



Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

Concluding observations on the combined seventh and eighth periodic reports of Liberia*

1. The Committee considered the combined seventh and eighth periodic reports of Liberia ([CEDAW/C/LBR/7-8](#)) at its 1339th and 1340th meetings, on 29 October 2015 (see [CEDAW/C/SR.1339](#) and 1340). The Committee's list of issues and questions is contained in [CEDAW/C/LBR/Q/7-8](#) and the responses of Liberia are contained in [CEDAW/C/LBR/Q/7-8/Add.1](#).

A. Introduction

2. The Committee appreciates the submission by the State party of its combined seventh and eighth periodic reports. It also appreciates the State party's written replies to the list of issues and questions raised by the pre-sessional working group and welcomes the oral presentation by the delegation and the further clarifications provided in response to the questions posed orally by the Committee during the dialogue.

3. The Committee commends the State party on its delegation, which was headed by the Minister of Gender and Development, Children and Social Protection, Julia Duncan-Cassell, and included the Deputy Minister of Gender and Development, Children and Social Protection and representatives of the Permanent Mission of Liberia to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva.

B. Positive aspects

4. The Committee welcomes the progress achieved since the consideration in 2009 of the combined initial to sixth periodic reports of Liberia ([CEDAW/C/LBR/6](#)), in particular the adoption of the following legislation:

(a) Education Reform Act of 2011, which seeks to advance girls' education at all levels;

* Adopted by the Committee at its sixty-second session (26 October-20 November 2015).



(b) Children's Law of 2011, which partly addresses female genital mutilation;

(c) Law Reform Commission Act of 2011, which provides for the revision of laws including those with a bearing on women's rights.

5. The Committee welcomes the State party's efforts to improve its institutional and policy framework aimed at accelerating the elimination of discrimination against women and promoting gender equality, such as the adoption or establishment of the following:

(a) National action plan on trafficking, launched in 2014;

(b) National health and social welfare plan, covering the period 2011-2021, pertaining to health care at all levels;

(c) Criminal Court "E" in Montserrado County mandated to hear cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence;

(d) Sexual and gender-based violence crimes unit within the prosecution system;

(e) Women and children protection unit in the police service, in 2009.

6. The Committee welcomes the State party's accession to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in 2012.

C. Factors and difficulties preventing the effective implementation of the Convention

7. The Committee notes that the State party's commendable efforts in the brief period since the end of the armed conflict have largely been reversed by the devastating impact of the Ebola virus disease pandemic and that the numerous economic and health problems in the post-Ebola recovery period pose serious challenges to the implementation of the Convention. The Committee notes the various recovery plans in place, including the Liberia Economic Stabilization and Recovery Plan, which are aimed at stimulating economic growth. The Committee considers that these efforts require the full implementation of the Convention in order to ensure respect for and enjoyment of women's rights. The Committee therefore urges the State party to implement the recommendations contained in the present concluding observations as a matter of high priority, including by seeking international assistance and cooperation, if appropriate, for their implementation. In this regard, the Committee urges the State party to consider adopting a four-year national action plan on the implementation of the present recommendations, which will provide the State party with a road map for better implementation and monitoring. Furthermore, in implementing the present concluding observations, the Committee also calls upon the State party to include women in the development and implementation of disaster risk reduction strategies and programmes.

D. Principal areas of concern and recommendations

Parliament

8. **The Committee stresses the crucial role of the legislative power in ensuring the full implementation of the Convention (see the statement by the Committee on its relationship with parliamentarians, adopted at the forty-fifth session, in 2010). It invites the parliament, in line with its mandate, to take the necessary steps regarding the implementation of the present concluding observations between now and the next reporting period under the Convention.**

General context

9. The Committee recalls the numerous problems that the State party has faced following the armed conflict and recently as a consequence of the Ebola outbreak. It recognizes and fully supports the efforts by the State party towards post-conflict reconstruction and to combat the outbreak and reduce its impact on the lives and health of the population, in particular women caregivers, and on the economy, State finances, food security and the health and employment sectors, as well as on the ability of the State party to respect, protect and promote women's rights. The Committee welcomes the information regarding the State party's efforts to refocus its policies and programmes to address the impact of Ebola. It is concerned, however, at the lack of information on the integration of comprehensive gender-sensitive programming into recovery and economic stimulus plans, considering the disproportionately adverse impact that the Ebola outbreak has had on the health, education and employment of women and girls.

10. **The Committee supports the efforts of the State party and encourages it:**

(a) **To mainstream gender perspectives in all programmes and activities earmarked as priority areas in the Ebola recovery and economic stimulus plans;**

(b) **To take specific measures, including educational and awareness-raising programmes, aimed at addressing the stigmatization of women and girls who survived Ebola and those who provided care to patients;**

(c) **To seek international assistance and cooperation to overcome the disruption of services and programmes in many areas following the Ebola outbreak, in particular by strengthening the health, education and employment sectors and by improving food security and social protection programmes.**

Definition of discrimination and legislative framework

11. The Committee notes that articles 8 and 11 of the Constitution provide for fundamental rights and freedoms and prohibit discrimination on specific grounds, including sex and ethnic background. The Committee is concerned, however, that the prohibition of discrimination in the Constitution does not encompass other prohibited grounds of discrimination, such as marital status, and that the definition is not fully in line with article 1 of the Convention. It notes the efforts by the State party to improve women's rights by adopting appropriate legislation. The Committee notes with concern, however, that several bills with an important bearing on women's rights, such as those on reproductive health, domestic violence and fairness, are still pending.

12. The Committee reiterates its previous concluding observations (CEDAW/C/LBR/CO/6, para. 13) and calls upon the State party to adopt a comprehensive legal definition of discrimination against women in line with article 1 of the Convention, covering all prohibited grounds of discrimination, direct and indirect discrimination in the public and private spheres, and intersecting forms of discrimination based on sex and other grounds. It also urges the State party to expedite the adoption of pending laws, such as those on reproductive health, domestic violence and fairness, and ensure that they fully comply with the Convention.

Legal status of the Convention and harmonization of laws

13. The Committee takes note of the efforts by the State party to incorporate most of the provisions of the Convention into its national legal order and to revise existing legislation, including in the context of the continuing constitutional review process. The Committee notes that, in 2011, the State party adopted an act establishing a law reform commission with a mandate to review laws. The Committee also notes the pluralistic legal system in the State party, where customary and statutory law are applicable side by side, and is concerned that certain elements of customary law are in conflict with statutory law and do not comply with the Convention. The Committee further notes that the State party has yet to ratify the Optional Protocol.

14. The Committee calls upon the State party:

(a) **To expedite the process of harmonizing customary and statutory law, in line with the provisions of the Convention and the Committee's general recommendation No. 29 (2013) on article 16 of the Convention (economic consequences of marriage, family relations and their dissolution) (paras. 12-15), with a view to eliminating existing conflicts, which have a negative impact on the full enjoyment of rights by women and girls, and ensure that women are part of this process, through traditional women's councils or in any other appropriate way;**

(b) **To provide all necessary safeguards, including legislative measures, against all violations of women's human rights by traditional courts, in line with the Committee's general recommendation No. 33 (2015) on women's access to justice;**

(c) **To ensure that the continuing constitutional review process is used to address issues of concern, including the applicability of parallel quasi-judicial mechanisms established under customary law, such as traditional courts, in order to facilitate access to justice by women and girls;**

(d) **To accelerate the process of incorporating all the provisions of the Convention into its national legal order and to consider ratifying the Optional Protocol.**

Access to justice and legal complaint mechanisms

15. The Committee notes the State party's efforts to provide legal aid services to women and girls through the support of the Association of Female Lawyers and the National Bar Association and its plan to decentralize the court system to facilitate accessibility. The Committee is, however, concerned that there is no legal aid scheme in the State party and that women's access to justice is often impeded by the

geographical inaccessibility of courts and alleged corruption within the judiciary. The Committee is also concerned about the absence of effective mechanisms to guarantee accountability and ensure the protection of women's rights, together with the fact that the Independent National Commission on Human Rights lacks adequate human and financial resources and reportedly does not comply with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles).

16. Recalling its general recommendation No. 33, the Committee urges the State party:

(a) To establish a comprehensive legal aid scheme by drafting an appropriate legal aid bill to facilitate women's access to justice;

(b) To ensure that the legal aid bill provides legal assistance to women and girls in both criminal and civil matters;

(c) To ensure that women, especially those belonging to disadvantaged and marginalized groups, such as women with disabilities, have effective access to justice throughout the 15 counties of the State party;

(d) To investigate allegations of corruption within the judiciary and prosecute and punish corrupt judicial officials who obstruct justice, in order to restore public trust in the judicial system;

(e) To consider establishing an independent national inquiry commission to receive and investigate complaints against judges and magistrates;

(f) To provide adequate human and financial resources to the Independent National Commission on Human Rights and ensure that it fully complies with the Paris Principles and that its mandate includes issues relating to gender equality and the protection of women's rights.

National machinery for the advancement of women

17. The Committee notes that the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, which acts as the national machinery for the advancement of women, now has an expanded mandate that includes children and social protection. While noting that the financial resources of the State party in the post-Ebola period are overstretched, the Committee is concerned that the expanded mandate of the Ministry and the lack of adequate human and financial resources may adversely affect the promotion and protection of women's rights in the State party. While welcoming the establishment of gender focal points in line ministries and efforts to ensure systematic gender-mainstreaming and gender budgeting, the Committee notes that the impact assessment of the implementation of the national gender policy of 2009 was postponed owing to the Ebola outbreak.

18. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Provide adequate human and financial resources to the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection to enable it to effectively undertake its activities as the national machinery for the advancement of women, including by seeking international assistance and cooperation, if appropriate;

(b) **Continue to provide support to the gender focal points in line ministries to ensure the effectiveness of their gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting activities;**

(c) **Continue to provide training to technical staff in charge of budgeting at all levels on gender-responsive budgeting;**

(d) **Assess the national gender policy of 2009 in order to understand the impact and effectiveness of policies and programmes aimed at mainstreaming gender equality and enhancing women's enjoyment of their human rights. The Committee encourages the State party to seek technical assistance in this regard from relevant United Nations agencies and other partners.**

Temporary special measures

19. The Committee notes the State party's efforts to ensure de facto equality of women and men by, among other things, amending the Elections Law, which now provides that lists of candidates fielded by political parties should contain a minimum of 30 per cent of each gender. The Committee is, however, concerned that the legislation does not provide for sanctions to enforce the quota. The Committee is also concerned at the inadequate use of temporary special measures in other areas covered by the Convention, such as education and employment, to accelerate the achievement of substantive equality between women and men in all areas in which women are underrepresented or disadvantaged.

20. The Committee calls upon the State party to adopt and fully enforce legislation on temporary special measures to increase the participation of women in political and public life, education and employment, in line with article 4 (1) of the Convention and the Committee's general recommendation No. 25 (2004) on temporary special measures, as a necessary strategy to accelerate the achievement of substantive equality between women and men in all areas covered by the Convention in which women are underrepresented or disadvantaged.

Stereotypes and harmful practices

21. The Committee notes the State party's efforts to address stereotypes and harmful practices by, among other things, issuing circulars banning certain practices that perpetuate discriminatory gender stereotypes. The Committee is, however, concerned at the persistence of adverse cultural practices and traditions, as well as patriarchal attitudes and deep-rooted stereotypes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men in society and in the family, which are perpetuated by secret tribal societies such as the Sande and the Poro. The Committee notes that such stereotypes contribute to the increase in child and/or forced marriage, the abduction of girls and polygamy, and hence to the disadvantaged and unequal status of women in society. The Committee is particularly concerned that the secret tribal societies continue to perpetrate harmful practices, including female genital mutilation, through their initiation rites, and that practices such as trial by ordeal for women and girls accused of witchcraft, as well as ritual murders, are rife.

22. Recalling joint general recommendation No. 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women/general comment No. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2014) on harmful practices, the Committee urges the State party:

(a) **To step up media and other awareness-raising efforts to raise public awareness about discriminatory gender stereotypes that persist at all levels of society, with a view to eliminating them;**

(b) **To expand public education programmes on the negative impact of such stereotypes on women's enjoyment of their rights, in particular in rural areas, targeting traditional leaders, who are the custodians of customary values in the State party;**

(c) **To take effective legal measures to prohibit and eliminate child and/or forced marriages and to discourage and prohibit polygamy;**

(d) **To regularly monitor and review the measures taken to eliminate discriminatory gender stereotypes and harmful practices, including trial by ordeal of women and girls accused of witchcraft, and engage traditional leaders and the Sande and Poro secret societies with a view to their abandoning all harmful practices, including female genital mutilation.**

Female genital mutilation

23. The Committee recalls its previous concluding observations ([CEDAW/C/LBR/6](#), para. 20) and reiterates its concern that, notwithstanding the State party's efforts to combat female genital mutilation, such as the adoption of the Rape Law and the Children's Law, this harmful practice continues to be carried out on a large scale by traditional and community leaders and zoes, in particular among tribal societies such as the Sande. The Committee notes with concern that the domestic violence bill introduces the element of consent for a harmful practice that constitutes a grave violation of the bodily integrity and health of women. The Committee is also concerned at reports of abduction and forcible subjection to female genital mutilation of individuals who are not members of the Sande secret society, in particular those residing in counties where it is not practised.

24. **The Committee reiterates its previous concluding observations ([CEDAW/C/LBR/6](#), para. 20) and urges the State party:**

(a) **To criminalize female genital mutilation in the Children's Law and introduce sanctions commensurate with the crime to ensure that the practice is prohibited in all circumstances and will be eradicated;**

(b) **To remove the element of consent from the domestic violence bill and ensure that the bill is used to prosecute and adequately punish perpetrators of female genital mutilation;**

(c) **To step up efforts to raise awareness among religious groups and leaders and the general public about the fact that all forms of female genital mutilation, including female circumcision, are in violation of the human rights of women and about the criminal nature and harmful effects of the practice;**

(d) **To consider seeking international assistance and cooperation in order to develop specific entrepreneurial programmes targeting zoes and traditional practitioners of female genital mutilation to help them to find alternative livelihoods.**

Sexual and gender-based violence

25. The Committee commends the State party for its efforts to combat violence against women by, among other things, drafting a domestic violence bill and establishing a sexual and gender-based violence crimes unit and Criminal Court “E”, which specializes in the prosecution of sexual and gender-based violence cases. The Committee notes the State party’s efforts to decentralize Criminal Court “E” and to replicate it in other counties. The Committee also notes the State party’s efforts to establish one-stop centres for victims of sexual and gender-based violence in 7 of the 15 counties. It remains concerned, however, at:

(a) The high levels of sexual and gender-based violence, especially domestic violence, and the increased number of ritual murders, especially during pre-election periods;

(b) The low conviction rates for acts of sexual and gender-based violence and the fact that rape remains one of the most frequently reported crimes;

(c) The inadequate number of shelters and the inaccessibility of existing shelters for most women and girls in most counties.

26. Recalling its general recommendation No. 19 (1992) on violence against women, the Committee urges the State party:

(a) **To step up its efforts to encourage the reporting of violence against women and investigate and prosecute cases of violence against women by ensuring the expansion of Criminal Court “E” to all counties of the State in order to curb the prevailing culture of impunity, in particular for rape and other forms of sexual violence;**

(b) **To develop a comprehensive prevention strategy on sexual and gender-based violence and establish a victim and witness protection programme for victims of and witnesses to acts of sexual and gender-based violence;**

(c) **To allocate sufficient resources to integrate sexual and gender-based violence into health sector strategic plans and train health-care providers in the provision of comprehensive clinical care for victims;**

(d) **To ensure the speedy adoption of the domestic violence bill and that it comprehensively covers all forms of violence against women, in particular marital rape and sexual violence;**

(e) **To develop a system for regular collection of statistical data on cases of all forms of violence against women, including domestic violence, abductions and ritual killings, which should be disaggregated by age, type of offence and relationship between the victim and the perpetrator;**

(f) **To establish shelters in all counties in order to ensure accessibility for women and girls who are victims of violence;**

(g) **To renew the national sexual and gender-based violence action plan, which expires at the end of 2015, and establish a national violence coordination mechanism with a mandate to address all forms of violence against women and girls and coordinate national efforts towards the prevention and elimination of violence against women.**

Trafficking and exploitation of prostitution

27. The Committee welcomes the launch of a national action plan to combat trafficking in 2014 and the establishment of a national anti-trafficking task force. The Committee notes that the State party remains a source and destination country for trafficking and that the State party is currently investigating a case involving 14 Liberian girls who were trafficked to Lebanon. The Committee is, however, concerned at the lack of information on the number of cases that have been prosecuted and in which perpetrators were convicted and that a trust fund on trafficking and shelters for victims are yet to be established by the State party. It is also concerned at the lack of data on the extent of trafficking in women and girls in the post-Ebola period, considering their increased vulnerability owing to poverty.

28. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) **Step up efforts to address the root causes of trafficking in women and girls and to ensure the rehabilitation and social integration of victims, including by providing them with access to shelters, legal, medical and psychosocial assistance and alternative income-generating opportunities;**

(b) **Seek international assistance and cooperation, if appropriate, in order to undertake a comprehensive study with a view to collecting data on the extent and forms of trafficking in women and girls, especially in the post-Ebola period, which should be disaggregated by age and region or country of origin;**

(c) **Step up awareness-raising efforts aimed at promoting the reporting of trafficking crimes and the early detection and referral of women and girls who are victims of trafficking;**

(d) **Step up efforts aimed at bilateral, regional and international cooperation to prevent trafficking, including by exchanging information and harmonizing legal procedures to prosecute traffickers, in particular with countries in the Economic Community of West African States;**

(e) **Provide data in its next periodic report on existing programmes aimed at addressing the exploitation of prostitution, including the demand side, and on exit programmes for women who wish to leave prostitution.**

Participation in political and public life

29. The Committee notes the progress made in improving the representation of women in leadership positions in the State party, such as the amendment to section 4 (5) of the Elections Law to provide for the inclusion of gender equity in the nomination of candidates and the election and re-election for a second term of a female President. It remains concerned, however, that women are still underrepresented at decision-making levels, including in the parliament, in senior leadership positions in the civil service and at the ministerial level.

30. The Committee recommends that the State party introduce measures, including temporary special measures, in line with article 4 (1) of the Convention and the Committee's general recommendations No. 25 and No. 23 (1997) on political and public life, such as a gender parity system for appointments and the accelerated recruitment of women to senior public positions, in order to accelerate the full and equal participation of women in elected and appointed bodies, including in the parliament, in senior leadership positions in the civil

service and at the ministerial level. Furthermore, the State party should consider introducing provisions on temporary special measures to achieve substantive equality of women and men in political and public life in the Constitution during the continuing constitutional review process.

Women and peace and security

31. The Committee notes that the national action plan on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) was recently evaluated and that the State party is reviewing recommendations in order to adopt a new national action plan. It notes, however, that, the existence of the national action plan notwithstanding, the participation of women in the security sector remains limited.

32. The Committee urges the State party to give due consideration to the Committee's general recommendation No. 30 (2013) on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations by ensuring that the national action plan on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) is regularly reviewed in order to address all areas of concern and ensure durable peace. The Committee also recommends that the State party fully involve women at all stages of the post-conflict reconstruction process, including in decision-making, in line with resolution 1325 (2000) and take into consideration the full spectrum of the Council's women and peace and security agenda, as reflected in Council resolutions 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013) and 2122 (2013), and in the Committee's general recommendation No. 30.

Nationality

33. The Committee notes the State party's efforts to address challenges relating to its nationality legislation. It is concerned, however, that the Aliens and Nationality Law of 1973, which contradicts article 28 of the Constitution, remains in force and continues to be applied, thereby preventing women from transmitting Liberian nationality to their children if they are born outside the country. The Committee notes that this is discriminatory because it is not applicable to Liberian men whose children are born outside the State party and entails the risk of statelessness for the children of Liberian mothers.

34. The Committee recommends that the State party repeal the discriminatory provisions of its Aliens and Nationality Law of 1973, in order to bring it into line with the Constitution and the Convention, to ensure that, in accordance with article 9 of the Convention, Liberian women who give birth to children outside the country can transmit their nationality to their children on an equal basis with Liberian men whose children are born outside the country. Furthermore, the Committee recommends that the State party ensure that children born to Liberian women married to non-Liberian men are not rendered stateless and have access to education, health care and other basic services equal to that of other children.

Education

35. The Committee welcomes the adoption of the Education Reform Act in 2011 and the various policies on girls' education, such as the sexual harassment policy, as well as the revision of the policy on girls' education in 2013. The Committee also commends the State party for its accelerated learning programme and the provision of

free tertiary education for students specializing in education, which is partly aimed at encouraging women and girls to pursue a career in education. The Committee is, however, concerned at the low enrolment and retention rates of girls in school and at gender disparities in gaining access to scholarships. The Committee is also concerned about:

- (a) The increasing number of girls who drop out of school, mainly owing to teenage pregnancy and recruitment into the Sande secret society;
- (b) The widespread abuse of and sexual violence against girls at school by teachers, and when travelling to and from school;
- (c) The lack of adequate programmes focusing on the re-entry of girls into the education system after giving birth;
- (d) The lack of clarity with regard to specific programmes aimed at addressing the impact of the Ebola outbreak on girls' education, in particular with regard to traditional attitudes and negative stereotypes about girls' education, which have been exacerbated by the outbreak;
- (e) The limited provision of age-appropriate sexual and reproductive health and rights education in schools.

36. The Committee reiterates its previous concluding observations (CEDAW/C/LBR/CO/6, para. 33) and recommends that the State party:

- (a) Introduce programmes that encourage the enrolment and retention of girls in school by, among other things, introducing monitoring mechanisms to address the recruitment of girls into the Sande secret society during the school year and by removing indirect costs associated with primary education as well as to protect disadvantaged girls, including girls with disabilities;**
- (b) Adopt measures to prevent and eliminate abuse of and sexual violence against girls at school, and ensure that perpetrators are adequately punished;**
- (c) Step up existing efforts to encourage girls and young women to choose non-traditional fields of study and professions, such as computer studies and technology, including through the adoption of temporary special measures, and implement programmes aimed at counselling boys and girls on the full range of educational choices, to encourage them to choose non-traditional fields of study;**
- (d) Reduce the number of girls dropping out of school by promoting re-entry into school for girls after they have given birth;**
- (e) Take steps to overcome traditional attitudes and stereotypes that constitute obstacles to the education of girls and women, which have been exacerbated by the Ebola outbreak and increased the pressure on girls to fall back into domestic roles;**
- (f) Integrate age-appropriate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights into school curricula, including comprehensive sex education for adolescent girls and boys covering responsible sexual behaviours, focused on preventing early pregnancy.**

Employment

37. The Committee welcomes the recent adoption of the Decent Work Act and efforts to improve the participation of women in the labour market by promoting the principle of equal pay for work of equal value. The Committee notes that the employment sector was heavily affected by the Ebola outbreak and that many women in both the formal and informal sectors of employment have lost economic opportunities and earnings as a result of the pandemic. The Committee notes that the State party's efforts to recover from Ebola are also focused on revamping the employment sector, in which women continue to experience occupational segregation and are concentrated in low-paid jobs in the informal economy.

38. **The Committee calls upon the State party:**

(a) **To ensure that Ebola recovery plans specifically address the persisting gender inequalities in the employment sector, such as occupational segregation and gender wage gaps in the informal sector, where women are concentrated;**

(b) **To step up efforts to promote the entry of women into the formal economy through, among other things, the provision of vocational and technical training;**

(c) **To conduct regular labour inspections and enforce compliance with labour laws by private employers, in particular with regard to domestic work.**

Health

39. The Committee commends the State party's efforts to contain the Ebola outbreak and the plans in place to restore the health system, which currently faces serious financial and human resource problems. The Committee notes that the State party is recruiting and deploying 4,000 health workers, including highly trained midwives, throughout the country, especially in rural areas. The Committee notes that the Ebola outbreak had a severe impact on women's lives and health owing to the fact that their roles as caregivers put them at greater risk of infection. The Committee notes with concern:

(a) That the impact of the Ebola pandemic further hampered the State party's efforts to combat the high maternal and infant mortality in the State party, owing to severe disruptions to midwifery and other services;

(b) That no information is available on the specific programmes to provide post-Ebola care to women and girls who survived the pandemic;

(c) That there are high rates of teenage pregnancy and a lack of data on access to sexual and reproductive health-care services in the post-Ebola period;

(d) That unsafe abortions are prevalent irrespective of efforts by the State party to provide access to abortion services in specific cases, such as where there is a substantial risk that continuation of the pregnancy would gravely impair the physical or mental health of the mother, or that the child would be born with severe fetal impairment, or where the pregnancy resulted from rape, incest or other felonious intercourse;

(e) That the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV remains a challenge in the State party.

40. **In line with its general recommendation No. 24 (1999) on article 12 of the Convention (women and health), the Committee calls upon the State party:**

(a) **To ensure that women fully participate in the implementation of Ebola recovery plans aimed at restoring and reinforcing the health system of the State party, taking into account the roles of women in caring for Ebola patients during the outbreak;**

(b) **To increase access for women and girls to basic health-care services, including post-Ebola health care for women and girls who survived the pandemic, in particular in rural areas, and address the barriers to women's access to health-care services, including sociocultural barriers;**

(c) **To strengthen the training of midwives and nurses to improve the access of women and girls to adequate health care;**

(d) **To strengthen the programme for the reduction of maternal, newborn and child mortality and ensure the full implementation of the programme for free obstetric care, with wider geographical coverage, by providing adequate financial and human resources;**

(e) **To promote comprehensive, rights-based and age-appropriate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, in particular by undertaking large-scale campaigns to raise awareness about available contraceptive methods, and to increase access to comprehensive, safe and affordable modern contraceptives and to information on family planning for women and men of all ages throughout the State party;**

(f) **To expand programmes and services relating to the provision of abortion and post-abortion care and services to ensure accessibility;**

(g) **To step up the implementation of strategies to combat HIV/AIDS, in particular preventive strategies, and continue the provision of free antiretroviral treatment to all women and men living with HIV, including pregnant women, in order to prevent mother-to-child transmission.**

Rural women

41. The Committee commends the State party's efforts to improve the livelihoods of rural women, such as the adoption of a national rural women programme, which is aimed at, among other things, ensuring that rural women are included in decision-making processes in their communities. The Committee also notes that the State party has undertaken several programmes to improve entrepreneurship, such as a social cash transfer programme and the provision of microfinance loans. The Committee is, however, concerned that women continue to face obstacles that prevent their full participation in decision-making processes, especially in local governance. The Committee is also concerned about women's limited access to infrastructure and social services such as health care, sanitation, potable water and electricity. The Committee is further concerned at the lack of information on the specific procedures that are followed in the granting of land concessions for economic activities on land owned or used by women and at reports of exploitation by private companies.

42. **The Committee calls upon the State party:**

(a) **To facilitate the full participation of women in rural development programmes and policies and decision-making, especially in the Traditional National Council and women's councils and integrate gender perspectives into the Local Governance Act, which is currently under review;**

(b) **To continue to expand women's access to microfinance and microcredit at low interest rates in order to enable them to engage in income-generating activities and to start their own businesses;**

(c) **To seek international assistance and cooperation, where appropriate, which should focus on improving infrastructure in rural areas and the provision of services such as health care, sanitation, potable water and electricity;**

(d) **To ensure effective consultations with affected communities before granting concessions to companies or third parties for the economic exploitation of land and territories traditionally occupied or used by women, and adhere to the obligation of obtaining the free, prior and informed consent of affected women;**

(e) **To step up efforts to collect disaggregated data on the status of older women, women with disabilities and widows and combat the intersecting forms of discrimination that they encounter in society.**

Marriage and family relations

43. The Committee notes the complexity of the different and sometimes contradictory customary and civil marital regimes in the State party, with varied legal implications, and is concerned at the lack of awareness among women as to their choices with regard to the applicable legal mechanisms for redress and their consequences. The Committee is also concerned that the legal age of marriage for girls under customary law is 16 years, while it is 18 years under statutory law, which has a bearing on efforts to combat child and/or forced marriage. It is also concerned that the Inheritance Act of 2003, which harmonizes inheritance rights under both customary and statutory marriage, is not being enforced. It is also concerned that, under the Domestic Relations Law, only the father has parental rights over and custody of the children after separation. It is further concerned that, under existing laws, the economic rights of women in de facto unions are not protected.

44. **The Committee recommends that the State party harmonize the legal age of marriage at 18 years for girls and boys and ensure that women who marry under customary law are afforded equal protection to that of women who marry under statutory law and to redress in the general courts. The State party should also ensure that, after the harmonization of the laws, inheritance rights under both customary and statutory marriage are in line with the Convention and are effectively enforced, and that women are fully informed about the changes in the law. The Committee urges the State party to amend the Domestic Relations Law and ensure equal parental rights for women in all cases, and provide for the best interest of the child to be the governing principle in matters of child custody. It also calls upon the State party to adopt the legislative measures necessary to protect the economic rights of women in de facto unions.**

Optional Protocol to the Convention

45. The Committee encourages the State party to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention.

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

46. The Committee calls upon the State party to use the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in its efforts to implement the provisions of the Convention.

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

47. The Committee calls for the realization of substantive gender equality, in accordance with the provisions of the Convention, throughout the process of implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Dissemination

48. The Committee recalls the obligation of the State party to systematically and continuously implement the provisions of the Convention. It urges the State party to give priority attention to the implementation of the present concluding observations and recommendations between now and the submission of the next periodic report. The Committee therefore requests that the present concluding observations be disseminated in a timely manner, in the official language of the State party, to the relevant State institutions at all levels (national, regional and local), in particular to the Government, the ministries, the parliament, the Senate and the judiciary, to enable their full implementation. It encourages the State party to collaborate with all stakeholders concerned, such as employers' associations, trade unions, human rights and women's organizations, universities, research institutions and the media. It recommends that the present concluding observations be disseminated in an appropriate form at the local community level to enable their implementation. In addition, the Committee requests the State party to continue to disseminate the Convention, the Optional Protocol thereto and relevant jurisprudence, as well as the Committee's general recommendations, to all stakeholders.

Technical assistance

49. The Committee recommends that the State party consider seeking international assistance and cooperation and availing itself of technical assistance in the development and implementation of a comprehensive programme aimed at the implementation of the above recommendations and the Convention as a whole. The Committee also calls upon the State party to continue its cooperation with specialized agencies and programmes of the United Nations system.

Ratification of other treaties

50. The Committee notes that the adherence of the State party to the nine major international human rights instruments¹ would enhance the enjoyment by women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms in all aspects of life. The Committee therefore encourages the State party to consider ratifying the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and other treaties to which it is not yet a party.

Follow-up to the concluding observations

51. The Committee requests the State party to provide, within two years, written information on the steps taken to implement the recommendations contained in paragraphs 12 and 26 (b) to (e) above.

Preparation of the next report

52. The Committee invites the State party to submit its ninth periodic report in November 2019.

53. The Committee requests the State party to follow the harmonized guidelines on reporting under the international human rights treaties, including guidelines on a common core document and treaty-specific documents ([HRI/GEN/2/Rev.6](#), chap. I).

¹ The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families; the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance; and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.