

Cycle 4: UPR of SIERRA LEONE

Summary Document



SUBMITTING ORGANISATIONS: *Christian Brothers Development Office (CBDO), Sierra Leone; Edmund Rice International and VIVAT International*

Our first set of recommendations refer to the **Right to Quality Education:**

Since the last UPR review, Sierra Leone has advanced the right to education through the Free Quality School Education Programme and the Radical Inclusion Policy. However, significant challenges persist, including overcrowded and unsafe schools, teacher shortages, low pre-primary enrolment, high out-of-school rates, persistent gender barriers, to name a few.

We urge Member States to recommend that Sierra Leone:

- ❖ **Focus investment in education infrastructure and teacher development**, particularly in rural and marginalized areas, ensuring safe and inclusive classrooms, adequate WASH facilities, disability-accessible learning environments, and accelerated recruitment and training of qualified teachers.
- ❖ **Enhance education monitoring, accountability** and data-collection systems to track enrolment, retention and learning outcomes effectively, with particular attention to girls, children with disabilities and learners living in poverty, to ensure recent reforms deliver equitable and sustainable results.

Gender Equality: While Sierra Leone has implemented gender equality initiatives, like the **GEWE Act 2022**, the **Customary Land Rights Act (2022)** significant challenges persist in the effective implementation of these laws as **Customary law, cultural norms like child marriage and harmful practices like FGM still dominate**. Women face barriers to education, healthcare, economic opportunities and remain disproportionately confined to informal work, accounting for 96.6% of female employment

We urge Member States to recommend that Sierra Leone:

- ❖ **Strengthen and focus on the effective enforcement of laws** prohibiting child marriage and female genital mutilation through targeted monitoring in high-prevalence areas and by engaging traditional and religious leaders
- ❖ **Engage with Traditional leaders** and strengthen implementation of the Customary Land Rights Act (2022) ensuring **equal inheritance rights** for women and daughters especially in rural areas.
- ❖ **Ensure sustained, gender-responsive budgetary allocations and adequate staffing for the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs** to enhance enforcement of gender equality laws, coordination of prevention efforts, and delivery of comprehensive, survivor-centered support services.

Sexual and Gender Based Violence: While Sierra Leone has strengthened implementation through the 2019 declaration of rape as a national emergency, the establishment of dedicated institutions and services including the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs and expanded prevention efforts through community engagement, male involvement strategies, and the EU–UN Spotlight Initiative, **challenges** like weak law enforcement, cultural norms, and limited resources underscore Sierra Leone's ongoing struggle with sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

We urge Member States to recommend that Sierra Leone:

- ❖ **Continue efforts** to effectively implement the Sexual Offences Act of 2018 by strengthening the legal and institutional framework to prevent and combat sexual and gender-based violence, including through

enhanced investigations, prosecutions, accountability of perpetrators, and the provision of adequate financial and human resources to relevant institutions, including the National Commission on Violence Against Women.

- ❖ **Strengthen access** to comprehensive, survivor-centred support services for victims of sexual and gender-based violence, including medical, psychosocial, legal and shelter services, ensuring their availability and accessibility across the country, in particular in rural and underserved areas.
- ❖ **Intensify prevention efforts** to address sexual and gender-based violence, including by promoting gender equality, addressing harmful social and cultural norms, engaging communities, traditional and religious leaders and civil society organizations, and strengthening data collection and monitoring mechanisms to inform evidence-based policies and programmes.

Right to Health: While we commend the Government of Sierra Leone and its partners for initiatives like the Free Health Care Programme for mothers and children, national responses to HIV and AIDS, TB, malaria, enhanced vaccine coverage and advancing health and well-being under SDG 3, **we draw attention** to the maternal mortality crisis, the critically under-resourced health centers, severe doctor shortages especially in the rural areas.

We urge Member States to recommend that Sierra Leone:

- ❖ **Increase sustainable public investment in the health sector**, with particular emphasis on primary health care, maternal and child health services, and the consistent availability of essential medicines, emergency obstetric care, and functional referral and emergency response systems, especially in rural and underserved areas
- ❖ **Strengthen the health system by recruiting, deploying, and retaining qualified health workers** through improved conditions of service and incentives for rural postings, while reinforcing regulation, monitoring, and accountability mechanisms to ensure equitable, accessible, and quality health services for women, children and marginalized populations.

Right to Adequate Standard of Living: While Sierra Leone has implemented social protection programs, invested in infrastructure and agricultural development, many communities continue to lack access to basic services such as clean water, electricity, and healthcare while social protection schemes remain limited in scope and insufficient to cover the needs of vulnerable groups, particularly those affected by conflict and displacement.

We urge Member States to recommend that Sierra Leone:

- ❖ **Strengthen and expand social protection systems** to ensure effective, inclusive, and shock-responsive coverage of vulnerable and marginalized groups, including children, women, persons with disabilities, older persons, and rural populations, with a view to reducing poverty and inequalities and ensuring an adequate standard of living.
- ❖ **Accelerate equitable access to basic services and sustainable livelihoods** by improving access to safe water and sanitation, affordable energy, adequate housing, and essential services; increasing targeted support to smallholder farmers through access to credit, markets, and climate-resilient agricultural practices; and investing in rural infrastructure to promote food security, resilience, and poverty reduction.

While Sierra Leone has demonstrated political will and legislative progress, urgent and sustained action is required to translate commitments into lived realities especially for women, girls and rural communities.

We call on Member States to make strong, measurable recommendations to support Sierra Leone in fulfilling its human rights obligations.