



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

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

Pre-session working group

Thirty-eighth session

5-9 February 2007

**List of issues and questions with regard to the consideration  
of initial and periodic reports**

**Sierra Leone**

1. The pre-session working group examined the combined initial, second, third, fourth and fifth periodic report of Sierra Leone (CEDAW/C/SLE/1-5).

**General**

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

**Articles 1 and 2**

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

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

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

5. According to the report, many laws discriminate in purpose or effect against women, including the Matrimonial Act of 1960, the Administration of Estates Act and the Citizenship Act of 1973 (paras. 4.5.1 and 9.1.10). Please provide information on what steps the Government has taken or intends to take to identify and amend all laws that are discriminatory against women and not in compliance with the Convention, including the progress made in this regard by the Law Reform Commission.

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

### **Article 3**

7. The report notes that the capacity of the national machinery for the advancement of women is limited due to lack of financial and human resources (paras. 10.3.1 and 10.4.1). Please explain the measures the Government is taking or intends to take to provide the national machinery for the advancement of women with adequate decision-making capacity and financial and human resources.

8. The report states that the regional desk officers are based in Freetown due to logistical problems and their presence is not felt in the regions (para. 10.4.1). Please outline the nature of the logistical difficulties encountered and provide details on the Government's plan and timetable to deploy the desk officers to the regions.

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

### **Article 4**

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

### **Article 5**

11. The report highlights the persistence of stereotypical attitudes in Sierra Leone, and certain cultural and traditional practices and customs are cited as the major obstacles to achieving de facto equality for women (for example, paras. 4.5 and 12.1). Please provide information about any comprehensive strategy that may exist to create a socio-cultural environment that is conducive to gender equality, including education and awareness-raising targeted at the general public and any

collaboration with non-governmental organizations in this regard. In responding to this question, kindly give particular attention to initiatives taken or anticipated for rural areas.

### **Violence against women**

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

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

14. The report states that there were no convictions in rape cases in 2004 (table 2.0), that wife-chastisement is an accepted practice (para. 12.15) and that the criminal law is not regarded as applicable to the forms of violence that a husband may exact on his wife (para. 9.1.13). Bearing in mind the Committee's general recommendation 19 regarding violence against women, please describe steps taken to develop a comprehensive strategy to combat all forms of violence against women, including prosecution of perpetrators, provision of assistance to victims and introduction of capacity-building and awareness-raising programmes for various groups (such as the police, lawyers, health and social workers and the judiciary) and the general public.

### **Article 6**

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

### **Article 7 and 8**

16. Given the significant underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions in public and political life and in international activities, what concrete measures are envisaged to achieve women's full and equal participation and representation at all levels of Government, in Parliament and the judiciary, as well as at the international level, taking into account the Committee's general recommendation 25, on article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention, and general recommendation 23, on women in public life? In particular explain what awareness-raising and capacity-building programmes or policies are in place or envisaged to encourage and facilitate Sierra Leonean women's further participation in public and political life.

### **Article 10**

17. The report states that 29 per cent of females were literate in 2004 (table 25, para. 17.9.2). Please describe any initiatives that are under way or envisaged to increase women's literacy and assess their efficacy and outcomes to date.

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

**Article 11**

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

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

21. Given the high percentage of Sierra Leonean women working in the informal sector and their precarious position, please indicate what outreach programmes are in place to inform low-income and poor women, particularly in rural areas, of opportunities to gain access to markets and technology.

**Article 12**

22. Sierra Leone has one of the highest maternal and infant mortality rates in the world. Please provide information on what measures are in place or planned to reduce maternal and infant mortality, including details of the safe motherhood programme to reduce mortality and morbidity (para. 19.6.1). Please also indicate what special measures are envisaged for women in the rural areas and any progress achieved towards meeting targets.

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

**Article 14**

24. The report paints a bleak picture of the position of rural women in Sierra Leone. Yet the vast majority of women live in rural areas (para. 21.1). Please provide information on the Government's rural development strategy, including whether it incorporates a gender perspective and includes targeted support for rural women in sectors such as health, education, employment, economic development, access to credit and participation in decision-making, including at the local level.

**Articles 15 and 16**

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

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

**Optional Protocol and amendment to article 20.1**

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

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