

SIERRA LEONE COUNTRY REPORT
on
Implementation of the Beijing Platform for
Action +30

Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs

June 2024.

Section I

Background

Section I of the report looks into the population landscape, the establishment of the Gender Ministry, policy and legal frameworks, the macroeconomic context and the political context. This section aims to provide a comprehensive overview of how these factors interplay in shaping the country's approach to gender equality and women's empowerment. It will explore how Sierra Leone's demographic composition influences gender dynamics, the role of the Gender Ministry in driving policy formulation, the impact of legal frameworks on gender issues, the economic landscape's influence on resource allocation for gender initiatives, and the political environment's effect on governance structures and decision-making processes related to gender equality

Sierra Leone Population Landscape through the lens of Statistics

Sierra Leone has a total population of 7,534,883 of which 48% and 52% are male and female, respectively (2015 Census Report). It has the characteristics of a young demography, where 14.9% are children under five years of age and 42.5% of the population are children (below 15 years old). 53.0% of the population are within the working age (15-64 years old) and only 4.2% are aged 65 years and above. Adolescents (10-19 years) constitute 22.9% while women of reproductive age (15-49 years) constitute 24.8% of the total population. Youth (defined as people aged 15–35 years) comprise 39.4% of the population in Sierra Leone (SLDHS 2019)

Creation of Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs

The Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs in Sierra Leone was established in 2019 with the primary aim of promoting gender equality, empowering women, and safeguarding the rights of children across the country. The ministry's establishment was driven by the recognition of the pressing need to address gender disparities, combat gender-based violence, and enhance the overall well-being of women and children in Sierra Leone. Its mandate includes formulating and implementing laws, policies, programs, and projects that advance gender equality, protect women and children from all forms of abuse, and ensure their active participation in decision-making processes.

Moreover, the appointment of the Gender Adviser to the President at State House plays a crucial role in advising the President on gender issues and ensuring that gender considerations are integrated into government policies and decision-making processes. The Gender Adviser's terms of reference include providing strategic advice to the President on gender mainstreaming, advocating for gender equality and women's empowerment, coordinating gender-related initiatives across government ministries, and monitoring the implementation of gender-responsive policies and programs to promote inclusive development and social justice in Sierra Leone.

Policy, Legal and Regulatory Frameworks for the Protection of the Rights of Women, Children and People Living with Disabilities

Since its inception, the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs has achieved significant milestones in advancing gender equality and promoting the rights of women and children in Sierra Leone. Some of the major successes include the enactment of key legislation and policies aligned with the Beijing Declaration Platform for Action such as the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy 2020 which aims to integrate gender perspectives into all government policies and programs. This policy has helped mainstream gender considerations across various sectors, leading to more inclusive and gender-responsive governance in Sierra Leone.

The Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act 2022 emphasizes the principle of gender equality, highlighting the importance of equal rights, opportunities, and treatment for all individuals regardless of gender. It seeks to eliminate discrimination and promote gender equity in all spheres of life. The Act focuses on empowering women by providing them with the necessary support, resources, and opportunities to thrive in various sectors such as education, employment, leadership, and decision-making. It aims to enhance women's economic, social, and political empowerment. It also addresses gender-based violence by establishing measures to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls. It aims to strengthen legal protections for survivors of gender-based violence and enhance support services for victims.

The Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 2019 represents a significant step towards strengthening laws related to sexual offenses in Sierra Leone. This amendment enhances legal protections for survivors of sexual violence, updates definitions of offenses, and improves the prosecution of perpetrators to ensure justice for survivors.

In Sierra Leone, the Anti-Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Act 2022 is a crucial legislation aimed at combating the heinous crimes of human trafficking and migrant smuggling. This act provides comprehensive measures to prevent, prosecute, and punish individuals involved in these illegal activities, as well as to protect and support victims. It emphasizes the importance of collaboration among law enforcement agencies, government entities, and civil society organizations to effectively address human trafficking and migrant smuggling.

Currently, there has been a review of the Child Rights Act of 2007, and a bill is currently before parliament awaiting approval. This review signifies the country's commitment to ensuring the protection and well-being of children by updating and strengthening existing legislation to better address the evolving needs and challenges faced by children in Sierra Leone. Once approved, the revised Child Rights Act will play a crucial role in safeguarding the rights of children and promoting their welfare across the nation. The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2024 is a major achievement for the promotion of the rights of the girl child. The law criminalizes marrying girls under 18 years of age.

The Customary Lands Rights Act 2022 in Sierra Leone is a significant legal framework that recognizes and protects the land rights of communities under customary tenure systems. This act aims to secure the land tenure rights of indigenous communities and ensure their land is not unfairly exploited or taken away. It establishes mechanisms for resolving land disputes, promoting community land governance, and safeguarding the rights of vulnerable groups, such as women and marginalized communities.

Employment Act 2023 serves as the foundational law protecting workers in the workplace. Notably, key provisions of this act include the extension of maternity leave to 14 weeks on full pay in alignment with ILO Convention 184, the prohibition of pregnancy testing during job applications, safeguarding pregnant workers, allowing females to work at night with ensured safety, ensuring equal pay for equal work, addressing violence and harassment in the workplace, and incorporating fair terms and conditions of employment in employment contracts.

The Public Elections Act 2022 in Sierra Leone is a pivotal legislation that governs the electoral processes in the country. This act outlines the procedures for conducting free, fair, and transparent elections, ensuring the democratic participation of all citizens. It establishes guidelines for voter registration, campaigning, polling, and result tabulation to uphold the integrity of the electoral system. The act also addresses electoral offenses, campaign finance regulations, and the role of electoral management bodies in organizing credible elections.

It is worth noting that the Political Parties Act of 2022 has had a significant impact on the political landscape of the country. This act aims to regulate the formation, registration, and functioning of political parties in Sierra Leone, ensuring transparency, accountability, and fair competition among political entities. By enacting this legislation, Sierra Leone seeks to strengthen its democratic processes, promote political pluralism, and enhance the overall governance framework within the country.

The Political Parties Act of 2022 introduces measures to enhance the internal democracy of political parties, promote inclusivity, and prevent the proliferation of parties without substantial support. This act also sets guidelines for party financing, campaign conduct, and electoral participation, fostering a more robust and responsible political environment in Sierra Leone. Overall, the implementation of the Political Parties Act reflects the country's commitment to upholding democratic principles, fostering political stability, and ensuring equitable and transparent political processes for the benefit of its citizens.

The establishment of the Women's Empowerment Fund, which provides financial support to women entrepreneurs and promotes economic empowerment. These legislative measures signify Sierra Leone's commitment to addressing gender disparities, combating violence against women, and promoting women's participation in decision-making processes.

Additionally, the ministry has implemented awareness campaigns, capacity-building programs, and advocacy initiatives to empower women and children, improve their access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, and combat gender-based violence.

Despite these achievements, the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs in Sierra Leone faces several challenges that hinder its effectiveness in carrying out its mandate. One major challenge is the inadequate funding and resources allocated to the ministry (less than 1 percent), limiting its capacity to implement programs and initiatives effectively.

The lack of comprehensive data and research on gender issues (including disaggregated data), hindering evidence-based policy making and program implementation. Furthermore, limited awareness and understanding of gender equality issues among key stakeholders pose barriers to effective advocacy and policy implementation. Besides, the ministry struggles with inadequate institutional capacity and staffing constraints, which impact its ability to deliver essential services and support to women and children effectively.

This financial constraint has impacted the ministry's ability to reach marginalized women and children, provide essential services, and address systemic issues such as gender inequality and child protection. Also, the lack of coordination and collaboration among government agencies, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders has hindered the ministry's efforts to achieve sustainable impact and ensure holistic support for women and children in Sierra Leone. Addressing these challenges will require increased investment in the ministry, enhanced coordination mechanisms, and strengthened partnerships to advance gender equality and women's empowerment effectively.

Despite persistent challenges such as entrenched cultural norms and gender biases, Sierra Leone's dedication to enhancing women's participation in leadership positions remains unwavering. By prioritizing inclusivity and advocating for women's rights in politics, the country is laying a solid foundation for sustainable progress and meaningful change. The ongoing efforts to elevate women in decision-making roles not only promote gender equity but also enrich the political discourse with diverse perspectives and experiences. Sierra Leone's journey towards greater women's representation in leadership stands as a testament to the transformative power of inclusive governance and the collective pursuit of a more just and equal society.

The government has recently unveiled the new Medium-Term National Development Plan (MTNDP) for 2024-2030. This strategic document outlines the administration's short-term and long-term objectives for Sierra Leone's development. Gender is mainstreamed throughout the Plan and specifically falls under the Human per Capita Development game changer

Macroeconomic Context

The economy continues to face significant challenges with high inflation, pressures on the currency, high risk of debt distress and inadequate growth to support poverty reduction. Despite some efforts in 2023, further corrective fiscal and monetary measures are urgently needed to address the high inflationary pressures and the worsened food security situation.

Recent Developments: In 2023, economic growth is estimated to have decelerated for the second consecutive year, with an estimated rate of 3.1%. This slowdown was primarily attributed to

subdued aggregate demand and socio-political stability concerns. The economy grappled with persistent inflation which diminished households' purchasing power and restrained both private consumption and investment. Despite these challenges, the mining sector emerged as a bright spot, driven by robust iron ore production and exports, alongside promising agricultural output.

Inflationary pressures remained high throughout the year, albeit showing some tentative signs of easing in the final quarter. Headline inflation averaged 47.6% for the year, making it the second highest in Africa after Sudan. Factors contributing to this included elevated food and fuel inflation, currency depreciation, and ongoing fiscal dominance. More than half the population faced moderate food insecurity, while over 70% of households allocated a substantial portion of their monthly expenditures to food, further straining social and political stability. In response, the Central Bank raised rates by a cumulative 525 basis points, reaching 22.25% by the end of 2023. However, the effectiveness of monetary policy was limited by shallow financial markets and continued fiscal dominance. Inflation began to show signs of moderation, declining from its peak of 54.6% in October to 43% by February 2024.

Political Context

In the aftermath of the 2023 elections, Sierra Leone has witnessed a notable shift towards increased female participation in decision-making roles. The data reveals a positive trajectory in women's representation in parliament, with more women assuming seats and actively contributing to legislative processes. This surge in female leadership signifies a fundamental step towards a more inclusive and diverse political landscape in Sierra Leone. The rise in women holding key positions showcases a growing recognition of the invaluable perspectives and contributions that women bring to governance and policy-making.

Furthermore, Sierra Leone has implemented targeted measures to address the historical underrepresentation of women in leadership positions. Through strategic policies and initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality and empowering women in political spheres, the country is fostering an environment conducive to women's active engagement in politics. By dismantling barriers and challenging societal norms that hinder women's progress in leadership, Sierra Leone is paving the way for a more equitable and representative democracy. The current trend underscores a collective commitment to advancing gender parity and amplifying the voices of women in shaping the nation's future.

Section II

Background

In this report, Section II delves into the twelve (12) critical areas outlined in the Beijing Declaration Platform for Action. It comprehensively examines the progress made, challenges encountered, and provides recommendations for each critical area within the specified period under review. By analyzing these critical areas, the report aims to assess Sierra Leone's achievements, identify areas for improvement, and offer strategic guidance to further advance gender equality and women's empowerment in the country.

In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to improve health outcomes for women and girls in your country?

In the narrative report, please provide details of up to three concrete examples of measures taken, including aims and scope of measures, target population, budget, impact evaluations, lesson learnt, and links to further information. Please also provide information about actions for specific groups, such as those listed in question 3. Where relevant and possible, please provide data to support your responses. (2 pages max.)

Highlight of Achievements

In the past five years, Sierra Leone has implemented various initiatives to enhance health outcomes for women and girls, focusing on improving maternal and child health, increasing access to reproductive health services, and addressing gender disparities in healthcare. These efforts have been crucial in advancing the well-being of women and girls across the country.

One significant action taken by Sierra Leone to improve health outcomes for women and girls is the implementation of the Free Healthcare Initiative (FHCI) in 2010, which aimed to reduce maternal and child mortality rates by providing free healthcare services for pregnant women, lactating mothers, and children under five years old. As a result of this initiative, there has been a notable increase in the utilization of maternal and child health services. According to the Ministry of Health, the percentage of women receiving antenatal care from a skilled provider increased from 76% in 2019 to 85% in 2023, indicating improved access to essential maternal healthcare services.

In addition to reproductive health services, Sierra Leone has taken steps to address gender disparities in healthcare by promoting women's participation in the health workforce. The Ministry of Health and Sanitation has implemented initiatives to increase the recruitment and retention of female healthcare workers, particularly in rural and underserved areas. As a result, the percentage of female healthcare workers in the country has increased from 35% in 2019 to 42% in 2024, contributing to improved access to quality healthcare services for women and girls.

Recent Sierra Leone Demographic and Health Surveys (SLDHS) show in 2019, Under-5 mortality decreased from 156 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2013 to 122 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2019. Similar patterns were observed for infant mortality (92 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2013 to 75 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2019) and neonatal mortality (39 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2013 to 31 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2019). There was a 40% reduction in the Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) from 1,165 deaths per 100,000 to 717 deaths per 100,000 between 2013 and 2019.

In 2022, Sierra Leone made significant progress in reducing preventable maternal deaths. Throughout the year, 1,180 women received cervical cancer screening services, enhancing early detection and treatment of cervical cancer. Additionally, 54 fistula survivors benefited from rehabilitation and social reintegration services, while 42 survivors underwent successful repair surgeries. Furthermore, 27 health facilities were equipped to deliver quality emergency obstetric and newborn care, and 105 service providers were trained to provide high-quality emergency obstetric and newborn care. These efforts have contributed to improving maternal health outcomes in Sierra Leone.

Furthermore, Sierra Leone made remarkable strides in reducing the unmet need for family planning. Throughout the year, 550,000 women opted for modern contraception methods, leading to a significant impact. This decision helped prevent 210,000 unintended pregnancies and averted 76,000 unsafe abortions due to the use of modern contraceptives. Moreover, approximately 1,700 maternal deaths were prevented as a direct result of modern contraceptive use. The country saw a positive shift with 55% of women having their family planning demands met through modern contraception. Additionally, an impressive 99% of service delivery points now offer at least three modern contraceptive options, ensuring accessibility and choice for women across Sierra Leone. As a result, the contraceptive prevalence rate among women of reproductive age has risen from 15% in 2019 to 25% in 2024, reflecting an improvement in women's ability to plan and space their pregnancies effectively. These achievements have played a crucial role in promoting reproductive health and reducing maternal mortality in the country.

The Ministry has the National Health Policy, Universal Health Coverage Roadmap, National Health Sector Strategic Plan, Health Financing Strategy and the National Public Health Agency Act, among many other existing health sector policies, legislations and regulatory bodies. There is also an existing Sierra Leone Social Health Insurance Act. The National Steering Committee for UHC and Secretariat also exist.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Health has implemented programs to address gender-based violence and promote the rights and well-being of women and girls. They have established specialized clinics and support services for survivors of gender-based violence, providing medical care, counseling, and legal support. These initiatives aim to create a safe and supportive environment for women and girls, ensuring their access to comprehensive healthcare services.

In order to enhance support for young people to explore and nurture positive values regarding their SRH, UNFPA worked with the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education to integrate age-appropriate Comprehensive Sexuality Education into the Basic Education Curriculum Framework and the syllabi of seven subjects – integrated sciences, social studies, home economics, religious morality education, physical health education, expressive arts and entertainment and English studies.

Sierra Leone became a Pathfinder country for Child Survival in May 2022 based on past work and commitment of GoSL to achieve the Child Survival SDG by 2023 with the support of global health partners. In April 2023, GoSL with the support of UNICEF and partners launched the Child Survival Action Plan (CSAP) 2023-25 to reduce under-five mortality and subsequently established a National Child Health Programme to coordinate and integrate quality health programme implementation across the continuum of care.

Challenges

In spite of the progress made in improving health outcomes for women and girls in Sierra Leone, several challenges persist that hinder further advancements in this critical area. These challenges include limited healthcare infrastructure, inadequate resources, cultural barriers, and persistent gender disparities in access to healthcare services. Addressing these challenges is essential to ensure the sustained improvement of health outcomes for women and girls in the country.

Limited healthcare infrastructure poses a significant challenge to providing quality healthcare services to women and girls in Sierra Leone, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Insufficient healthcare facilities, medical equipment, and skilled healthcare professionals contribute to disparities in access to essential health services. To overcome this challenge, investments in healthcare infrastructure, including the construction of new health facilities and the upgrading of existing ones, are crucial to expand access to quality healthcare services for women and girls across the country.

Inadequate resources also present a barrier to improving health outcomes for women and girls in Sierra Leone. Limited funding for healthcare programs, including maternal and child health services, family planning initiatives, and healthcare workforce development, hinders the effective delivery of essential healthcare interventions. To address this challenge, increased investment in the healthcare sector, both domestically and through international partnerships, is necessary to ensure sustainable funding for healthcare programs that specifically target the needs of women and girls.

Cultural barriers and gender disparities in access to healthcare services further complicate efforts to improve health outcomes for women and girls in Sierra Leone. Sociocultural norms, traditional practices, and gender inequalities can prevent women and girls from seeking timely and appropriate healthcare services, leading to adverse health outcomes. To overcome these barriers, community-based interventions, culturally sensitive healthcare approaches, and

targeted outreach programs are essential to promote awareness, empower women to make informed health decisions, and address gender inequities in healthcare access and utilization.

Recommendations for Action

In light of these challenges, several recommendations can be made to advance the health outcomes of women and girls in Sierra Leone. Strengthening healthcare infrastructure through the construction and equipping of health facilities, increasing the recruitment and training of healthcare professionals, and expanding healthcare services to underserved areas are critical steps to improve access to quality healthcare services for women and girls. Moreover, enhancing funding for healthcare programs, prioritizing maternal and child health services, and promoting community engagement and education on women's health issues can help address the existing gaps and disparities in healthcare delivery.

In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to improve education outcomes and skills for women and girls, including in sectors where they are underrepresented?

In the narrative report, please provide details of up to three concrete examples of measures taken, including aims and scope of measures, target population, budget, impact evaluations, lesson learnt, and links to further information. Please also provide information about actions for specific groups, such as those listed in question 3. Where relevant and possible, please provide data to support your responses. (2 pages max.)

Highlight of Achievements

Sierra Leone has implemented various initiatives to address these challenges and promote education for women and girls. The government has developed gender-responsive education policies and strategies to promote gender equality in education. These policies aim to eliminate gender disparities, increase girls' enrolment and retention, and improve learning outcomes.

Since the launch of the free quality education program in 2018, Sierra Leone has made significant strides in improving access to education. In 2021, the gross enrollment rate of pre-primary education saw a notable increase to 20.6%, up from 19.3% the previous year and a substantial rise from the baseline of 11.5% as reported by MICS. The period between 2020 and 2021 witnessed a positive transition rate from primary to lower secondary education, which rose to 97.6%. Furthermore, the lower secondary education completion rate climbed from 68.5% to 73.9%, indicating progress towards the country's educational targets. Notably, there was a remarkable 36% surge in the total number of children enrolled in schools from pre-primary to secondary education levels. The data also revealed encouraging trends in completion rates, with 8 out of 10 primary school children successfully completing primary education and 7 out of 10 junior secondary school students finishing their studies.

The Ministry of Technical & Higher Education provides higher education skills and knowledge through universities, training colleges, and polytechnics, including demand-led skills through technical and vocational institutions and apprenticeship centres. The ministry's intervention in

the TVET Sector narrows the gaps and addresses the mismatch in the country's labor market and middle-level manpower.

The Ministry as part of its response to increasing and improving education outcomes and skills for women and girls and other areas where under-representation is huge, like the construction sector, the sciences, and engineering technology, the ministry designed and rolled out the STEAM (Science, Technology, Agriculture & Maths) Policy as a major criterion for the award of the Government grants in aid and international scholarships to student at universities and Colleges. This policy put a premium on awards for females and girls offering STEAM courses in all public institutions. For the first time in Sierra Leone, the ministry now gives grants to Technical vocational institutions with a special quota for women and girls. The Government grant in aid support targeted about 30% of female students who have gained admission to public tertiary institutions and polytechnic annually.

Also, as part of the MTHE response and contribution, the Ministry rolled out the Skills development project through the skills development secretariat with funds from the World Bank. This project targeted six priority sectors Fisheries, Mining & Extractives, Construction, Agriculture & Agro Processing and Tourism. The project targeted youths who have either drop out of formal learning or who have taken TVET as a career path. The training was done by 47 service providers in the TVET sector across the regions to train youths in demand-led skills for the project's first phase. The second phase also targeted 100 small and medium scale businesses especially women in small businesses. The aim of this project was to increase productivity and competitiveness by a total of 19,785. 7524 males (45%) and 55% female were trained by all the ten Government Technical Institutes (GTI) universities & polytechnics and other government-assisted private institutions. Women and girls were particularly targeted in the construction & engineering, solar installation, electricals, construction, and mining components.

The Ministry as part of its continued efforts to improve education outcomes and skills continues to partner and collaborate with the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE), in the provision of capacity-building training to female teachers in the teacher training institutions, the review and capacity building for female teachers in the science streams in schools and universities.

In addition to the Ministry's effort/ response to increasing and improving access to higher education, the Sierra Leone student loan scheme was introduced last year piloting loan facilities to master, MPhil, and PhD students in both public and private institutions. All of these interventions have impacted learning outcomes at the school level and has also contributed to the human capacity building at the employment and governance level. Women and girls can now compete with boys in science competitions, they are now more motivated and confident to select career domains that were only considered or reserved for male students. More students can now pursue higher education, especially at the master's and PhD levels, financial barriers, especially for women and girls aspiring or pursuing higher education, are now steadily reduced and this continues to better place women in leadership positions and other major decision-making platforms

The ministry in future will continue to collaborate with MBSSE, and plan international & other line ministries in the capacity building and training of teachers especially female teachers in the sciences and TVET. futuristically increase local and international links and partnerships for more women and girls' scholarships in science programs like medicine, engineering, Environment mining technology maths, biology chemistry, etc. These interventions aim to eliminate gender disparities, increase girls' & women's enrolment and retention, and improve learning outcomes in higher institutions & schools including technical and vocational education programs.

In 2023, the gross enrollment ratio for girls in primary education was 87%, showing a positive trend towards gender parity in access to basic education. Additionally, efforts to promote girls' participation in STEM subjects have resulted in an increase in the number of girls pursuing science and technology-related fields.

One key initiative that has contributed to these improvements is the National Policy on Radical Inclusion by the Ministry of Basic Education and Senior Secondary School. This policy has played a crucial role in ensuring that girls have equal access to education and are actively encouraged to participate in all levels of schooling. As a result, dropout rates among girls have decreased, and more girls are completing their education, as indicated by the rise in the secondary school completion rate for girls from 62% in 2019 to 75% in 2024.

GoSL in its Transforming Education Summit commitment to expand access to education and improve the quality of foundational learning outcomes. The completion of 29 Early Childhood Development (ECD) centers officially handed over by Government together with the training of 678 teachers and 4,836 cumulatively, has expanded access to education for more than 24,000 children aged 3-5, strengthening the foundation for primary education.

UNICEF supported GoSL to address challenges related to low learning outcomes through the training of 13,581 early grade teachers (3,810 females); implementing the National Curriculum Framework; establishing teachers' communities of practice in 11 of 16 districts; reviewing instructional core for early grade foundational numeracy and providing teaching and learning materials in line with the Education Sector Plan priority on "Delivering the Foundations of Learning for All." The increase in completion, transition and pass rates is attributable to sustained efforts in teacher training, curriculum and instructional development as a major contribution and driver

Challenges

- One of the major challenges is gender inequality, which can limit access to education for girls and women. Cultural norms and traditional beliefs sometimes prioritize boys' education over girls', leading to lower enrolment rates for girls.
- Increased number of pupils passing the basic education stage for universities and colleges, continue to hit the universities in terms of facilities, lecturers, teaching & learning materials.
- Emerging issues to catch up with existing curriculum and facility and labour demand
- . Global economic crisis to cater to student livelihoods

- Pressure on government to increase and sustain the Sierra Leone grant in aid support to student in universities and colleges but importantly to increase the budget allocation targeting more female in universities.
- inadequate tools and equipment for hands-on technical training and skills, like training laboratories at TVET centers, the establishment of a center of excellence
- availability of tutors for industrial training and skills at Government vocational institutions
- Another challenge is early marriage and teenage pregnancy. Many girls in Sierra Leone are forced into early marriages, which often results in them dropping out of school. Additionally, teenage pregnancy can also disrupt girls' education, as they may face stigma or be unable to continue their studies due to the responsibilities of motherhood.
- Infrastructure and resources are also areas of concern. Some schools lack proper facilities, such as classrooms, libraries, and sanitation facilities, which can affect the quality of education. Limited resources, including textbooks and teaching materials, can also hinder the learning experience for both girls and boys.

Recommendations for Action

To address these challenges, the Government must increase its investment in higher education this will have a direct impact on the quality of learning at the basic education level and also to improve support to TVET, especially in the area of training tools & equipment and capacity building for TVET instructors to meet the labour market demand. Government to continue investment in the rebranding of TVET and also invest in the establishment of a centre of excellence for the TVET sector to be more competitive. The review and upgrade of government institutions to community colleges to accommodate the growing number of graduates from schools will significantly contribute to addressing the employment and skills gap in the country.

In the past five years, what actions has your country prioritized to address gender-based violence?

In the narrative report, please provide details of up to three concrete examples of measures taken, including aims and scope of measures, target population, budget, impact evaluations, lesson learnt, and links to further information. Please also provide information about actions for specific groups, such as those listed in question 3. Where relevant and possible, please provide data to support your responses. (2 pages max.)

Highlight of Achievements

Sierra Leone has taken significant actions in the past five years to address gender-based violence (GBV) and create a safer environment for its citizens. One of the key priorities has been strengthening the legal frameworks surrounding GBV. The country enacted the Domestic Violence Act in 2007, the Sexual Offences Act in 2012 as amended in 2019, ensuring legal protection for survivors and holding perpetrators accountable.

In addition to legal measures, Sierra Leone has established specialized courts known as the Sexual Offences Model Courts. These courts are dedicated to handling sexual offences cases and aim to provide survivors with swift and fair trials. By prioritizing these specialized courts, Sierra Leone is working towards ensuring access to justice and reducing the backlog of sexual offences cases.

To enhance support services for survivors, Sierra Leone has expanded the availability of One-Stop Centres with the support of UN Women. These centres offer comprehensive care by providing medical, legal, and psychosocial support to survivors of GBV. By establishing these centres, the country is ensuring that survivors have access to the necessary services and support they need to heal and recover.

Sierra Leone has made significant strides in integrating gender response to violence by incorporating standard operating procedures and data sharing protocols. This integration has facilitated the piloting of the Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS) in the country. Sierra Leone stands out as the first owned by government to pilot the GBVIMS, showcasing its commitment to enhancing data management and response mechanisms for gender-based violence. This initiative marks a crucial step towards improving the coordination and effectiveness of interventions aimed at addressing gender-based violence in Sierra Leone.

Additionally, Sierra Leone's created innovative E-referral directory for gender-based violence services provision. This digital platform serves as a crucial resource connecting survivors of gender-based violence with essential support services. By streamlining the referral process and enhancing coordination among service providers, the E-referral directory ensures timely and efficient access to critical assistance for those affected by gender-based violence. Through this technological advancement, Sierra Leone is bolstering its response to gender-based violence, prioritizing survivor-centric care, and fostering a more integrated and responsive support system for individuals in need

In accordance with the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Act, the government has established a national steering committee. This committee, spearheaded by the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs, is tasked with monitoring and evaluating Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) along with other public service institutions to ensure compliance with the act. One of the key responsibilities of this committee is to conduct annual gender audits of MDAs and present a report of their findings and recommendations to the minister for submission to parliament within a timeframe of three months. This mechanism aims to promote accountability and transparency in upholding gender equality and empowering women across various sectors in Sierra Leone.

Sierra Leone has taken proactive steps to engage boys and men in combating gender-based violence through a gender transformative approach. The country has established out-of-school boys' clubs that are supported with trainings and engagement activities. These clubs play a crucial role in promoting gender equality and challenging harmful gender norms among boys and men. By involving boys in these initiatives, Sierra Leone is fostering a culture of respect and

understanding, ultimately contributing to the prevention of gender-based violence and the promotion of positive masculinity within the society.

Husband schools were also established, which are unofficial learning hubs providing information on GBV, SRHR, sexual abuse, drug abuse and the role of husbands, partners, guardians and parents in ending these harmful practices. MAPES facilitated the husband school sessions, attended by a maximum of 25 participants per session. A total of 450 participants from 18 communities attended

To increase availability of services for vulnerable girls and boys, UNFPA, in partnership with MoGCA, supported the setting up of four AYSRH hubs. These hubs are located in four hard to reach communities (Wara Bafodia, Kondembaia, Fadugu and Koinadugu 2) in Koinadugu district and are being piloted for easy access to services meant for adolescent girls who are in the safe spaces.

Education and awareness play a crucial role in combating GBV, and Sierra Leone has recognized this. The government has implemented awareness campaigns to educate communities about GBV, its consequences, and the available support services. These campaigns aim to challenge harmful gender norms and promote gender equality, fostering a culture of respect and non-violence.

Sierra Leone has also prioritized strengthening partnerships with international organizations, NGOs, and civil society to address GBV effectively. By collaborating with these entities, the country has been able to leverage their expertise, resources, and support. This collaboration has facilitated capacity-building, resource mobilization, and knowledge sharing, ultimately strengthening the overall response to GBV.

In 2021, with funding from Irish Aid, UNFPA continued to support the National Secretariat for the Reduction of Teenage Pregnancy in implementing the National Strategy for the Reduction of Adolescent Pregnancy and Child Marriage. In order to provide strategic direction to partners implementing adolescent pregnancy and child marriage programmes, support was provided for improved coordination at national and regional levels. The youth advisory panel was supported in participating in national and international level youth advocacy events such as the National Youth Summit on Harnessing the Demographic Dividend, through Investments in Youth and the AFRIYAN conference

In 2022, Sierra Leone demonstrated significant progress in reducing gender-based violence and harmful practices. The country reached 7,972 marginalized girls through life skills programs aimed at enhancing their health, social, and economic well-being. Additionally, 1,904 victims and survivors of gender-based violence received a comprehensive set of services to support their recovery. Furthermore, 1,800 dignity and hygiene kits were distributed to vulnerable women and girls, promoting their well-being and safety. Engaging traditional and religious leaders in the fight against child marriage, 225 leaders actively contributed to combatting harmful practices.

Notably, 87 communities reported the abandonment of harmful practices like gender-based violence, showcasing a shift towards safer environments. Moreover, 28 community-based organizations had their capacities strengthened to advocate for sexual and reproductive health services and provide support to survivors of gender-based violence within their communities. These efforts have been instrumental in fostering a safer and more supportive environment for women and girls in Sierra Leone.

Tailored capacity development of over 720 personnel supported the expansion of child protection services reaching 56,061 children (36,777 girls, 19,284 boys), significantly exceeding the annual target of 16,000. This expansion of services was particularly important during the election period given the risk of socio-political tensions.

Challenges

While progress has been made, challenges remain in effectively addressing GBV in Sierra Leone. Ongoing efforts are needed to ensure the sustainability of interventions, increase access to support services, and continue raising awareness about GBV prevention. By building on the actions taken in the past five years, Sierra Leone can continue to make strides in combating GBV and creating a safer society for all its citizens.

Recommendations for Action

To address these challenges and prioritize efforts to combat gender-based violence in Sierra Leone, the following recommendations for action can be considered:

- Increase funding and resources for programs and services dedicated to preventing and responding to gender-based violence.
- Conduct awareness campaigns to challenge harmful cultural norms and promote gender equality.
- Enhance support services for victims and survivors of gender-based violence, including counselling and legal assistance.
- Improve coordination among government agencies, civil society organizations, and community leaders to create a comprehensive response to gender-based violence.

Over the past five years, which forms of gender-based violence, and in which specific contexts or settings, has your country prioritized for action?

In the narrative report, please explain why your country considers these priority areas or contexts and how it has addressed them. Where relevant and possible, please provide data to support your responses (3-5 pages).

Highlight of Achievements

Sierra Leone has prioritized addressing various forms of gender-based violence (GBV) within specific contexts and settings. The country has recognized the importance of targeting these specific areas to effectively combat GBV and create a safer environment for its citizens.

According to Rainbo Initiative report in 2023, a total of 2,762 cases were recorded across our seven (7) Rainbo Centres, located in six (6) districts across Sierra Leone and 2743 recorded in 7 districts where the Government OSCs are operational. Among these cases, sexual assaults accounted for 92.7%, while physical assaults accounted for 7.3%. It is disheartening to note that female survivors constituted 99% of the recorded cases, highlighting the gendered nature of GBV. The report also emphasizes the importance of addressing GBV across all age groups, as the youngest survivor was just one month old, while the oldest survivor was 78 years old.

One form of GBV that Sierra Leone has prioritized for action is intimate partner violence (IPV). This includes physical, sexual, and emotional abuse perpetrated by a current or former intimate partner. The government has taken steps to strengthen legal frameworks and raise awareness about IPV to ensure survivors have access to support services and justice.

Another form of GBV that Sierra Leone has focused on is sexual violence, particularly in conflict-affected areas. The country has acknowledged the heightened vulnerability of women and girls during times of conflict and has implemented measures to address sexual violence in these settings. This includes establishing specialized courts and One-Stop Centers to provide comprehensive support to survivors.

Sierra Leone has also prioritized combating harmful traditional practices that perpetuate GBV, such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage. The Sierra Leone Parliament has passed into law the Prohibition of Child Marriage Bill 2024. It is hoped the revised Child Rights Bill 2024 will criminalize the underage passage of rite for girls. The government has implemented legislation and awareness campaigns to challenge these practices and protect the rights of women and girls. Efforts have been made to engage community leaders, religious leaders, and traditional authorities to change social norms and promote gender equality.

Sierra Leone's efforts to prevent and respond to gender-based violence have been significantly enhanced through the review of the existing 2012 National Referral Protocols (NRP) on GBV. The rationale for this review stemmed from changes in the legal and political environment, the growing concern over school-related gender-based violence, and the need for effective, coordinated, child-friendly, gender-sensitive, and disability-inclusive services. The revised NRP 2022 now includes a focus on school-related gender-based violence integrated within the updated referral pathways, mainstreaming disability considerations, and outlining a clear reporting and referral system for both child and adult survivors. This survivor-centered approach ensures that services are tailored to meet the specific needs of survivors, promoting a more holistic and supportive response to gender-based violence in Sierra Leone.

Furthermore, Sierra Leone has recognized the need to address GBV within educational settings. The country has taken steps to prevent and respond to GBV in schools, ensuring a safe and

inclusive learning environment for all students. This includes training teachers and school staff on GBV prevention, establishing reporting mechanisms, and providing support services to survivors.

In summary, Sierra Leone has prioritized action against various forms of GBV within specific contexts and settings. This includes intimate partner violence, sexual violence in conflict-affected areas, harmful traditional practices, GBV in educational settings, and GBV within the justice system. By addressing these specific areas, Sierra Leone is taking significant steps towards creating a society free from gender-based violence.

Challenges

However, several challenges persist in effectively tackling these issues. Intimate partner violence and sexual violence pose significant threats to the well-being and safety of individuals, especially women and girls, in Sierra Leone. Some of the challenges faced by the country include:

- Limited access to support services for survivors of intimate partner violence and sexual violence.
- Societal norms that perpetuate the acceptance of violence within intimate relationships.
- Barriers to reporting incidents of intimate partner violence and sexual violence, such as fear of retaliation or stigma.
- Inadequate training for law enforcement and healthcare professionals to respond effectively to cases of intimate partner violence and sexual violence.
- Insufficient data collection and monitoring mechanisms to track the prevalence of these forms of gender-based violence accurately.

Recommendations for Action

To address these challenges and prioritize actions against intimate partner violence and sexual violence in Sierra Leone, the following recommendations can be considered:

- Enhance support services for survivors, including shelters, counselling, and legal assistance.
- Conduct awareness campaigns to challenge societal norms that tolerate intimate partner violence and sexual violence.
- Provide comprehensive training for law enforcement and healthcare professionals on responding to and supporting survivors of these forms of gender-based violence.
- Strengthen data collection systems to improve monitoring and evaluation of interventions addressing intimate partner violence and sexual violence.
- Implement and enforce laws and policies that protect individuals from intimate partner violence and sexual violence, ensuring perpetrators are held accountable.

What actions has your country taken to ensure that economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic closes gender gaps in poverty, employment, social protection, education, and/or health that the pandemic has exacerbated?

In the narrative report, please provide details of up to three concrete innovations, including aims and scope of measures taken, target population, budget, impact evaluations, lesson learnt, and links to further information, with a focus on measures that have outlasted the emergency response. In doing so, countries are encouraged to reflect on lessons learned from the pandemic for ongoing and future crises. Please also provide information about actions for specific groups, such as those listed in question 3. Where relevant and possible, please provide data to support your responses. (2 pages max.)

Highlight of Achievements

Sierra Leone has taken significant actions to ensure that the economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic addresses and closes gender gaps in various areas that have been exacerbated by the crisis. The government has recognized the importance of addressing these gaps to promote gender equality and ensure that women are not left behind in the recovery process.

In terms of poverty alleviation, Sierra Leone has implemented targeted measures to support women-led businesses and entrepreneurs. This includes providing access to credit and financial resources, as well as offering training and capacity-building programs. By empowering women economically, the country aims to reduce poverty rates among women and their households.

To address employment disparities, Sierra Leone has focused on promoting gender-responsive policies and practices in the labor market. The government has encouraged the private sector to adopt gender-inclusive hiring and promotion practices, as well as providing support for women to access training and skills development opportunities. These initiatives aim to create more equitable employment opportunities for women and reduce gender gaps in the workforce.

Over the years, Sierra Leone has made progress in the areas of health, education, infrastructure, food production, energy and social protection. In 2011, Government approved the Social Protection Policy which was revised and launched in 2020. In 2019, the Social Protection was included under clusters 5, 6 and 7 as key government priorities in the Sierra Leone Medium-Term Development Plan 2019-2023. This created renewed impetus to build on the social protection systems and launch additional programmes to support extremely poor and vulnerable groups. Social protection is one of the five pillars under the Quick Action Economic Recovery Plan initiated in April 2020 as part of the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic

In May 2020, taking into account the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government decided to expand the SSN programme nationwide to reach an additional 70,000 households and has adjusted the programme to address a broader range of vulnerabilities and needs. In the MTNDP, the Government declared its commitment to developing a solid national social protection system and delivering quality social protection services to the population to enhance human capital. In January 2020, the Government launched its revised National Social Protection Policy (NSPP). It sets out the goal to establish a gender-sensitive, disability-inclusive and age-appropriate framework for protecting the extreme poor and vulnerable and to minimize risks of

others sliding into poverty through a minimum social protection floor for all Sierra Leonean citizens to ensure a life of dignity

Sierra Leone has expanded and strengthened existing social safety nets to ensure that vulnerable women and their families receive adequate support. This includes increasing the coverage and benefits of cash transfer programs, as well as implementing targeted interventions to address specific needs, such as access to healthcare and nutrition. These measures aim to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on women's well-being and ensure their social and economic security.

Following the validation and launch of the National Social Protection Strategy, UNICEF strengthening of adequate knowledge and national capacities both for GoSL counterparts and UNICEF staff in building efforts to develop a cash+ model for prevention of child marriage and teenage pregnancy and cash transfer in humanitarian actions. Efforts on developing a new system for assessment and certification of disability have continued to progress in 2023, however the revised Persons with Disabilities Act has not yet passed through Parliament. Once completed, these efforts will enhance social protection coverage for all children

UNICEF continued to support GoSL and the World Bank to develop a comprehensive package of support for district development planning, including a template for district development plans which contains key child indicators being introduced in four districts. This will improve the monitoring of child indicators at district level to drive results in social protection.

Sierra Leone has also prioritized ensuring equal access to education for girls during the pandemic. The government has implemented measures to promote remote learning and provide support for girls to continue their education, including the distribution of learning materials and the provision of online platforms. By addressing the barriers to education caused by the pandemic, Sierra Leone aims to prevent further disparities and promote equal educational opportunities for all.

Furthermore, Sierra Leone has taken steps to strengthen the healthcare system and ensure that women have access to essential health services during the pandemic. This includes increasing the availability of reproductive health services, ensuring access to maternal and child healthcare, and promoting gender-responsive healthcare policies. These efforts aim to address the unique health needs of women and girls and mitigate the impact of the pandemic on their well-being.

In summary, Sierra Leone has implemented various actions to ensure that the economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic closes gender gaps in poverty, employment, social protection, education, and health. By prioritizing gender-responsive policies and interventions, the country is working towards creating a more equitable and inclusive society, where women are empowered and have equal opportunities for economic and social well-being

Challenges

The pandemic has intensified poverty levels, particularly impacting women who often work in informal sectors with unstable incomes. Additionally, there have been disproportionate job

losses among women, especially in sectors heavily affected by the pandemic, leading to increased employment disparities. Furthermore, existing social protection programs may not be sufficient to cover the growing number of vulnerable populations, including women and children who have been disproportionately affected by the crisis.

Moreover, school closures and disruptions during the pandemic have disproportionately affected girls' access to education, potentially widening the gender gap in educational attainment. Limited access to healthcare services has also had a significant impact on women's health outcomes, particularly in areas such as maternal and reproductive health.

Recommendations for Action

To address these challenges, it is crucial to implement gender-responsive policies that specifically target the gendered impacts of the pandemic. Expanding social protection programs to cover more vulnerable populations, with a focus on women and children, is essential. Providing targeted skills training and job opportunities for women can facilitate their reintegration into the workforce post-pandemic. Strategies to ensure continued access to education for girls, including remote learning options, are vital. Strengthening healthcare systems to guarantee ongoing access to essential health services for women, particularly in maternal and reproductive health, is also crucial.

In the past five years, what strategies has your country used to prevent gender-based violence?

In the narrative report, please provide details of up to three concrete examples, including aims and scope of measures taken, target population, budget, impact evaluations, lesson learnt, and links to further information. Please also provide information about actions for specific groups, such as those listed in question 3. Where relevant and possible, please provide data to support your responses. (2 pages max.)

Highlight of Achievements

Sierra Leone has implemented several strategies over the past five years to prevent gender-based violence (GBV) and promote gender equality and women's rights. The government, in collaboration with civil society organizations and international partners, has taken significant steps to address this issue and create a safer environment for women and girls.

One key strategy that Sierra Leone has employed is the enactment and enforcement of legislation specifically aimed at combating GBV. The country has implemented the Domestic Violence Act, which criminalizes various forms of violence against women, including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. This legal framework provides a basis for holding perpetrators accountable and ensuring justice for survivors.

In addition to legislation, Sierra Leone has focused on raising awareness and changing societal attitudes towards GBV. The government has launched public awareness campaigns to educate the public about the harmful effects of violence and the importance of gender equality. These

campaigns aim to challenge harmful gender norms and promote positive behaviors and attitudes towards women and girls.

Sierra Leone has also prioritized the establishment and strengthening of support services for survivors of GBV. This includes the establishment of One-Stop Centers, which provide comprehensive medical, legal, and psychosocial support to survivors. The government has also trained healthcare workers, police officers, and other frontline responders to effectively respond to cases of GBV and provide survivor-centered care.

The Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs has implemented a male involvement strategy to enhance the prevention and response to Gender-Based Violence (GBV). Recognizing the essential role of men and boys in effectively addressing GBV, this strategy aims to engage them as crucial allies in combating violence against women and girls. By involving men and boys in initiatives to tackle GBV, Sierra Leone is fostering a more inclusive and comprehensive approach to addressing this critical issue. This strategy underscores the importance of engaging all members of society, regardless of gender, in creating a safer and more equitable environment for women and children in Sierra Leone.

Another important strategy employed by Sierra Leone is the integration of GBV prevention and response into the education system. The government has developed curricula and training programs for teachers and students to raise awareness about GBV, promote gender equality, and teach skills for conflict resolution and respectful relationships. By addressing GBV at an early age, Sierra Leone aims to prevent violence and promote gender equality in future generations.

Furthermore, Sierra Leone has worked towards strengthening the coordination and collaboration among different stakeholders involved in GBV prevention and response. The government has established national and district-level GBV coordination structures, bringing together government agencies, civil society organizations, and international partners. These platforms facilitate information sharing, joint planning, and the implementation of comprehensive GBV prevention and response strategies.

While significant progress has been made, challenges still remain in addressing GBV in Sierra Leone. Limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, and cultural norms that perpetuate violence continue to pose obstacles. However, the commitment and efforts of the government and its partners have led to important advancements in preventing GBV and protecting the rights of women and girls in the country.

In conclusion, Sierra Leone has implemented various strategies over the past five years to prevent gender-based violence. Through the enactment of legislation, awareness campaigns, the provision

In the past five years, what actions and measures has your country to promote women's participation in public life and decision-making?

In the narrative report, please provide details of up to three concrete examples of measures taken, including aims and scope of measures, target population, budget, impact evaluations, lesson learnt, and links to further information. Please also provide information about actions for specific groups, such as those listed in question 3. Where relevant and possible, please provide data to support your responses. (2 pages max.)

Highlight of Achievements

Over the past five years, Sierra Leone has taken significant actions to promote women's participation in public life and decision-making. The country has made strides in advancing gender equality and empowering women to take on leadership roles. One notable action was the adoption of the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act, which aims to eliminate discrimination against women and promote their full participation in all spheres of society.

The country has made notable strides towards enhancing women's political participation through legislative measures. The Public Elections Act 2022, particularly in section 58(2), mandates that for every three candidates nominated, one of them must be a female candidate. This provision aims to address the gender imbalance in political representation and create opportunities for women to actively engage in the political sphere. By ensuring female representation among candidates, Sierra Leone is taking a proactive step towards promoting gender inclusivity and empowering women to have a stronger voice in decision-making processes within the country. Such initiatives are crucial for advancing gender equality and fostering a more inclusive and representative political landscape in Sierra Leone.

Sierra Leone has also implemented various initiatives to increase women's representation in politics and decision-making bodies. For instance, the government introduced gender quotas to ensure a minimum percentage of women in parliament and local councils. Additionally, awareness campaigns and capacity-building programs have been conducted to encourage women to engage in politics, run for office, and participate in public decision-making processes.

Challenges

Despite these efforts, Sierra Leone still faces challenges in promoting women's participation in public life. One major challenge is the persistence of cultural and traditional norms that limit women's access to leadership positions. Deep-rooted gender stereotypes and patriarchal structures continue to hinder women's advancement in politics and decision-making roles.

Recommendations for Action

To address these challenges and further promote women's participation in public life, several recommendations can be considered:

- **Strengthen Implementation of Gender Equality Laws:** Ensure effective enforcement of existing laws and policies that promote gender equality and women's empowerment. This

includes providing resources for monitoring and evaluation to track progress and address gaps.

- **Enhance Women's Leadership Training:** Expand training programs that equip women with the skills, knowledge, and confidence to participate in public life and decision-making processes. These programs should focus on leadership development, public speaking, advocacy, and negotiation skills.
- **Foster Gender-Responsive Governance:** Promote gender-responsive governance practices that prioritize women's needs and perspectives in policy-making and planning. This includes creating inclusive spaces for women to voice their opinions, concerns, and priorities.
- **Review of the PEA, 2022** to clearly indicate the positioning of women in the list and not leave it to the discretion of political parties, candidature lists to be displayed early enough, like the voter register display, for aspirants to know whether and where they are put on the list and proper unisex naming identification by sex, were recommended by interviewees and participants.

Please describe your country's current national women's machinery (government entity exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women) and describe the measures that your country taken over the past five years to establish and/or strengthen it.

In the narrative report, please provide a summary of the evolution of your country's national machinery for gender equality, its mandate, location within government, current budget (in local currency and as a proportion of total government spending). Where relevant and possible, please provide data to support your responses. (2 pages max.)

Highlight of Achievements

Over the past five years, Sierra Leone has made significant efforts to establish and strengthen its national women's machinery, a government entity dedicated to promoting gender equality and empowering women. Following the 2018 general elections, the president made a strategic decision to separate the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender, and Children's Affairs. As a result, the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs emerged as a standalone ministry, emphasizing its dedication to advancing and safeguarding the rights of women and children under the age of 18. This restructuring underscores the government's commitment to prioritizing gender equality, women's empowerment, and child protection within the country's policy framework. By elevating the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs to an independent entity, Sierra Leone demonstrates its focused approach towards addressing the specific needs and challenges faced by women and children, ensuring their rights are upheld and promoted effectively.

The country's current national women's machinery is the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs (MoGCA). The MoGCA plays a crucial role in formulating policies, programs, and initiatives to advance gender equality, protect women's rights, and empower women across various sectors.

To bolster the effectiveness of the MoGCA and enhance its capacity to promote gender equality, Sierra Leone has implemented several measures in recent years. One key initiative was the development of the National Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy 2020, which guides government ministries and agencies in integrating gender perspectives into their policies, programs, and projects. This policy has helped mainstream gender considerations in decision-making processes and ensure that women's needs and priorities are addressed.

Additionally, Sierra Leone has worked to increase the budget allocation to the MoGCA to support its activities and programs aimed at advancing gender equality. The government has also collaborated with civil society organizations and international partners to strengthen the capacity of the MoGCA in advocating for women's rights, providing support services to women, and promoting gender-responsive governance.

Challenges

Despite these efforts, Sierra Leone faces challenges in fully realizing the potential of its national women's machinery. One major challenge is the limited resources and capacity of the MoGCA to effectively implement its mandate. Insufficient funding, staffing shortages, and inadequate infrastructure hinder the ministry's ability to carry out its programs and initiatives effectively.

Recommendations for Action

To address these challenges and further strengthen the national women's machinery in Sierra Leone, the following recommendations can be considered:

- **Increase Funding and Resources:** Allocate adequate financial resources and human capital to the MoGCA to enhance its capacity to promote gender equality and empower women effectively.
- **Enhance Coordination and Collaboration:** Foster greater coordination and collaboration between the MoGCA, other government agencies, civil society organizations, and international partners to leverage expertise, resources, and support for gender equality initiatives.
- **Monitor and Evaluate Impact:** Establish robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track the impact of the MoGCA's programs and initiatives on gender equality outcomes. This will help identify areas for improvement and ensure accountability in promoting women's empowerment.

In the past five years, what other mechanisms and tools has your country used to mainstream gender equality across sectors? (e.g. gender focal points in the Executive, Legislature or Judiciary; inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms; gender audits, consultations with women's organizations)

In the narrative report, please provide details of up to three concrete examples of measures taken, including aims and scope of measures, target population, budget, impact evaluations, lesson learnt, and links to further information. Please also provide information about actions for specific groups, such as those listed in question 3. Where relevant and possible, please provide data to support your responses. (2 pages max.)

Highlight of Achievements

In the past five years, Sierra Leone has employed various mechanisms and tools to mainstream gender equality across sectors, aiming to promote women's rights and ensure gender inclusivity in all aspects of society. One significant approach utilized by the country is the establishment of gender focal points within government ministries, departments, and agencies.

Gender focal points serve as key individuals within organizations responsible for mainstreaming gender equality considerations into policies, programs, and projects. These focal points play a crucial role in advocating for gender-sensitive approaches, conducting gender analyses, and monitoring the implementation of gender mainstreaming initiatives within their respective institutions. Capacity building initiatives for gender focal points have been led by the Ministry of MoGCA with technical support from UN Women and financial support from Irish Aid

Additionally, Sierra Leone has integrated gender equality into its national development strategies and frameworks. The country has adopted a Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy that outlines specific actions and targets to advance gender equality across various sectors, including education, health, employment, and governance.

Furthermore, Sierra Leone has prioritized gender-responsive budgeting as a tool to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. By incorporating gender perspectives into budget planning and allocation processes, the country aims to ensure that resources are allocated equitably to address the specific needs and priorities of women and girls.

In recent years, Sierra Leone has also focused on enhancing data collection and analysis on gender issues to inform evidence-based policymaking and programming. The country has invested in generating sex-disaggregated data to better understand the disparities and challenges faced by women and men in different sectors, thus enabling targeted interventions to promote gender equality.

By utilizing these mechanisms and tools, Sierra Leone has made strides in mainstreaming gender equality across sectors and advancing women's rights. The country's commitment to gender

mainstreaming is essential for fostering an inclusive and equitable society where women and men have equal opportunities to thrive and contribute to national development.

Challenges

In the efforts to mainstream gender equality in Sierra Leone over the past five years, while mechanisms like gender focal points, gender-responsive budgeting, and data collection have been instrumental, there have been challenges that need to be addressed to further advance gender equality in the country.

One of the primary challenges faced is the inadequate capacity and resources allocated to gender focal points within government institutions. To enhance the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming, it is crucial to provide these focal points with sufficient training, support, and resources to carry out their responsibilities effectively.

Another challenge is the persistence of gender stereotypes and cultural norms that hinder progress towards gender equality. Addressing deep-rooted beliefs and practices that perpetuate gender inequality requires comprehensive awareness-raising campaigns, community engagement, and education initiatives to promote gender-sensitive attitudes and behaviors.

Furthermore, limited coordination and collaboration among stakeholders working on gender equality initiatives pose a challenge to achieving holistic and sustainable outcomes. Enhancing coordination mechanisms, fostering partnerships between government agencies, civil society organizations, and the private sector, and promoting multi-sectoral approaches are essential to maximize the impact of gender mainstreaming efforts.

Recommendations for Action

Recommendations for action to overcome these challenges may include:

- **Strengthening institutional capacity:** Invest in training programs, resources, and support for gender focal points to enhance their skills and knowledge in mainstreaming gender equality within their respective organizations.
- **Promoting gender-transformative approaches:** Implement targeted campaigns and interventions to challenge harmful gender stereotypes, promote gender equality, and empower women and girls to realize their full potential.
- **Enhancing coordination and collaboration:** Foster partnerships and networks among stakeholders involved in gender equality initiatives to ensure a cohesive and integrated approach towards advancing gender equality across sectors.
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** Establish robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track progress, measure impact, and identify areas for improvement in gender mainstreaming efforts.

If there is a national human rights institution in your country, what measures has it taken to address violations of women’s rights and promote gender equality?

In the narrative report, please provide details of up to three concrete examples of measures taken, including aims and scope of measures, target population, budget, impact evaluations, lesson learnt, and links to further information. In doing so, countries are encouraged to report on the institution's role in promoting women's rights in national legislation and policies. Please also provide information about actions for specific groups, such as those listed in question 3. Where relevant and possible, please provide data to support your responses. (2 pages max.)

Highlight of Achievement

Over the years, Sierra Leone has taken significant steps to address violations of women's rights and promote gender equality through its national human rights institution, the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL). The HRCSL plays a vital role in safeguarding human rights, including women's rights, and advocating for gender equality in the country.

To address violations of women's rights and promote gender equality, the HRCSL has implemented various measures in collaboration with government agencies, civil society organizations, and international partners. One key initiative undertaken by the HRCSL is the establishment of a dedicated Women's Rights Division within the commission. This division focuses on addressing issues such as gender-based violence, discrimination against women, and access to justice for women.

Furthermore, the HRCSL has conducted awareness campaigns and training programs to educate the public, government officials, and law enforcement agencies on women's rights and gender equality. These initiatives aim to raise awareness about women's rights, empower women to claim their rights, and promote a culture of respect for gender equality in Sierra Leone.

Challenges

Despite these efforts, the HRCSL faces challenges in effectively addressing violations of women's rights and promoting gender equality. One significant challenge is the limited resources and capacity of the commission to handle the increasing number of complaints related to women's rights violations. Insufficient funding, staffing shortages, and logistical constraints hinder the HRCSL's ability to investigate complaints thoroughly and provide timely redress to women affected by rights violations.

Recommendations

To enhance the effectiveness of the HRCSL in addressing violations of women's rights and promoting gender equality, the following recommendations can be considered:

- **Strengthen Institutional Capacity:** Provide adequate funding and resources to the HRCSL to enhance its capacity to investigate complaints, conduct research on women's rights issues, and advocate for policy reforms to promote gender equality.

- **Enhance Collaboration:** Foster greater collaboration between the HRCSL, government agencies, civil society organizations, and women's rights groups to coordinate efforts in addressing women's rights violations and advancing gender equality.
- **Improve Access to Justice:** Ensure that women have access to legal aid services, support mechanisms, and safe spaces to report violations of their rights and seek redress. Strengthening the justice system's responsiveness to women's rights issues is crucial in promoting gender equality.

In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to build and sustain peace, promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development and implement the women, peace and security agenda?

In the narrative report, please provide details of up to three concrete examples of measures taken, including aims and scope of measures, target population, budget, impact evaluations, lesson learnt, and links to further information, including specific actions related to National Action Planning on 1325 and the WPS Humanitarian Action Compact. Please also provide information about actions for specific groups, such as those listed in question 3. Where relevant and possible, please provide data to support your responses. (2 pages max.)

Highlight of Achievement

In the last five years, Sierra Leone has made significant strides in building and sustaining peace, promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, and implementing the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda. The country has demonstrated a commitment to these goals through various actions and initiatives.

Sierra Leone became the 4th country in West Africa and the 7th in Africa to develop a national action plan for the full implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325. The first action plan was crafted as a five-year plan in 2014, followed by the second-generation plan that was finalized in 2019. After the expiration of SILNAP 1 in 2014, the second generation was developed, building formally on the final evaluation of SILNAP 1 in the country's ministering and evaluation report, focusing on achievements, gaps, and emerging issues.

The formulation of SILNAP 2 was an all-inclusive process led by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender, and Children's Affairs (MSWGCA) with support from the National Steering Committee constituted to oversee the implementation and monitoring of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda. Major activities included orientations, consultations, sectoral reviews, drafting of the plan, and validation workshops. This comprehensive approach ensured that the second generation plan addressed key issues and built upon the successes and challenges identified in the first plan, enhancing the country's commitment to promoting women's rights and gender equality.

Sierra Leone has focused on post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation efforts following the civil war that ended in 2002. Over the past five years, the government has prioritized initiatives to address the root causes of conflict, promote social cohesion, and strengthen institutions to prevent a resurgence of violence. These efforts have included the establishment of truth and reconciliation processes, community dialogues, and peacebuilding programs to foster unity and healing among different groups in society. The Government has also established Independent Commission on Peace and Social Cohesion .

In terms of promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, Sierra Leone has implemented strategies to enhance good governance, rule of law, and access to justice. The country has worked towards improving transparency, accountability, and citizen participation in decision-making processes. Efforts have been made to strengthen democratic institutions, promote human rights, and combat corruption to create an enabling environment for sustainable development and peace.

Regarding the implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda, Sierra Leone has taken steps to empower women, promote gender equality, and ensure the meaningful participation of women in peacebuilding and decision-making processes. The government has adopted policies and legislation to address gender-based violence, increase women's representation in political and peacebuilding processes, and provide support for women affected by conflict. Sierra Leone has also integrated gender perspectives into security sector reform and peacebuilding efforts to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of peace initiatives. Sierra Leone has validated and finalized its third generation National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 and 1820 for full implementation. The Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) has demonstrated commitment to women's empowerment in so many ways including the recruitment of 300 all-female personnel in 2019. RSLAF recognises the role of women, and are working towards making the service women realise their full potential.

Challenges

Despite these positive actions, Sierra Leone still faces challenges in its peacebuilding and development efforts. One key challenge is the persistence of structural inequalities, including limited access to basic services, economic opportunities, and social protection for marginalized groups. Addressing these disparities requires targeted interventions to promote inclusive development and ensure that the benefits of peacebuilding efforts reach all segments of society.

Recommendations for Action

Recommendations for action include:

- Strengthening social cohesion: Enhance efforts to promote dialogue, reconciliation, and social cohesion among diverse communities to build trust and understanding.

- Investing in youth empowerment: Prioritize programs that empower young people, provide education and skills training, and create opportunities for youth to actively participate in peacebuilding and development processes.
- Enhancing women's participation: Increase support for women's leadership, representation, and engagement in decision-making at all levels to ensure their voices are heard in peacebuilding efforts.
- Reviewing existing policies within security forces to protect women within the forces.

In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to integrate gender perspectives and concerns into environmental policies, including climate change adaptation and mitigation, biodiversity conservation and land degradation?

In the narrative report, please provide details of up to three concrete examples of measures taken, including aims and scope of measures, target population, budget, impact evaluations, lesson learnt, and links to further information. Please also provide information about actions for specific groups, such as those listed in question 3. Where relevant and possible, please provide data to support your responses. (2 pages max.)

Highlight of Achievement

In the past five years, Sierra Leone has shown a commitment to integrating gender perspectives into environmental policies, focusing on climate change adaptation and mitigation, biodiversity conservation, and addressing land degradation. The country has recognized the importance of considering gender-specific impacts and ensuring women's participation in environmental decision-making processes.

Sierra Leone has taken steps to incorporate gender considerations into climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies. The government has worked to assess the differential impacts of climate change on men and women, recognizing that women often bear a disproportionate burden in climate-related disasters. Efforts have been made to empower women in climate-resilient agriculture, promote sustainable energy solutions, and increase women's participation in climate change initiatives.

In terms of biodiversity conservation, Sierra Leone has made efforts to involve women in conservation and sustainable resource management practices. The country has implemented programs to enhance women's knowledge and skills in biodiversity conservation, promote sustainable livelihoods, and ensure equitable access to natural resources. By engaging women as key stakeholders in conservation efforts, Sierra Leone aims to protect biodiversity while advancing gender equality.

Laws and policy to integrate gender perspectives into environmental issues

In the past years, the government of Sierra Leone has made significant strides in integrating gender perspectives into environmental policies and programs. Some of the key actions taken

include the government has taken steps to strengthen women's land rights, as access to land is crucial for sustainable resource management and conservation efforts. Through the development and enact the following laws:

The Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy 2020

The GEWE policy is a lawful reference point for addressing gender inequalities by all stakeholders at the national and community levels and family units throughout the country. It calls for equal access for women, men, boys, and girls to opportunities across all areas of the economy. In addition, it emphasizes the need for gender-responsive budgeting in the public and private sectors. It further clarifies the roles and responsibilities of the Gender Management Structures and ensures that a gender perspective is mainstreamed in national development plans and sectoral policies and strategies, supported by monitoring and evaluation (M&E) indicators that are designed to benchmark the performance of stakeholders on gender equality and equity. Pillar 6 (Gender, the Environment, and Disaster Management) talks about integrating gender issues into environmental issues.

The National Land Policy 2015

The NLP aims to enable more inclusive agricultural systems as regards land tenure and gender issues. One of the guiding principles is to ensure equal rights of women and men in the enjoyment of all human rights, acknowledge differences between women and men, and take specific measures to accelerate de facto equality where discrimination exists. Further, the NLP ensures equal tenure rights and access to land for women and girls independent of their civil or marital status. Regards land rights for vulnerable groups and minorities. The Government has facilitated and promoted indigenous knowledge and built the capacity of customary tenure institutions to enhance land governance in all areas consistent with the principles and aspirations expressed by the National Land Policy.

The National Land Commission Act 2022

The Act makes provision for the establishment of the National Land Commission, the District Land Commission, and other land administrative bodies to secure effective and holistic land administration and to provide for other related matters. In all of these bodies for each of bodies, three women should be assigned to serve in the committees designed to protect the land administrations.

The Customary Land Rights 2022

This Act explicitly provides for the protection of customary land rights, the elimination of discrimination under customary law, and the management and administration of land subject to customary law. In particular, this law guarantees women's equal rights and access to land and bans industrial development (mining, plantations, farming, and housing) in protected, conserved or ecologically sensitive areas (wetlands, wildlife habitats, steep slopes and old-growth or virgin forests)

Environmental Protection Agency Act:

After the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency office, an act was enacted to help the full running of the agency. The law establishes the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), to highlight the roles and responsibilities of the agency which includes regulating and overseeing environmental issues in the country.

Forest Laws and Regulations 2010: Forest Laws and Regulations 2010 were adopted to help protect the forests and control deforestation, including the Forestry Act and the National Protected Area Authority Act.

Wildlife Conservation Laws: The Wildlife Conservation Act and the Endangered Species Act regulate the conservation and protection of wildlife in Sierra Leone.

Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan: Sierra Leone has developed a national strategy and action plan for biodiversity conservation to improve the management of its natural resources and biodiversity.

Climate Change Policy: The government has a climate change policy aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions, adapting to climate change impacts, and promoting sustainable development.

National Environmental Policy: Sierra Leone has a national environmental policy that outlines the government's commitment to sustainable development, environmental protection, and natural resource management.

Waste Management Strategy: The country has a waste management strategy to promote proper waste disposal, recycling, and composting to reduce pollution and protect public health

Addressing land degradation has also been a priority for Sierra Leone in the past five years. The country has worked to integrate gender perspectives into land use planning, soil conservation, and reforestation projects. Efforts have been made to secure land rights for women, promote sustainable land management practices, and involve women in reforestation initiatives to combat deforestation and land degradation.

Challenges

Despite these efforts, Sierra Leone faces challenges in fully integrating gender perspectives into environmental policies. One challenge is the limited participation of women in decision-making processes related to environmental management and climate change adaptation. Gender stereotypes, unequal access to resources, and institutional barriers hinder women's meaningful involvement in shaping environmental policies and programs.

Recommendations for Action

Recommendations for action include:

- Enhancing gender mainstreaming: Strengthen mechanisms to ensure the systematic integration of gender perspectives into environmental policies and programs, including targeted capacity-building for policymakers and stakeholders.
- Promoting women's leadership: Increase support for women's leadership roles in environmental decision-making bodies, providing opportunities for women to influence policies and strategies related to climate change adaptation, biodiversity conservation, and land degradation.
- Improving data collection: Enhance efforts to collect sex-disaggregated data and conduct gender analyses to better understand the specific needs, roles, and contributions of women in environmental management and sustainable development.
- Ensuring gender-responsive budgeting: Allocate adequate resources to support gender-sensitive approaches in environmental initiatives, ensuring that funding mechanisms prioritize gender equality and women's empowerment in climate change adaptation, biodiversity conservation, and land degradation efforts.

In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to integrate gender perspectives into policies and programmes for disaster risk reduction and building environmental and climate resilience?

In the narrative report, please provide details of up to three concrete examples of measures taken, including aims and scope of measures, target population, budget, impact evaluations, lesson learnt, and links to further information. Please also provide information about actions for specific groups, such as those listed in question 3. Where relevant and possible, please provide data to support your responses. (2 pages max.)

Highlight of Achievement

In the past five years, Sierra Leone has made significant strides in integrating gender perspectives into policies and programs for disaster risk reduction and building environmental and climate resilience. The country has recognized the importance of addressing gender-specific vulnerabilities in the face of disasters and climate change, aiming to ensure that women are actively involved in decision-making processes and benefit equitably from resilience-building efforts.

Sierra Leone has taken concrete actions to incorporate gender considerations into disaster risk reduction initiatives. The government has worked to assess and address the unique vulnerabilities of women and men in disaster-prone areas, recognizing that gender inequalities can exacerbate the impacts of disasters. Efforts have been made to strengthen women's leadership in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery, as well as to enhance women's access to early warning systems and resources for resilience-building.

In terms of building environmental and climate resilience, Sierra Leone has implemented programs that prioritize gender equality and women's empowerment. The country has focused

on enhancing women's participation in sustainable natural resource management, promoting climate-resilient agriculture practices, and ensuring that women have access to clean energy solutions. By involving women as active agents of change in resilience-building efforts, Sierra Leone aims to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of climate adaptation strategies.

Challenges

Despite progress, Sierra Leone faces challenges in fully integrating gender perspectives into disaster risk reduction and resilience-building programs. One challenge is the persistence of gender stereotypes and social norms that limit women's participation and decision-making power in disaster management and climate resilience initiatives. Additionally, inadequate data on gender-specific vulnerabilities and limited resources for gender-responsive programming pose obstacles to effectively addressing gender disparities in disaster and climate resilience contexts.

Recommendations for Action

Recommendations for action may include:

- **Strengthening gender-responsive policies:** Enhance the integration of gender perspectives into disaster risk reduction and resilience-building policies, ensuring that they address the specific needs and priorities of women and men in vulnerable communities.
- **Capacity-building and awareness-raising:** Provide training and awareness programs to build the capacity of policymakers, practitioners, and community members on gender-sensitive approaches to disaster management and climate resilience, fostering a more inclusive and equitable response to environmental challenges.
- **Enhancing women's participation:** Promote women's meaningful participation in decision-making processes related to disaster risk reduction and resilience-building, creating opportunities for women to contribute their knowledge, skills, and experiences to shaping effective and sustainable strategies.
- **Investing in gender-sensitive research and data collection:** Improve data collection systems to capture gender-disaggregated information on vulnerabilities, capacities, and impacts of disasters and climate change, enabling evidence-based decision-making and targeted interventions that address gender inequalities

What are the most important areas in which your country has made most progress over the past five years when it comes to gender statistics at the national level?

In the narrative report, please provide details of up to three concrete examples of measures taken, including aims and scope of measures, budget, impact evaluations, lesson learnt, and links to further information. Please also provide information about actions for specific groups, such as those listed in question 3. Where relevant and possible, please provide data to support your responses. (2 pages max.)

Highlight of Achievement

Over the past five years, Sierra Leone has made significant progress in various key areas concerning gender statistics at the national level. One of the most notable advancements has been the improvement in data collection and reporting on gender-related indicators. The country has enhanced its capacity to gather, analyze, and disseminate gender-disaggregated data across different sectors, providing a more comprehensive understanding of gender disparities and inequalities.

Sierra Leone has also made strides in promoting gender equality in education. Efforts have been focused on increasing girls' access to quality education, reducing gender gaps in enrollment rates, and addressing barriers that hinder girls' educational advancement. The government has implemented policies and programs to support girls' education, including initiatives to combat gender-based violence in schools and promote girls' retention and completion rates.

Sierra Leone is a pilot on Time-Use Survey (TUS) that was conducted in 2023 in Western Area Urban and Rural. The study gathers data on how individuals assign and spend their time on diverse activities during the day, and thus provides detailed information on their daily lives. The outcome is extremely useful in official statistics, especially when it shows the different and associated roles, responsibilities and circumstances of men and women; as well as their social lives.

The growing importance of the collection on time-use data is to development and integral all TUS indicators in achieving the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5. Target 5.4 calls for recognizing, reducing and redistributing unpaid care work as a condition for achieving gender equality.

Statistics Sierra Leone wants to expand on the pilot study to national. This data will help to inform government, policy makers, and development partners to have a time use data that will inform their intervention.

Statistics Sierra Leone in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender and Children Affaires trained all Local Councils and MDAs on gender statistics. The main objective of the training is to capacitate councils and MDAs on how they can integrate gender indicators and gender mainstreaming in public sector. The activity was done in 2023.

In 2020, Statistics Sierra Leone received funding from UN Women to conduct a Rapid Gender Assessment on the Impact of Covid-19 pandemic in Sierra Leone. The objective of the study is to understand the gender impact of Covid-19 on men, women, boys and girls.

In 2021, Statistics Sierra Leone received funding from UNDP to conduct a study on Sexual and Gender Base Violence (SGBV) in Sierra Leone. The objective of the study is to understand the prevalence, incidence, trends and patterns of SGBV.

Statistics Sierra Leone is planning to embark on routine data collection to identify all gender data gaps at national level with funding from World Bank through the Harmonizing and Improving Statistics in West Africa (HISWA).

Challenges

Despite these advancements, Sierra Leone faces challenges in the realm of gender statistics at the national level.

- One of the primary obstacles is the limited availability and reliability of gender-disaggregated data in certain sectors, which hinders the accurate monitoring and evaluation of gender equality initiatives.
- Staff capacity building on how to collect, compile and analyses gender statistics.
- Limited data on gender statistics at national level to compare with other countries when it comes to gender data request.
- Inadequate funding on routine data collection of gender disaggregated indicators.
- Weak collaboration with gender data producers and users at national level

Recommendations for Action

Recommendations for action include:

- **Strengthening data collection systems:** Invest in improving the quality and coverage of gender statistics by enhancing data collection methodologies, expanding data sources, and ensuring the regular publication of gender-disaggregated data to inform evidence-based policymaking.
- **Enhancing gender mainstreaming efforts:** Integrate gender perspectives into all stages of policy development and implementation to address gender disparities comprehensively across various sectors, including education, health, employment, and social protection.
- **Promoting gender-sensitive research:** Support research initiatives that focus on generating data and evidence on key gender issues, such as women's empowerment, gender-based violence, and women's participation in decision-making, to inform targeted interventions and programs.
- **Building institutional capacity:** Provide training and technical assistance to strengthen the capacity of government agencies, research institutions, and civil society organizations in collecting, analyzing, and utilizing gender statistics effectively, fostering a culture of data-driven gender equality programming.

What formal mechanisms are in place for different stakeholders to participate in the implementation and monitoring of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?

In the narrative report, please describe participatory processes and mechanisms, including their impact on the implementation of the BPfA and the 2030 Agenda. Please also describe any mechanisms that are in place to ensure that women and girls from marginalized groups (listed under question 3 above) can participate and that their concerns are reflected in these processes. (1 page max.)

Highlight of Achievement

Over the past few years, Sierra Leone has established formal mechanisms to engage various stakeholders in the implementation and monitoring of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. These mechanisms aim to ensure multi-stakeholder participation, transparency, and accountability in advancing gender equality and sustainable development in the country.

One key mechanism for stakeholder engagement is the establishment of national gender machinery, such as the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs (MoGCA). MoGCA plays a crucial role in coordinating gender mainstreaming efforts, promoting women's empowerment, and monitoring the implementation of gender-related policies and programs. The ministry collaborates with government agencies, civil society organizations, and development partners to advance gender equality and women's rights in line with international commitments.

Sierra Leone has also set up platforms for civil society engagement, including women's rights organizations, youth groups, and community-based associations. These stakeholders actively participate in policy dialogue, advocacy campaigns, and program implementation to ensure that the voices of marginalized groups, including women and girls, are heard and considered in decision-making processes. Civil society plays a vital role in holding the government accountable for its commitments to gender equality and sustainable development.

Challenges

Challenges persist in the effective engagement of stakeholders in the implementation and monitoring of gender equality and sustainable development agendas in Sierra Leone. Limited resources, capacity constraints, and institutional fragmentation pose obstacles to meaningful stakeholder participation and coordination. Additionally, there is a need to enhance the representation and inclusion of marginalized groups, such as rural women, persons with disabilities, and indigenous communities, in decision-making processes to ensure that their specific needs and priorities are addressed.

Recommendation for Action

Recommendations for action include:

- Strengthening multi-stakeholder partnerships: Foster collaboration among government agencies, civil society organizations, academia, private sector entities, and development

partners to leverage collective expertise, resources, and networks in advancing gender equality and sustainable development goals.

- Enhancing capacity-building initiatives: Provide training and technical support to different stakeholders to enhance their knowledge, skills, and capacity in gender mainstreaming, data collection, monitoring, and evaluation to facilitate evidence-based decision-making and programming.
- Promoting inclusivity and diversity: Ensure the meaningful participation and representation of diverse stakeholder groups, including women, youth, persons with disabilities, and marginalized communities, in policy development, implementation, and monitoring processes to address intersectional gender inequalities and promote social inclusion.

Please describe your country's system for tracking the proportion of the national budget that is invested in the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women (gender-responsive budgeting), including the approximate proportion of the national budget that is invested in this area.

In the narrative report, where possible, please provide disaggregated information and data on resources allocated to specific critical areas of the BPfA as well as reflections on achievements and challenges encountered in making budgets gender responsive. (2 pages max.)

Highlight of Achievement

Sierra Leone has made strides in tracking the proportion of the national budget allocated to promoting gender equality and empowering women through gender-responsive budgeting initiatives. The country has established mechanisms to integrate gender considerations into budget planning, implementation, and monitoring processes to ensure that resources are allocated effectively to advance gender equality goals.

Approximately 0.2% of the national budget in Sierra Leone is invested in initiatives that promote gender equality and empower women. This allocation reflects the government's commitment to addressing gender disparities and promoting women's rights across various sectors, including education, health, employment, and social protection. By tracking this proportion of the budget, Sierra Leone aims to enhance transparency, accountability, and the impact of public spending on gender equality outcomes.

Challenges

Despite progress in gender-responsive budgeting, Sierra Leone faces challenges in effectively tracking and maximizing the impact of budget allocations on gender equality and women's empowerment. Limited capacity and expertise in gender analysis, inadequate data collection systems, and weak coordination among government agencies hinder the accurate assessment of budget allocations' gender responsiveness. Furthermore, the lack of awareness and

understanding of gender-responsive budgeting principles among key stakeholders poses a barrier to mainstreaming gender considerations in budget processes.

Recommendation for Action

To address these challenges and enhance the effectiveness of gender-responsive budgeting in Sierra Leone, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **Strengthening institutional capacity:** Build the capacity of government agencies, particularly the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, in gender analysis, budgeting techniques, and monitoring and evaluation to ensure that gender considerations are integrated into all stages of the budget cycle effectively.
- **Improving data collection and analysis:** Enhance data collection systems to capture gender-disaggregated information on budget allocations and expenditures to facilitate evidence-based decision-making and policy formulation. Invest in research and data analysis to assess the impact of budget allocations on gender equality outcomes.
- **Promoting stakeholder engagement:** Foster dialogue and collaboration among government entities, civil society organizations, women's groups, and development partners to promote transparency, accountability, and participation in gender-responsive budgeting processes. Encourage meaningful engagement of women and marginalized groups in budget planning and monitoring to ensure their needs and priorities are adequately addressed.

In the last five years, what actions has your country taken to eliminate discrimination against and violations of the rights of the girl child, including adolescent girls?

In the narrative report, please provide details of up to three concrete examples of measures taken, including aims and scope of measures, target population, budget, impact evaluations, lesson learnt, and links to further information. Please also provide information about actions for specific groups, such as those listed in question 3. Where relevant and possible, please provide data to support your responses. (2 pages max.)

Highlight of Achievement

Sierra Leone has undertaken several actions in the past five years to combat discrimination against and violence towards the rights of the girl child, particularly adolescent girls. The government has implemented policies and programs aimed at promoting gender equality, protecting the rights of girls, and addressing issues such as child marriage, female genital mutilation, and gender-based violence.

One significant action taken by Sierra Leone is the enactment of the Sexual Offences Act in 2019, which provides legal protection for girls and women against sexual violence and exploitation. This legislation represents a crucial step towards safeguarding the rights of adolescent girls and ensuring perpetrators are held accountable for their actions.

Additionally, the government has launched awareness campaigns and educational initiatives to raise awareness about the importance of girls' rights and the negative impact of discrimination and violence. These efforts aim to change societal attitudes, promote gender equality, and empower girls to assert their rights and access education and healthcare services.

Challenges

Despite these efforts, Sierra Leone faces challenges in eliminating discrimination against and violence towards the rights of the girl child. Limited access to education, entrenched cultural norms and practices, inadequate enforcement of existing laws, and weak support systems for victims hinder progress in addressing these issues effectively.

Recommendations for Action

To overcome these challenges and further advance the rights of the girl child, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **Strengthening legal frameworks:** Enhance the implementation and enforcement of existing laws protecting girls' rights, including the Sexual Offences Act, by providing training for law enforcement officials, judges, and prosecutors. Ensure that perpetrators of gender-based violence are swiftly brought to justice.
- **Investing in education and awareness:** Increase investment in girls' education and awareness-raising programs to promote gender equality, challenge harmful stereotypes, and empower girls to assert their rights. Collaborate with schools, communities, and civil society organizations to provide comprehensive sexuality education and support services for adolescent girls.
- **Providing support services:** Establish and strengthen support systems for victims of gender-based violence, including shelters, counseling services, and legal aid. Ensure that girls have access to safe spaces where they can seek help, receive support, and access essential services to recover from trauma and rebuild their lives.

In the last five years, what actions has your country taken to enhance judicial and non-judicial accountability for violations of international humanitarian law and violations of the human rights of women and girls in situations of armed and other conflicts or humanitarian action and crisis response?

In the narrative report, please provide details of up to three concrete examples of measures taken, including aims and scope of measures, target population, budget, impact evaluations, lesson learnt, and links to further information. Please also provide information about actions for specific groups, such as those listed in question 3. Where relevant and possible, please provide data to support your responses. (2 pages max.)

Highlight Achievement

Sierra Leone has made notable efforts in the past five years to strengthen both judicial and non-judicial accountability for violations of international humanitarian law and human rights, particularly concerning women and girls in situations of armed conflicts and humanitarian crises. The country has taken steps to address these issues through various mechanisms and initiatives aimed at ensuring justice and protection for women and girls affected by conflict.

One key action taken by Sierra Leone is the establishment of special courts and tribunals to prosecute individuals responsible for human rights violations and crimes against women and girls during armed conflicts. These specialized legal mechanisms have played a crucial role in holding perpetrators accountable and delivering justice for victims, contributing to the promotion of accountability and the rule of law.

Moreover, Sierra Leone has actively engaged in capacity-building programs for judicial and law enforcement personnel to enhance their knowledge and skills in handling cases related to violations of international humanitarian law and human rights abuses against women and girls. By providing training and support, the country aims to strengthen the legal system's ability to address these complex issues effectively.

Challenges

Despite these efforts, Sierra Leone faces challenges in enhancing accountability for violations of international humanitarian law and human rights of women and girls in conflict settings. Challenges include limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, gaps in legal frameworks, and the need for greater coordination among relevant stakeholders to address these issues comprehensively.

Recommendations for Action

To address these challenges and further improve accountability for violations against women and girls in conflict and humanitarian settings, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **Strengthening legal frameworks:** Enhance existing laws and policies to align with international humanitarian law standards and human rights principles, ensuring comprehensive protection for women and girls in conflict situations. Implement mechanisms to investigate, prosecute, and punish perpetrators of gender-based violence and human rights violations.
- **Enhancing support services:** Expand access to essential support services for women and girls affected by conflict, including psychosocial support, healthcare, legal aid, and economic empowerment programs. Establish safe spaces and shelters where survivors can seek refuge and receive assistance to recover from trauma and rebuild their lives.
- **Promoting awareness and education:** Conduct awareness campaigns and educational programs to raise awareness about the rights of women and girls in conflict settings, combat harmful gender stereotypes, and promote gender equality. Collaborate with local

communities, civil society organizations, and international partners to advocate for the protection and empowerment of women and girls in conflict-affected areas.

In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to increase women’s access to expression and participation in decision-making in the media, including through information and communication technologies (ICT)?

In the narrative report, please provide details of up to three concrete examples of measures taken, including aims and scope of measures, target population, budget, impact evaluations, lesson learnt, and links to further information. Please also provide information about actions for specific groups, such as those listed in question 3. Where relevant and possible, please provide data to support your responses. (2 pages max.)

Highlight of Achievements

Over the past five years, Sierra Leone has made significant strides in promoting women's access to expression and participation in decision-making in the media, including through information and communication technology (ICT). The country has implemented various initiatives to empower women in the media sector and enhance their representation in decision-making roles.

One key action taken by Sierra Leone is the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment in the media industry. Efforts have been made to increase the visibility of women in media outlets, both traditional and digital, by providing platforms for their voices to be heard and their perspectives to be shared. This has contributed to a more diverse and inclusive media landscape that reflects the experiences and viewpoints of women in society.

Furthermore, Sierra Leone has focused on capacity-building programs and training opportunities for women in the media sector, equipping them with the skills and knowledge needed to excel in various roles within the industry. By offering training in journalism, digital media, and ICT, the country has aimed to bridge the gender gap in media representation and empower women to actively participate in decision-making processes.

Challenges

Despite these positive steps, Sierra Leone still faces challenges in increasing women's access to expression and participation in the media. Challenges include limited access to resources and technology, gender stereotypes and biases in the media sector, lack of mentorship opportunities for women journalists, and insufficient support for women-owned media enterprises.

Recommendations for Action

To address these challenges and further enhance women's participation in the media sector, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Promoting gender-sensitive policies: Implement policies that promote gender equality in the media industry, including quotas for women's representation in decision-making positions, equal pay for equal work, and protection against gender-based discrimination and harassment.
- Providing mentorship and networking opportunities: Establish mentorship programs and networking initiatives to support women in the media sector, providing guidance, advice, and connections that can help them advance in their careers and access leadership positions.
- Investing in ICT infrastructure: Improve access to information and communication technology for women in the media, ensuring they have the tools and resources needed to amplify their voices, share their stories, and engage in decision-making processes effectively. This includes expanding internet connectivity, providing training in digital skills, and supporting the development of women-led digital media platforms.

In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to increase the leadership, representation and participation of women in conflict prevention, resolution, peacebuilding, humanitarian action and crisis response, at decision-making levels in situations of armed and other conflicts, and in fragile or crisis settings?

Highlight of Key Achievements

It is noted that there has been an improvement compared to the statistics from 2014-2018. However, the increase did not meet the 30% requirement outlined in the Sierra Leone Police gender mainstreaming policy of 2014. Despite this, there was a 17% female representation and participation in decision-making within the Sierra Leone Police at all levels between 2019-2023. A significant milestone was achieved in 2020-2022 when a female was appointed as the deputy inspector general of police, marking a positive step towards gender inclusivity in leadership roles. In 2019, there were three female assistant inspector generals of police/directors, but due to retirements, there is currently one female AIG and two females serving as directors, showcasing a continued presence of women in key positions within the Sierra Leone Police.

It is highlighted that the Sierra Leone Police gender mainstreaming and sexual exploitation abuse and harassment policies from 2014 were reviewed in 2023. The policies are currently under validation and approval processes to ensure they align with current needs and best practices. Additionally, efforts have been made to enhance gender responsiveness within the Sierra Leone Police by revamping the SL Gender unit, which now operates in 35 divisions and 10 departments/units. This unit plays a crucial role in supporting the SLP in addressing gender-related issues through activities such as talk shows, training sessions, and parade lectures, promoting a more inclusive and gender-sensitive approach within the police force.

Regarding resolutions, the Sierra Leone Police has actively engaged in maintaining and enhancing partnerships with stakeholders to strengthen community relations. Collaborative efforts through local policing partnership boards and area chiefdom initiatives have been instrumental in fostering trust,

cooperation, and effective communication between the police and the communities they serve, contributing to enhanced conflict prevention and resolution strategies in Sierra Leone.

There has been a notable 11% increase in women's representation and participation in the recent peacebuilding initiatives. Through the implementation of four batches of gender-responsive recruitment processes, there was a significant achievement with 29% female representation out of the total 3,206 recruits, consisting of 2,285 males and 922 females. To promote inclusiveness, these recruitment processes were decentralized, ensuring that opportunities are accessible and equitable for all individuals interested in contributing to peacebuilding efforts.

The SLP gender unit organized job fairs that played a crucial role in boosting female recruitment in the four batches of recruit training. Women in the police force actively participated in public order management tasks such as handling protest demonstrations and unlawful assemblies. Additionally, they were involved in disaster management efforts, including providing security for quarantined individuals during the fight against COVID-19 and supporting flood victims through sensitization programs. This active involvement of police women in various critical tasks showcases their dedication and contribution to maintaining peace and security in Sierra Leone.