Heads on issues related to FGM.

With one voice the women sang "what would we and our family eat, wear and educate our children?". By implication they were sending a signal that their livelihood depended on FGM and therefore called for an alternative source of income. The Ministry and few women's groups are on the verge of signing a memorandum of understanding in working towards addressing the issues of livelihood for the Societal Heads. However, sensitization on the health implications of FGM will form the bed rock of the Ministry and its partners' advocacy activities.

## Article 14

**23. The report paints a bleak picture of the position of rural women in Sierra Leone. Yet the vast majority of women live in rural areas (para. 21. 1). Please provide information on the Government's rural development strategy, including whether it incorporates a gender perspective and includes targeted support for rural women in sectors such as health, education, employment, economic development, access to credit and participation in decision-making including at the local level**

The Government of Sierra Leone, in collaboration with Donors, Civil Society Groups and Traditional Authorities formulated a National Policy and Action Plan on Integrated Rural Development in 1994. The policy has been in operation since then and it incorporates gender perspectives which have significant bearing on rural women in particular. The priorities of the policy framework include:- increase in participation of rural women in decision-making both at home and in the community, enhance participation of girl-child in educational programmes, articulates targeted support for rural women and girl child in health, education, economic development, access to credit facilities, employment etc. Tremendous efforts have been made by government and NGOs to articulate these priorities into operational activities. In accordance with a new approach for defining the role of women in rural development, a paradigm shift has been introduced – the emphasis on providing opportunities to rural women merely for deriving benefits had shifted to the assertion for promoting their partnership in the development process. This is evidenced by the fact that women have been considered as partners in the administration of the 149 chiefdoms either as Paramount Chiefs or chiefdom Councillors (an electoral college for the election of Paramount chiefs). There are currently 11 women Paramount Chiefs mainly in the South and East of the country and a host of chiefdom councilors nation-wide. Government policy is geared towards non-gender discrimination in the election of Paramount Chiefs and Sub- Chiefs country-wide. However, the Northern Province and part of the Eastern Province still contravene this policy as traditional and cultural practices militate against women vying Paramount Chieftaincy elections.

The Local Government Reform and Decentralization Programme which is geared towards empowering local communities to respond to the development needs of their locality and to take ownership of planning and implementation of projects/programmes that will alleviate poverty has

been considered one of the major strategies geared towards mainstreaming gender into governance at all levels. The Local Government Act 2004 created provision for a democratically elected Local Councils and a Ward Committee in each Ward. The membership of Ward Committee comprised equal numbers of both sexes (at least 5 women out of ten other members) and substantial members of the rural women are members of the Local Councils. This is to create provision for women at the local level to display their potentials in the decision making process in their various local communities. This was highlighted in the report as an affirmative action.

In the health sector, government in collaboration with NGOs has constructed health centres and health posts in the 149 chiefdoms and many villages. The goal is to bring closer the health delivery services to the rural communities, improve the quality of reproductive health for all Sierra Leoneans, reduce maternal and neonatal morbidity and mortality rates and to reduce the level of unwanted pregnancies in all women of reproductive age. Some cost recovery drugs have been provided, particularly for vulnerable rural women and children. Traditional Birth Attendants have been trained at chiefdom level to assist rural women in child birth. Government in collaboration with NGOs and Civil Society continue to carry out massive sensitization campaign on Family Planning and HIV/AIDS. In view of providing effective and efficient health care services to the rural communities, government has decentralized Primary Health Care to the Local Councils to enhance easy access to health services at the rural level. Women and children are specifically targeted for immunization programmes. Additionally, NGOs working on women's rights provide training on health matters.

In the rural areas even though statistics are not available, it is still evident that there is high incidence of early marriage and increased number of teenage pregnancies, high incidence of rape, and high drop out rates of the girl child from school.

There are also issues of high interest rate on credit from local money lenders, lack of access to improved agricultural tools/ inputs, lack of access to formal credit, very little direct access to land, limited extension service in rural areas, Poor storage and processing facilities, low number of female extension workers, and poor managed cooperatives. These issues are made worse for women due to the gender insensitive laws for women on land inheritance and high male influence on disbursement of credit to rural women. Often micro credit excludes women in agriculture. Majority of rural women are also excluded from NASSIT. There is no access to electricity and pure water supply, which leaves women economically poor and vulnerable to more health hazards.

On another note however, the reestablishment of the local councils provides an opportunity to improve the lives of rural women. Even though the decision making power of women, for example at the Ward Levels is still of questionable, efforts have been made to train them and build their confidence so that they can actively participate in decision making affecting the lives of their womenfolk. For this, a Gender Specialist has been recruited at the Decentralization Secretariat to ensure she engenders policy related documents concerned with rural development. The reviews of these documents is in progress and a gender mainstreaming strategy has been drafted so far to guide the process of women's active involvement and benefit particularly in the rural areas.

Much priority has been paid to the education sector creating positive impact on rural women and rural girl child. Government's education strategy has created provision for increase in the enrolment of the girl child, facilitated by the construction of more schools in the rural communities, payment of public examination fees for the children qualified for the National Primary School Examination, the Basic

Education Certificate Examination and the West African Senior School Certificate Examination. This strategy also includes provision of teaching and learning materials including school furniture, books, uniforms etc.

The policy has created provision for generating alternative employment opportunities in the rural areas. These include: agro-based industries, fish processing, petty trading, cottage industries, handicrafts, rural cooperatives etc. significant assistance is been rendered by the government and NGOs to Community Based Organizations engaged in the backyard and vegetable gardening in Kabala in the Koinadugu District and Lungi in the Port Loko District. Micro-finance institutions such National Commission for Social Action and the Association for Rural Development have assisted rural women through the provision of micro credit facilities to enhance their self-reliance. It is hoped that women in farming will soon benefit as those in petty trading.

Women in Agriculture and Nutrition unit set up in the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security to address issues of women to ensure household food and nutrition security.

## **Article 15 and 16**

**24. The report indicates that Sierra Leone has three different forms of marriages based on civil, religious, and customary laws, with discrimination against women persisting in many areas including in administration of property and parental consent to marry. Please provide information on what Government is doing to ensure that the international legal obligations it has entered into are adhered to in its entire territory.**

Sierra Leone has four different types of marriage. These are:

- a) Christian Marriage, found in cap. 95 of the Laws of Sierra Leone, 1960
- b) Muslim Marriage, found in cap. 96 of the Laws of Sierra Leone 1960
- c) Civil Marriage, found in cap. 97 of the Laws of Sierra Leone, 1960 and
- d) Customary Marriage.

The fact remains however that these laws certainly discriminate against women in many areas, including the administration of property for instance under the general law cap. 45 “Devolution of Estates” on intestacy, a husband’s estate is given to the widow. Section 9 of the Muslim Marriage Act, states that the estate of any Muslim who dies without writing a Will shall be distributed in accordance with Muslim law. In terms of this law, the person who shall be entitled to take out letters to distribute the property are limited to the eldest son of the person who died without preparing a will, if of full age according to Muslim law; the eldest brother, if full age according to Muslim; and the official administrator. This section clearly discriminates against women as it is only male relatives that may distribute the property.

Under the Christian Marriage Act, section 7 provides that if a party to the marriage is 21 the consent of the father must be obtained and only if the father is dead can the consent of the mother be obtained. This section does not afford women and men the same level of authority or guardianship over their children.



The Civil Marriage Act has words that are not in favour of women: section 14 of the Act which refers to the partnership of husband and wife as “man and wife” should be amended to read “husband and wife”, “man and woman”.

Customary Law discriminates against women in different ways. For instance, with regards to marriages under customary law there is no limit to the number of wives a man may marry and there is no fixed minimum age for marriage. Also the husband gives his approval for the marriage whereas in a number of cases, the woman’s consent is not necessary.

As to the question of what government is doing to ensure that its International legal obligations are adhered to in its entire territory, the answer is obvious: Government is aware that many of its laws are old and therefore need reform to catch up with modern trends especially as it is a signatory to many international Conventions including CEDAW.

It is as a result of this necessity that government revived the Law Reform Commission in 2003 to reform all the laws of Sierra Leone including Customary Law and taking into consideration the international Conventions/treaties. To this effect the Law Reform Commission is in the process of reforming almost all discriminatory laws against women. The only thing left now is the political will to see these laws come into effect.

**25. The report provides no information on the existence of polygamy. Please provide this information, including statistics, and state what plans the Government has to review its laws and eradicate the practice of polygamy which is in contravention of the Convention.**

No attempt has ever been made to generate data on the percentage of polygamy in Sierra Leone much as it is predominant especially in the rural areas. The draft bill on registration of customary marriage and divorce when passed into law will provide a first step of minimizing polygamy. This bill gives women the opportunity to sign an agreement on what type of marriage the couples want before marriage.

#### **Optional Protocol and amendment to article 20.1**

**26. Sierra Leone signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women on 8 September 2000. Please indicate any progress towards its ratification. Please indicate what progress has been made towards acceptance of the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1 of the Convention.**

Sierra Leone has indeed signed the optional protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women since 2000. However, the optional protocol has not been popularized nation-wide before it gets to Parliament for ratification. The Ministry is thinking of sensitizing the public on the optional protocol after the formal presentation and consideration of Sierra Leone’s combined initial -5<sup>th</sup> periodic report on CEDAW.