



**SIERRA LEONE
COUNTRY OFFICE
ANNUAL
REPORT
2023**

“WE ENVISION A GENDER-EQUAL SIERRA LEONE IN WHICH ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS ARE EMPOWERED TO ENJOY THEIR FULL HUMAN RIGHTS AND LIVE UP TO THEIR FULL POTENTIAL.”



Acknowledgement:

UN Women Sierra Leone Country Office acknowledges the Government of Sierra Leone, development partners, civil society, the private sector and implementing partners that play a critical role in the transformational change occurring in the life of women and girls. The support and partnership received contribute towards the delivery of our programmatic interventions and the results captured in this report.

Disclaimer:

All necessary efforts have been taken to make sure that information contained in this publication is correct and not misleading. However, the possibility of errors or unintentional omissions cannot be excluded.

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FOREWORD

A NEW DAWN FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN SIERRA LEONE!

The United Nations Development System (UNDS) Reform of 2018 called for enhancing the capacity its to help countries achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN Resolution A/ RES/72/279 of 31 May 2018).

The subsequent change management meant that a few country offices, including UN Women Sierra Leone, should be reformatted or simply closed. Despite this challenge, the country office demonstrated boundless and goal focused leadership by prioritizing coordinated efforts and interests among multiple stakeholders which revealed the significant impact of UN Women's universal triple mandate for women's rights, women's empowerment, and gender equality in Sierra Leone. The policy transformation demonstrated from these efforts includes: the recommendation of mainstreaming gender equality in the constitutional review white paper of 2018, the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy launched by His Excellency, President Julius Maada Bio in November 2020, the United Nations Security Council Resolution UNSCR 1325 National Action Plans I, II and III to promote women's representation, leadership and protection in Peace, Security and Social Cohesion, the criminalization of rape by the year 2019 amendment to the sexual offence act 2012. The groundbreaking GEWE Act 2022, which goes beyond the gender quota to address the roles of private sector actors and civil society, among other things, has resulted in a historic rise in women's representation in politics and governance across the majority of institutions, bringing the goal of "at least 30% women in appointive and elective positions" to reality. It unfolds continued legislative initiatives for enabling the normative environment for girls, women and vulnerable human beings living in Sierra Leone, with positive effects on ending violence against women, ending early marriage, and increasing access to resources for justice,

This report celebrates the diversity of unshakable transformations of women's representation, rights, and responsibilities across political, governance and community systems in Sierra Leone. It reveals the supreme magnificence of UN Women's triple mandate, the significance of working as OneUN, the value of women's movement, the distinctiveness of the contributions of feminist organizations, the priceless advantage of transforming gender norms with traditional leaderships, the strengths of assembling diverging voices that resonate for unmet needs: working differently, leading for impact, driving



change, and enabling the success of others for faster and greater achievements.

The challenges persist, gender disparities and gaps remain visible and the road to equality remains long, very long. It is our collective responsibility to persevere in our efforts until female genital mutilation is addressed and recognized as a crime, until gender equality replaces quotas, until discrimination and harassment are consistently punished in both public and private spheres including households and workplace. Together, we must work towards ensuring that, women or girls enjoy their full human rights at parity with men or boys.

On behalf of UN Women Sierra Leone, I appreciate your continued support and partnership. Let us continue working together taking advantage of the triple mandate of UN Women, rooted in women's courage and resilience, the conducive political commitment of the government of Sierra Leone, for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, and adaptable strategic collaborations to address gender issues despite limited resources. I also recognize the progress made in Sierra Leonean communities, although it is still a work in progress.

SÈTCHÉMÈ JÉRONIME MONGBO,
UN WOMEN HEAD OF OFFICE,
SIERRA LEONE

WOMEN'S INCLUSION IS ESSENTIAL TO SUSTAINABLE CLIMATE SOLUTIONS





1.0 COUNTRY OFFICE OVERVIEW

The Sierra Leone Country Office has come a long way from one that was slated for closure in 2021 to one that has now positioned itself to make significant contributions in promoting Gender Equality and the empowerment of Women and Girls in Sierra Leone. The office is currently a small size typology but is expected to grow into a medium-size typology during the lifespan of the Strategic Note 2025 - 2030.

The Country Office (CO) is under the leadership of the Head of Office, supported by five thematic leads for the CO Gender Accelerator areas: Women's Political Participation and Governance; Women's Economic Empowerment; Ending Violence Against Women and Girls; Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Assistance; Cross-cutting UN Partnership and Coordination. The office also encompasses an Operations team handling all procurement, finance, and administrative processes.

The CO Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) team facilitates quality assurance and accountability processes across programs, managing M&E systems, tracking of results against SP targets & CO Annual Work Plan (AWP), Global and donor results reporting and contributes to UNCT M&E interventions.

UN Women Sierra Leone developed a Strategic Note in line with the global Strategic Plan and the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) alongside the government of Sierra Leone priorities as stated in the Medium-Term National Development Plan, all within the context of Sustainable Development Goals. The CO has developed an Annual Work Plan (AWP) which outlines the CO activities, timelines, resources, partners, and resource mobilizations for the implementation of the Strategic Note.

The Status of Women and Girls in Sierra Leone

Since the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which remain transformative framework for achieving gender equality, the empowerment of all women and girls as well as the full enjoyment of their human rights, the government of Sierra Leone has made significant strides for the advancement of women's rights and the elimination of discrimination against women and girls including the enactment of gender-focused policies and laws: Gender Justice laws (2007 & 2009); Sexual Offences Act (2019); Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy (2020); Domestic Violence Act 2007; Sierra Leone National Action Plan on 1325 & 1820 (2018-2023); Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act (2022); The Customary Land Rights Act (2022); The National Land Commission Act (2022) which addresses the deep inequalities and discrimination in the ownership and control of land in the provinces by giving rights to all Sierra Leoneans to own land anywhere, irrespective of their gender, ethnicity, and other identities. The capacity and resources to implement these frameworks remain

a challenge. UN Women Sierra Leone continues to leverage on its coordination role to influence the adoption and to domesticate them across the nation.

Sierra Leone has an estimated population of 8.49 million with more women (51%) than men (49%) and a population growth rate of 2.1% annually. The behaviors of the majority are heavily influenced by cultural and religious norms. Key gender-related indices of the country include female life expectancy (estimated at 57 years), maternal mortality ratio (717 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births), child marriages before age 18 (29.6%), gender-based violence prevalence (52%), and female genital mutilation (FGM) prevalence at (83%). The share of women are 57 percent of the workforce and the backbone of agricultural sector in Sierra Leone, but men have access to ownership, control cash crop production, farming inputs, and technologies. Women's representation in Parliament has considerably improved from 14.5 percent in 2018 to 30.4 percent in 2023. The share of female local councilors improved from 18.7 percent in 2018 to 34% in 2023, which is slightly above the minimum threshold in the GEWE Act. UN Women will continue to provide capacity building support to newly elected women in Parliament to fully perform their functions and represent women in decisions and policies.

2.0-Country Office Results

The UN Women Sierra Leone framework is committed to supporting the Government of Sierra Leone's Medium-Term National Development Plan in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Country Office's gender accelerators are:

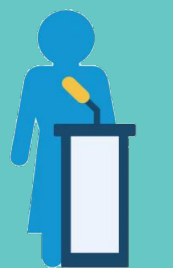
- Goal 1 - Women's Political Participation and governance,
- Goal 2 - Women Economic Empowerment,
- Goal 3 - Ending Violence Against Women and Girls,
- Goal 4 - Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Assistance
- Goal 5 - Cross cutting UN Partnership and Coordination.





2.1-IMPACT AREA 1: WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND GOVERNANCE

Global Strategic Plan outcome: Women fully and equally participate in leadership and decision-making and women and girls benefit from gender-responsive governance



- Women's representation in Parliament has considerably improved from **14.5 percent** in 2018 to **30.4 percent** in 2023.
- The share of female local councilors improved from **18.7 percent** in 2018 to **34 percent** in 2023 which is above the government threshold.
- UN Women strengthened the capacity of **350 women** candidates from **14 political parties** on campaign strategy, communication tools and coaching.

Following the enactment of the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act 2022 and the Public Elections Act 2022, with UN Women's support, women's representation in Parliament has considerably improved from 14.5 percent in 2018 to 30.4 percent in 2023. The share of female local councilors improved from 18.7 percent in 2018 to 34 percent in 2023 which is above the government threshold. These changes were achieved through the improved technical capacity of 350 women candidates across 14 political parties in developing a campaign strategy, communication & coaching, and provision of leadership tools. UN Women, also strengthened the capacity of 100 male champions in four districts, (Port Loko, Falaba, Pujehun, Western Area) and engaged 80 Paramount Chiefs to promote women's participation in politics. Furthermore, UN Women, through the All Political Parties Women's Association (APPWA), advocated for the mainstreaming, popularization, and domestication of the GEWE Act by political parties incorporating it into their policies, constitutions, and regulations, as well as the establishment of a Corps of transformative female and male leaders to promote gender equality, women's empowerment, and leadership. The CO also strengthened the institutional capacities of the Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone (ECSL), Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC), civil society organizations & women's networks and leaders (Political, traditional, and religious leaders) who signed up as agents of change. They have made commitments to support women, advocate and address women's rights issues including violence, intimidation, discrimination, and harmful cultural practices.

In partnership with the Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC), All Political Parties Women's Association (APPWA) and other key stakeholders, UN Women contributed to the Increased Women's voters in the 2023 general elections by advocating for women's leadership within political parties during

nominations of candidates as prescribed by the GEWE Act. Additionally, UN Women also strengthened the capacity of 35 women political leaders from the All Political Parties Women's Association (APPWA) in transformative leadership, GEWE and Public Election Act (PEA) laws which amplified their voices and knowledge to engage election management bodies, political parties, traditional leaders, and the media to ensure the laws are implemented during the 2023 general elections. UN Women through APPWA further raised awareness about the content of the Acts and encouraged women to demand the implementation of the laws within their political parties.

UN Women's help reduced violence, intimidation, and discrimination against women and girls during the 2023 general elections. This was achieved by engaging local and national stakeholders in promoting peaceful electoral procedures. We used 12 social media influencers to promote gender equality and peaceful elections, reaching 12125 viewers across Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Twitter. UN Women collaborated with UNDP to set up a situation room that recorded 202 incidences of violence against women during elections (68% of which were reported by women).

UN Women's support led to increasing lobbying for the GEWE policy and Act among women's rights organizations and movements, notably those led by younger women. CSO capacity building helped 57 organizations demand accountability for implementing the GEWE Act and amplify the voice of young women in the Democracy Network. Trainings on democratic governance principles, monitoring, and advocacy were provided to promote GEWE Act in Sierra Leone.





2.2- IMPACT AREA 2: WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT



- 17,887 rural farmers in Sierra Leone (12,250 women and 5,637 men) from 1,577 farmer groups across 1,502 communities) improved livelihood income.
- Engagement with 50 private sector companies on their roles for the implementation of the GEWE Act

17,887 rural farmers in Sierra Leone (12,250 women and 5,637 men) from 1,577 farmer groups spread over 1,502 communities increased their livelihood income thanks to UN Women's assistance. This was achieved through UN Women's Investment in Women's Economic Empowerment, setting a direct path towards gender equality, poverty eradication and inclusive economic growth using integrated Programme Approach, working with Government and Local partners at all levels and layering on other GEAs to advance the economic empowerment of women in Sierra Leone. The investments include, among other, the supply of 18 machines and farming inputs to support value addition in rice, cassava, maize, and palm oil value chains. They also strengthen farmers' capacity for sustainable and climate-smart agriculture and provide profitable connections to financial services and suppliers. UN Women created the Digital Market Square (DMS) website (<https://www.unwomenmarketsquare.org/home>) to assist women-owned businesses in showcasing their products, networking with customers, increasing visibility, and gaining access to resources. This is expected to improve their livelihoods in Sierra Leone. The Women in Agriculture Network (WiAN), an important local UN Women partner, has enhanced its readiness to participate in the Agricultural funding programs, particularly SDB-funded AfDB programs. This was accomplished through capacity building for cooperative proposal creation in accordance with AfDB guidelines.

Through UN Women support, 5 women farmer groups in two districts (Karene and Bombali) increased capacity to replicate and integrate training on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), sexual and reproductive health and rights, and HIV (SRHR/HIV), as well as adopting gender sensitive programming in 32 rural communities. UN Women's strategies, initiatives, and interventions are in alignment with the Government Feed Salone Program under the Medium-Term National Development Plan 2025-2030.

For the first time in Sierra Leone, the Private sector has increased readiness to implement Gender responsive programs and initiatives in compliance with the GEWE Act. This was achieved through engagement with 50 private sector companies on their roles for the implementation of the GEWE Act and support their readiness and capacity to promote gender parity and women's empowerment in the private sector in line with UN Women's WEPs program. UN Women designed and introduced the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) private sector tool which allowed companies to identify and address institutional gender gaps. These have resulted in fifty leading corporations in Sierra Leone integrating gender into their systems, policies, and programs, as well as making a commitment to the execution of the GEWE law to reach 30% female participation in their institutions. There is a promising development with three private sector institutions already signatories to the global WEPs platform.





UN Women Digital Market Square to shed light on women owned business

Women's businesses, whether in the formal or informal sector require more visibility and internal recognition. The visibility will not be achieved without records, organization, and connections. Therefore, UN Women decided to support the development of a digital database of businesses led by women, individual or in groups where at least 80% members are females

UN Women is supporting Women in business to tap into the online hub to empower women entrepreneurs in Sierra Leone by providing a Digital MarketSquare (DMS) where women-owned businesses can showcase their products, connect with customers, and access resources and support to grow their enterprises.

The DMS showcases a selected range of high-quality products from women-owned businesses and connects shoppers with female entrepreneurs worldwide, fostering a supportive community.

This online marketplace focuses on the process of mapping women entrepreneurs across the nation to their various locations with the strategic goal of connecting various women-owned businesses across Sierra Leone's provinces for improved networking, business profile displays, and mentorship where necessary.

The website can be found at this link:

<https://unwomenmarketsquare.org/home>

Indigenous women play a crucial role in:

Food security

Conserving the environment

Preventing biodiversity loss

Defending human rights





2.3- IMPACT AREA 3: ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

All women and girls live a life free from all forms of violence.



- **Operationalization of 7 One Stop Centers (including institutional, financial and logistical) through the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs.**
- **UN Women increased the capacity of 49 Frontline Service Providers, 120 Paramount Chiefs across the country and created spaces for dialogue on gendered social norms and the establishment of community structures to address SGBV including creating gender sensitive community-based action plans in ten (10) communities.**

UN Women advocates for comprehensive measures to ensuring that all women and girls live free of all types of violence. UN Women continued to help the government, civil society organizations, and the private sector at all levels in preventing and responding to SGBV through effective, efficient, real-time, and survivor-centered service delivery.

With UN Women's assistance, 486 SGBV survivors received a range of case management services in 2023, such as psychosocial counseling, medical examinations, legal advice, and wider support for survivors via referral channels. This was achieved through strengthening the operationalization of the 7 One Stop Centers (including institutional, financial and logistical) through the ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs. Furthermore, UN Women increased the capacity of the 49 Frontline Service Providers on national and International SGBV frameworks and guidelines, including handling disclosure, International SGBV response principles, Risk management, National Referral Protocol, Child Protection, safeguarding and Psychosocial Support Services and provision of wellness tools.

In 2023, over 120 paramount chiefs across the country created spaces for dialogue on gendered social norms and the establishment of community structures to address SGBV including creating gender sensitive community-based action plans in

ten (10) communities. This was accomplished through UN Women's capacity building and engagement with paramount chiefs on the GEWE Act, Sexual Offences Act, gender justice laws, social norms, and myths about women's leadership, as well as referral support, accompaniment, and the provision of safety nets to survivors.

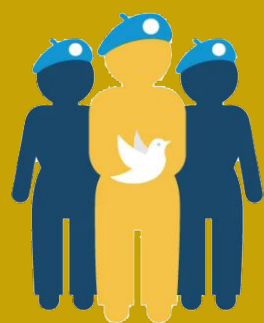
Additionally, 400 members of SGBV community structures from one-stop center have improved their ability for SGBV prevention and response, including referral pathways. UN Women is currently strengthening community mechanisms for SGBV prevention and response, including community laws on SGBV prevention and response in seven districts, and has established SGBV Steering Committee structures where none previously existed, allowing them to monitor, refer, report, and document SGBV cases before, during, and after elections. These mechanisms have also created safe spaces for interrogating social norms in their communities and established a strong alliance with the district councils through improved coordination. Stakeholders have committed to provide support to survivors from various home-grown funds including transportation refunds, job training and foster care especially for survivors from hard-to-reach communities. The local capacity building initiatives have sustained an enabling safe space through a paradigm shift from ad hoc and activity centered actions to a results-based approach.





2.4- IMPACT AREA 4: WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AND HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

Women and girls contribute to, and have influence in, building sustainable peace and resilience and benefit equally from the prevention of conflicts and disasters, and from humanitarian action



In 2023, a total of 500 RSLAF Military Aid to Civil Power (MACP) & SLP security personnel enhanced Inter-Agency collaborations between the two forces to protect Women and Girls against Violence before, during and after the 2023 Presidential and Parliamentary election.



Following the adoption of landmark Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) and nine subsequent resolutions on Women, Peace and Security, the government of Sierra Leone through UN Women support is the 4th country in West Africa to develop a comprehensive National Action Plan (SiLNAP) 7th in Africa, and 17th globally for the implementation of the resolutions.

In 2023, the implementation of Sierra Leone National Action Plan II continued to register key results for the full implementation of UNSCR 1325 including the engendering of the human resources and procurement processes of the Republic of the Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) and the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) which resulted in the appointment of a female officer for the first time as member of the Ministry of Defense/RSLAF Decision Making Committee. Additionally, for the first time another female officer was appointed as a Battalion Second-in-Command. Similarly, for the first time the Policy Directorate of RSLAF integrated maternity dress. In addition, informed by the findings of the Barrier Assessment on Meaningful Participation of Women in Peacekeeping missions for the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces & Sierra Leone Police, the SLP appointed a female Police Commissioner as the head of the Somalia Peacekeeping mission for both the Informed Police Unit (IPU) and the Formed Police Unit (FPU). The SLP also committed to deploying 62 (39%) female of 160 eligible officers in an FPU and 30 (47%) female of 64 eligible officers in the IPU.

Additionally, UN Women established and trained 70 Gender Focal Officers across RSLAF to handle gender issues, and integrate gender principles into RSLAF policies, local statutes, strategic plans, and programs.

In 2023, a total of 500 RSLAF Military Aid to Civil Power (MACP) & SLP security personnel enhanced Inter-Agency collaborations between the two forces to protect Women and Girls against Violence before, during and after the 2023 Presidential and Parliamentary elections. This was

achieved through joint partnership between UN Women, UNDP & World Vision on inclusive and gender responsive peacebuilding and election initiatives.

Additionally, through the joint program, Women-Focused CSOs coalition working on conflict prevention/mitigation and meaningful participation of women was established with strengthened capacities, tools and structures at national and district level for joint collaboration in promoting the Women, Peace and Security agenda in Sierra Leone. The coalition is recognized as a key player in advocating for women's rights and peace building and is networking widely with various players in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment by influencing perceptions and practices in broader peacebuilding issues. Moreover, the coalition has actively contributed at both district and national levels to the development and validation of the National Action Plan 1325 SiLNAP III.

Furthermore, UN Women strengthened the capacities of the Independent Commission for Peace and National Cohesion (ICPNC) that resulted in increased commitment on mainstreaming gender in mechanisms and opportunities that promotes peace building, social cohesion and solution-based dialogue touching on the need for integrity, attitudinal and behavioral change. The following quotation from the former Deputy Inspector General of Police demonstrates these commitments:

“Our force has always aimed to match up with best international practices and have upscaled up our efforts to meet international provisions on gender mainstreaming, as such security issues deeply concern women, so, as a force, we are committed to promoting women's leadership to impact service delivery in Sierra Leone.”



2.5- CROSS CUTTING UN PARTNERSHIP AND COORDINATION

UN Partnership and coordination for gender and the empowerment of women and girls



In 2023, 28 Gender Units were established and the capacity of 60 gender focal persons were strengthened through the UN partnership as mandated by the GEWE Act 2022.

HeForShe campaign with paramount chiefs, religious leaders, women leaders, Mammy Queens and CSOs working on women's rights to transform male leaders and traditional leaders into becoming advocates to support women's empowerment and the reduction of SGBV in their communities.

The engagement of 2000 School children and adolescent girls have increased understanding and awareness of gender equality and women's empowerment.

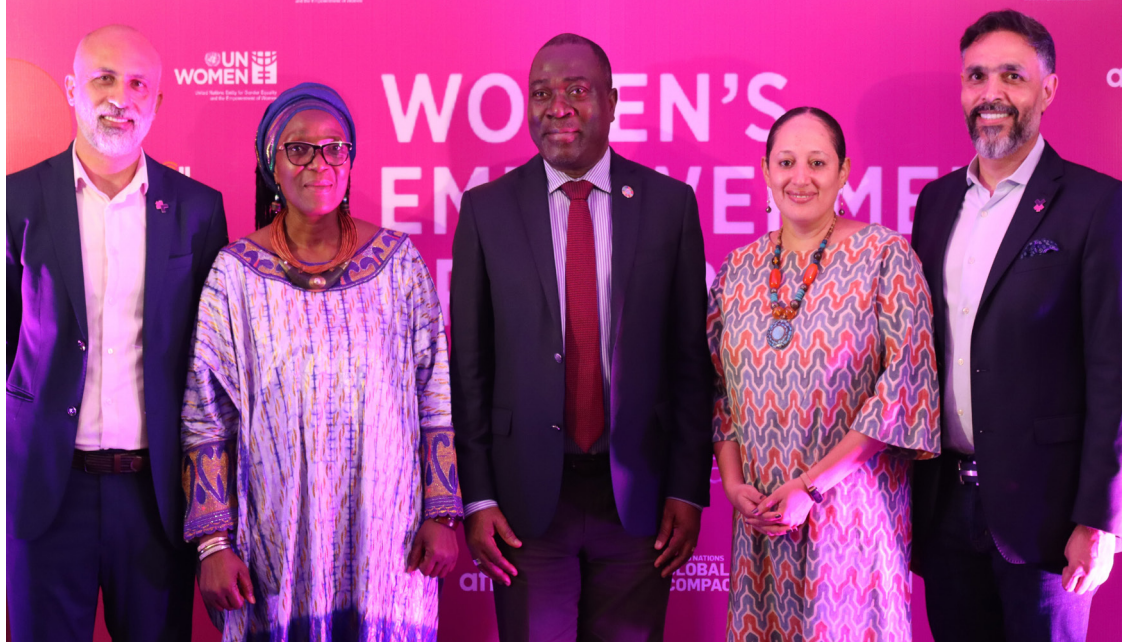
In 2023, The UN Partnership for Gender Mainstreaming in Government Ministries (GiM), the ground-breaking multi-stakeholder joint partnership of UN WOMEN, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA and Irish Aid, continued to support the government of Sierra Leone in advancing the rights of women and girls and accelerating gender equality through the implementation of the Gender Policy and Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act (GEWE). The policy and the act have been strong drivers in addressing gender inequalities in Sierra Leone. In 2023, with UN Women secretariat and technical leadership, a total of 28 Gender Units were established and the capacity of 60 gender focal persons were strengthened through the UN partnership as mandated by the GEWE Act 2022. These have resulted in effective gender sensitive programs, public policies, strategies, and strategic plans in the government line ministries with the outstanding twin-track approach on gender mainstreaming in the Medium-Term National Development Plan (MTNDP) 2030. UN Women is also leading the development of the Gender Accountability Framework to implement the GEWE Act. The UN Partnership Secretariat, located in the UN Women Country Office, serves as a liaison between MDAs and development partners, facilitating joint activities and creating a pool fund to support the GEWE Policy implementation.

UN Agencies benefit from collaborative efforts as specified in the GEWE Policy, GEWE Act 2022, and aligned with the Beijing Platform for Action and SDGs.

UN Women Partnership amplified the voices of women and girls through increased community actions for the GEWE policy implementation using a two-pronged approach of direct implementation and gender mainstreaming, emphasizing on family-life balance to address gender equality. The regional engagements with stakeholders in Bo, Makeni, Kenema and Port Loko have significantly contributed to transforming social norms for women and girls in Sierra Leone.

UN Women carried out the HeForShe campaign with paramount chiefs, religious leaders, women leaders, Mammy Queens and CSOs working on women's rights to transform male leaders and traditional leaders into becoming advocates to support women's empowerment and the reduction of SGBV in their communities. Afterwards, the Paramount Chiefs developed actions to support community-led initiatives and committed to modeling positive masculinities in their spheres of influence. The male involvement strategy and messages were cascaded in the communities in a culturally acceptable manner, adopting positive masculinity to promote women's empowerment. The engagement of 2000 School children and adolescent girls have increased understanding and awareness of gender equality and women's empowerment. In co-educational schools, male-students were encouraged to support female-students to excel and advocate for gender equality.

UN Women Regional popularization and consultations on the GEWE Act have influenced community stakeholders to act as community influencers with the GEWE Act and outlined some of the barriers preventing them from achieving the benefits of the Act. As a result, there is increased support and commitment of community-based leaders as demonstrated by the Mamie Queens appeal to UN Women to continue to build their capacity to promote the GEWE Act as custodians of women's rights in their communities. Furthermore, the religious leaders' excerpts from the Holy Quran and the Holy Bible supported the promotion of women's empowerment and developed an implementation strategy for incorporating Gender Equality and Women Empowerment into their teachings.



SIGNING UN WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT PRINCIPLES: AFRICELL SIERRA LEONE LEADS THE WAY

UN Women Sierra Leone is proud to announce Africell as the first signatory of Woman's Employment Principles (WEPs) in Sierra Leone.

Woman's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) are a set of principles, offering guidance to businesses on how to advance gender equality and women's empowerment in the workplace, marketplace, and community.

Established by UN Women and UN Global Compact, the WEPs are informed by international labor and human rights standards and grounded in the recognition that businesses have a stake in, and responsibility for, gender equality and women's empowerment.

Africell is the first company in Sierra Leone to be approved by the WEPs and featured on the global listing page. The company's Profile page on WEPs.org highlights their efforts to promote gender

equality and empower women in the workplace and community. Africell Sierra Leone firmly believes in the transformative power of diversity and the immense strength it brings to both their team and the community they serve. Recognizing that a diverse and inclusive workforce not only enhances innovation and creativity but also drives economic growth, the company has made women's empowerment a cornerstone of its corporate ethos.

To mark this historic moment, UN Women SL and Africell held an official signing ceremony and joined 8000+ signatories globally.

Africell Sierra Leone's pioneering step exemplifies the kind of leadership needed to create a more equitable and just society for all.



Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education being crowned as HeforShe



Africell Ceo and UN Women Team

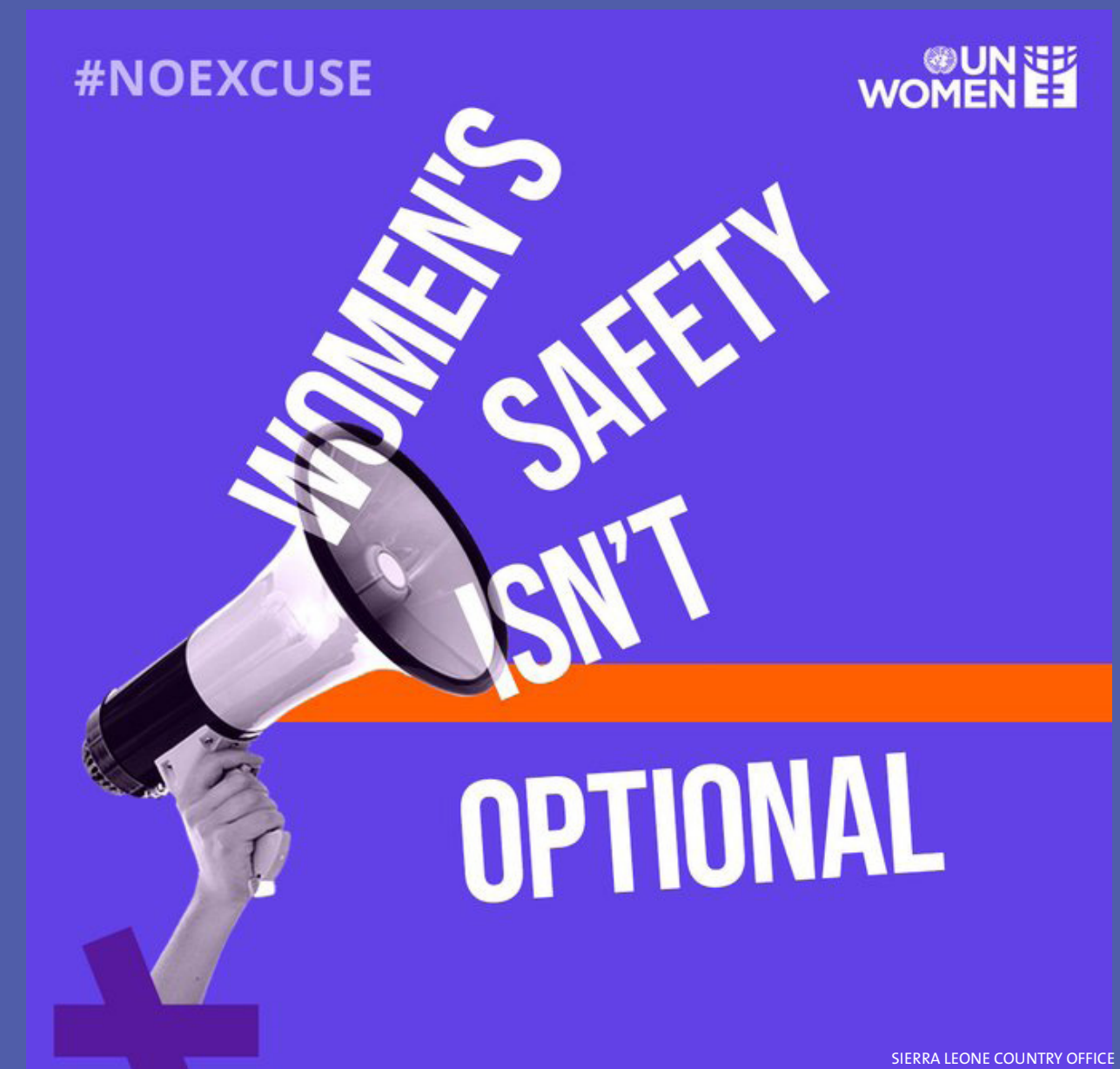
3.0 CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- Despite significant accomplishments, the year under review provided challenges and opportunities for the UN Women Sierra Leone Country Office, which can be summarized as follows:

Delayed funds transfer from UNW HQ for some projects is a major challenge including PBF Funds. The new Quantum system brought huge challenges that affected program implementation, divagating the new system has been a learning curve for everyone. Creating projects on quantum came with many challenges and the delay in funds distribution from donors and HQ.

- Political instability and unrest

Even while certain operations continued during the 2023 elections, political conflicts that restrict implementations and actions involving the security sectors, particularly the police, raised concerns about security threats. Alongside this, there was situation of a coup attempt followed by a nationwide curfew imposed on the country. The entire project implementation plan was skewed by this circumstance, particularly when it occurred during the advocacy campaign for 16 Days of Activism.



4.0 LESSONS LEARNT, INNOVATION AND PERSPECTIVES

- Sustaining government engagement and institutional strengthening require a long-term investment in partnering with the Ministry of Gender and Children

Affairs as well as other MDAs:

Strengthened partnership with the Ministry of Gender and Children Affairs enabled the Country Office to provide substantive inputs into the GEWE policies and legal frameworks. UN women also have strong partnerships with all MDAs and has established gender units within the ministries. The CO intentionally charted a course to broaden and deepen its working partnerships with the MDAs, especially with the Joint Program to mainstream the GEWE Act across ministries, departments, and agencies. Initial indicators note that this approach of sustained working relations helps equip officials with the tools and skills needed to understand and implement the Act. Moving forward in the new Strategic Note (SN), the CO will aim to evolve this from educating about the Act toward supporting its effective implementation coupled with accountability measures. Furthermore, the CO intends to broaden this effort to include other gender policies and laws.

- Reigniting the women's movement is essential not only for continued peace, but ensuring the government is held accountable for the implementation of the GEWE Act and related laws:

Historically, Sierra Leone benefitted from a vocal and effective women's movement. Unfortunately, the civil war resulted in a fragmented and weakened movement that has yet to regain its vitality. Owing to the initial success of the CO's support to strengthen and grow women's networks and groups on the advocacy of the GEWE Act and the implementation of the UNSC1325 National Action Plan, the CO aims to sustain this support and apply this approach through the new Strategic Note to include the redevelopment of a wider women's movement. A major lesson learned during the advocacy for the enactment of the GEWE Bill was that working with the Women's movement ensured that a broad spectrum of women especially women in rural areas were consulted and this resulted to greater ownership of the process.

- Leveraging UN Women's coordination mandate is essential for advancing the GEWE agenda in the UNCT and its programming:

During the development of the previous UNSDCF, the CO did not have an optimal role of engagement and participation in the gender theme group, and other related initiatives remained ad hoc for UN Women and other members of the

UNCT. Noting this gap and that the UNSDCF is extended for one year, the CO worked to increase its visibility within and commitment to the UNCT in a more strategic and sustained manner as the current CR winds down. The CO is engaged in the results group, management, and M&E teams to ensure the final stages of the CF implementation reflect gender results where possible. Moving forward, the CO is engaging in the CCA process to ensure gender analysis is central to the new assessment and will seek to effectively integrate the work of the new SN into the design of the new CF. It will continue to strengthen its role as the lead of the gender theme group, the implementation of the gender score card recommendations and seek to further develop joint programs with UN agencies.

- The legal frameworks on Gender Equality contributes significantly to the achievements of results on the promotion of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment:

The passing of key gender laws including GEWE Act, GEWE policy, National SGBV Referral Protocol, Customary Land right Act, Land commission Act, the three Gender Justice laws, the amended sexual offences act, Public Elections Act, Political Parties Regulatory Commission Act, Sierra Leone National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security provided opportunities to strengthening accountability for the empowerment of women in Sierra Leone. For example, as a result of the GEWE act, in 2023, women representation in parliament increased from 12% to 30.4% in 2023. In addition, the Unity Agreement, and the Tripartite Agreement present opportunities for strengthening gender transformative approaches as well as women's effective participation in peace building processes at all levels. UN Women is leading the development of the Gender Accountability Framework to implement the GEWE Act and intends to continue to offer similar technical support along all the other gender policies, laws and legal frameworks.

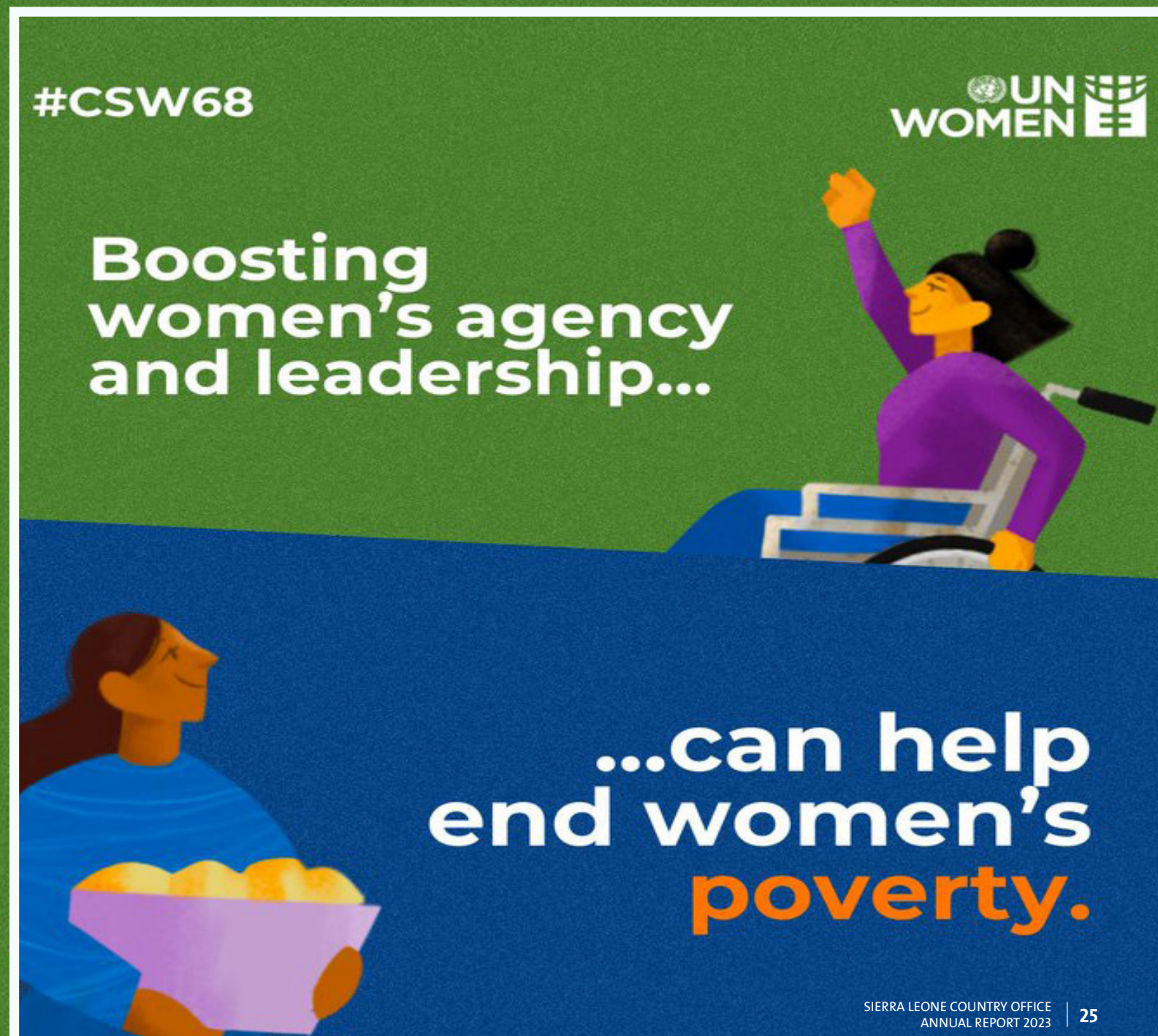
- Through advancing the Women Empowerment Principles, there are promising results through private sector engagement taking strides in mainstreaming gender.

Major network operators and financial institutions have already committed to signing WEPS. As a result, there is increased strategic collaboration and engagement between UN Women and the Private Sector including awareness raising during 16 Days of Activism against GBV and International Women's Day. The private sector is also taking active engagement in regional convening on WEPS. The Country Office intends to sustain this relationship and continue to explore opportunities for improving women's access to finance and technology introduction of gender single digit loans, and loans with non-fixed assets collateral by the banking sector

- Strengthening women's economic empowerment is a foundation for sustainable realization of women's rights and empowerment:

UN Women has aligned the women economic empowerment portfolio with the government's flagship initiative – 'Feed Salone'. The Country Office has supported women farmers across the country with climate smart agricultural equipment such as green houses, irrigation, fish hatches, improved seed varieties, processing equipment. In addition, the Country Office influenced a strong gender mainstreaming in the six pillars of the current Medium Term Development Plan (MTDP). Moving forward the Country Office will support gender mainstreaming, and gender responsive budgeting in relevant sectorial policies such as agriculture, finance, fisheries, and trade.

- An integrated approach towards programming better supports women's empowerment in all dimensions of their lives: Utilizing women economic empowerment as an entry point, the Country Office has made strides in addressing Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), increasing women's political participation, and women peace and security. An innovative approach of supporting value addition for women farmers' groups has enabled the Country Office to extend capacity strengthening of the groups in addressing VAWG, peace, women's leadership, and governance. The Country Office intends to upscale such initiatives as well as documenting lessons learnt.



5.0 MOST SIGNIFICANT HUMAN IMPACT STORIES

Disabled Father Gets Justice for His Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Victim Daughter

By Mohamed Kargbo: UN Women Communications Officer



Kailahun District, Eastern Sierra Leone- Saidu, not his real name, a 60-year-old visually impaired father, steps into the One Stop Centre tightly clutching the hand of his 15-year-old hearing and speech impaired daughter. Their quest at the facility in Kailahun District, to get justice for his daughter, who was raped three years ago.

“On the 19th October, 2021, at about 1:00am, while my daughter Bariatu (not her real name) was sleeping in her veranda room, she heard continuous banging on her room door. Before she could get up to check and see who was at the door, the alleged perpetrator had already barged into her room, rushed to where she was lying, brutally stripped her naked and sexually took advantage of her.” Saidu narrates.

The father reported the matter to the police station and was referred to the One Stop Centre in Kailahun. With the full support from the One Stop Centre in Kailahun, the matter was committed to the Kailahun Magistrate Court, where a sign linguist was assigned to aid with court proceedings.

“This case is not the only one in the district”, says Doris E.R.S Mansaray, Centre Manager. “We have so many victims of cases ranging from sexual abuse to incest practices, physical abuse in the Centre.”

This high increase of sexual and gender-based violence particularly against very young children, led the Ministry of Gender and Children’s Affairs in collaboration with UN Women, in April 2020 with funds from Irish Aid to establish One-Stop Centres to address Sexual and Gender-based Violence (SGBV) cases in 7 districts across all regions including Kailahun.

“The Centres provide holistic service for survivors of Sexual and Gender-based Violence (SGBV) including in

psychosocial care, medical examination, reports and treatment. The centers also support police statement taking, legal aid and advise and referrals for specialized care services.” Explains Ella Syl-Macfoy, UN Women, Programme Specialist.

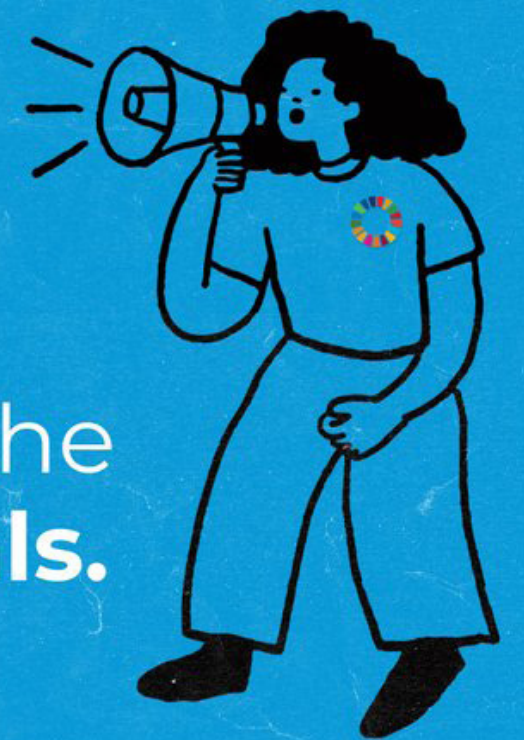
Since its inception, the Centres have provided support to a total of 2, 343 cases of which 1, 808 are sexual abuse including penetration of children below the age of 18, rape among adults is 195, and 14 cases for sexual assaults.

Thanks to Irish Aid’s support, UN Women is supporting the running of the One Stop Centres to improve the quality of services and systems including capacity strengthening in all the 7 One Stop Centres in Sierra Leone-Bonthe, Pujehun, Moyamba, Kailahun Port Loko, Karene and Koinadugu District.

The One Stop Centres have greatly helped the punishment of perpetrators and rendered justice to survivors. “I am so delighted about the outcome of the verdict. Finally, the rapist has been sentenced to 6 years of imprisonment at the Correctional Centre.” He says. “My daughter is slowly recovering , each time we visit the Centre we get psychosocial support and that makes my daughter feel better and now even plays in the Centre and at home.” Says Saidu.



Women & girls are essential for lasting peace & achieving the Global Goals.





UNWOMEN TEAM IN SIERRA LEONE





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