

Children's Report on the Implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child - Sierra Leone



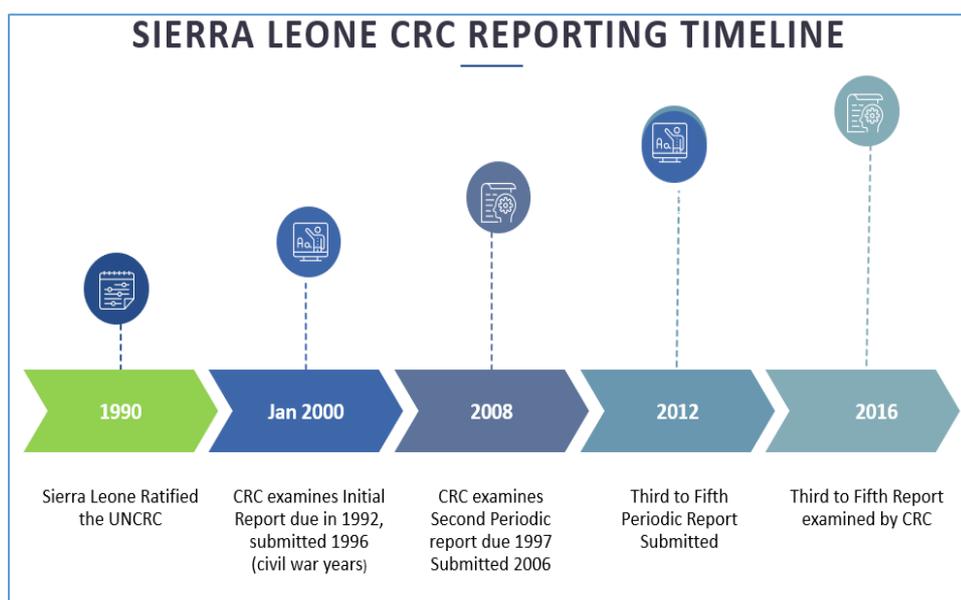
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Introduction

Sierra Leone signed the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990, the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (OPSC) in 2001 and the Optional Protocol for the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (OPAC) in 2002. Since then, the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL), through the Ministry of Social Welfare and Children's Affairs (now separated as MoGCA and MoSW), has submitted 3 State Party Reports on the implementation of the CRC to the treaty monitoring body: the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and 1 report each on OPAC and OPSC in 2008/9. The Initial periodic report due in 1992 was submitted in 1996 and examined in 2000, second report examined in 2008 and the combined third to fifth report in 2016. The country is expected to report again in October 2023 following a list of Issues prior to reporting in a pre-sessional working Group meeting in October 2021 as part of the Committee's new Simplified Reporting Procedures. In accordance with the previous CRC standard reporting procedures, the country received a list of issues in relation to the third to fifth periodic report in September 2016 and concluding observations on the same report in November 2016. In addition to Periodic Reports from the State Party on the



implementation of the treaty, non-governmental organisations, UN Agencies, National Human Rights Institutions and Children's Organisations can also present independent Alternative Reports on how they perceive the status of the realisation of

Child Rights in the Country. For the next reporting schedule for Sierra Leone, the Child Rights Coalition CRC-SL is supporting the writing of a Children's Alternative Report that will contribute to informing the List of Issues Prior to Reporting (LOIPR) that the CRC Committee will present to the Government of Sierra Leone to respond to as its periodic report to be examined in 2023.

The Child Rights Coalition – Sierra Leone

The Child Rights Coalition Sierra Leone CRC-SL is a coalition of NGOs, both local and international working on child rights issues, which was established in 2007. Child Rights Coalition Sierra Leone (CRC-SL) is the NGO group recognised by the Committee on the Rights of the Child to produce CSO Alternative Reports on the Convention and its Optional Protocols. The CRC-SL was established in 2007 to monitoring government implementation

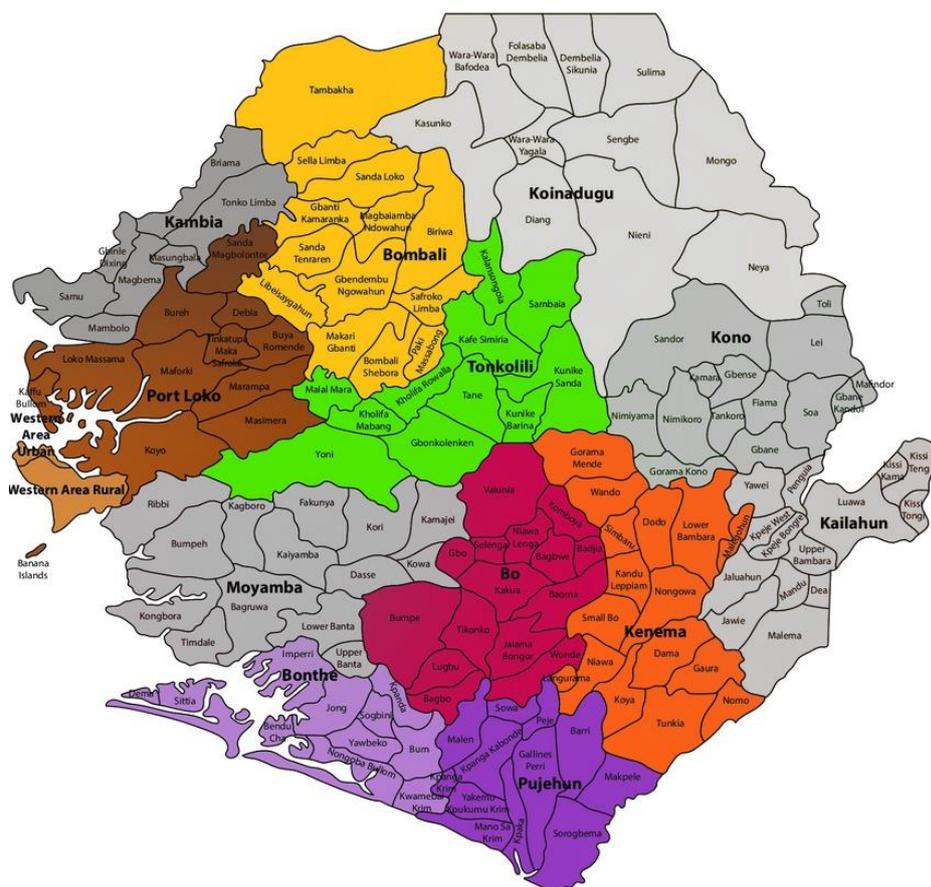
and reporting process of the CRC, and report to international bodies on government's implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and other relevant international legal instruments, and to contribute to the promotion of children's rights. The Child Rights Coalition Sierra Leone facilitated the process of putting this report together

CRC-SL envisions a Sierra Leone where every child enjoys his/her rights and its members share a Mission to ensure the implementation of the UNCRC and ACRWC in Sierra Leone through persistent advocacy, monitoring of government actions, networking with relevant agencies and promoting child participation in all matters that affect their fundamental rights to survival, development and protection.

Child Rights Coalition has been supported by Equality Now, Defence for Children International (DCI) and WAVES to produce this Children's Report. Equality Now is an International NGO established in 1992 which advocates for the protection and promotion of the human rights of women and girls. Both DCI and WAVES are members of the Child Rights Coalition.

Method of selection of Children

One Hundred and Two (102) Children and young people, (42F,60M) participated from 8 Districts, accounting for representation from 50% of districts in the country (see districts in colour). Children and Young people were selected from Children's Organisations managed by member NGOs of the Child Rights Coalition Sierra Leone. Although there was a mix of children in these groups including disabled children, other children were purposively selected from a Remand Home, 2 Orphanages, a school (residential) for the blind, and a safe home for SGBV Survivors, to provide their specific issues that may not be common to those unaffected, so as to present a balanced report of issues affecting the majority of children, including those in especially difficult circumstances.



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List of Issues Prior to Reporting (LOIPR) that the CRC Committee will present to the Government of Sierra Leone to respond to as its periodic report to be examined in 2023.

All children and young people who participated gave consent to participate through their respective organisations but also verbally before all consultation sessions started.

Method of consultation

The Child Rights Coalition SL Member Organisations recognise that children and young people are members of the society and so they have the right to participate in activities that affect their lives, their families' and their country's development. Children's right to participate is enshrined in the UN CRC (Art 12, 13 and 23). Children are able to participate if given the space and opportunity. As Children and young people they have a voice in matters that affect their lives and the International Community, State and Non-State Actors have a duty to ensure that their voices are heard and taken into account.

The purpose of the consultation is to identify the issues and specific rights of children that are being realised or violated, as they see it.

The methodology employed in writing the report included mainly consulting children from different backgrounds and regions in the country. Three workshop-style consultations were held with approximately 70 children, where a brief orientation was facilitated by a Consultant, after which children were placed into small groups to work on tasks that were designed to help them bring out issues affecting children now in the country, both positive and negative, where children want to be, who can deliver the change they want to see, and what role children can play in bringing about the desired result for children. Child friendly presentations on the CRC and its Optional Protocols, previous COs and LOIs as well as recent legislation specific to child rights formed part of the orientation. This was done to provide an environment for the children to present their issues from an informed point of view.

Child Safeguarding policies were enforced by CRC SL Members in the consultations sessions and travelling to and from the sessions.

The consultation sessions were adult-assisted to help children representatives to talk about how they perceive their rights are being fulfilled by the State. Plenary and small group working sessions were held with children taking lead in discussions and presenting their reports at plenary.

For the consultation to be meaningfully participatory, the larger group identified issues of child rights violations and rights that have been realised. Then were split into smaller age-range and sex groups to discuss these issues and how each group is affected in detail guided by a list of questions. Adult facilitators guided the groups to set up and document group presentation. Small group presentations were made at plenary only for information sharing to other groups.

Children were divided into age and sex groups for workshop style consultations into Girls, 10 -14 years, Boys 10 -14 years, Girls 15- 17 years and Boys 15 - 17 years old. This was

to allow for age and sex specific issues and experiences of rights violation or enjoyment to come through the report.

For each issue selected, responses were provided to the following questions:

1. How are our rights realised on this issue?
2. How are our right violated on this issue?
3. What can government /adults do to help improve the situation for children on this issue?
4. How can children participate or express our views on the issue at home, in school and in public?

Children were encouraged to present their small group reports in oral or written form or through poems, drawings or other means of expression in response to the questions above. As much as possible, direct quotes have been used to portray the children's voices in the report. The sessions were audio taped and transcribed later for the report. Confidentiality is assured in the report as no individual child has been named for stating issues.

Preparing children for consultation - overview of the latest Issues and recommendations to Sierra Leone from the CRC in 2016

Children were asked to brainstorm and identify rights issues they currently face. In addition to what each child knows or has experienced, they were asked to represent other children they know about who cannot be present for the consultation since they are part of various Human Rights Defender Groups and have these issues discussed at meetings. To help children think of these issues, previous CRC Concluding Observations and List of Issues for the Government of Sierra Leone in 2016 were discussed.

The CRC **Concluding Observations** for Sierra Leone's Third to Fifth State Party Report were submitted in 2012 but examined in 2016. Concluding observations are what the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) presents to the State following Periodic Reports that highlights progress made since the last report but more so gaps in the implementation of the UN CRC selected from the report, with recommendations for actions that need to advanced by the next periodic report. Key recommendations in the 2016 CO recommendations include:

1. Birth registration for all children
2. Prohibition of corporal punishment in all settings
3. Support to the FSU to protect children from all forms of violence
 - a. Access to psychosocial support and recovery
 - b. Early detection and prevention of child abuse
 - c. Speedy prosecution of perpetrators of violence against children
4. Mechanisms to reduce sexual abuse and exploitation
 - a. Provision of psychosocial, medical support to Survivors of SV against children
 - b. Investigate, prosecute and punish perpetrators of SV against children

- c. Combat stigmatisation of child survivors of SV
- 5. Harmful practices
 - a. Take measures to eliminate FGM and child Marriage
- 6. Family environment: Implement Trust Fund for Child Welfare and disseminate Child Welfare Policy
- 7. Children deprived of family environment: ensure assistance to child orphans, implement the Alternative Care policy, monitor quality of alternative care institutions, periodic review of foster care institutions, allocate resources to care centres
- 8. Adoption: foster formal domestic adoptions
- 9. Disabilities, basic health and welfare: community-based care and inclusive education for children with disabilities and utilise National Development Fund to support children with disabilities.
- 10. Increase access to health and health services to children.
- 11. Provide access to mental health and counselling services.
- 12. Take measures to address adolescent health including; high teen pregnancies, high number of unsafe and illegal abortion, lack of adolescent friendly counselling services for girls and boys, stigmatisation and discrimination of teenage pregnancy, sale of alcohol and drugs to children. To also ensure sexual and reproductive health education in school, protect teen mothers and their children from discrimination and drug use.
- 13. Protect children with HIV and AIDS and prevent discrimination and stigmatisation.
- 14. Ensure primary school is free, lift ban on pregnant girls attending school and sitting exams, and improve access to early childhood care and development.
- 15. Address economic exploitation of children including child labor.
- 16. Provide children in the Streets prevention, recovery and reintegration services.
- 17. Investigate and prosecute perpetrators of sale, trafficking and abduction of children.
- 18. In administration of juvenile justice, prevent pre-trial detention and where necessary for no more than 6 months, not detaining children with adults, provision of competent legal aid to children in conflict with the law, provision of medical, counselling and legal services to child victims and witnesses.

In the CRC's List of Issues for SL in 2016 a summary of the issues raised to be responded to were related to: (1) Children out of school, (2) Child abuse, (3) Child labour, (4) Sexual abuse, (5) Juvenile justice, (6) Children in the streets, (7) Child victims of both external and local trafficking, (8) Children with disabilities, (9) Poor and vulnerable children, (10) Children in need of alternative care including separated children and orphans.

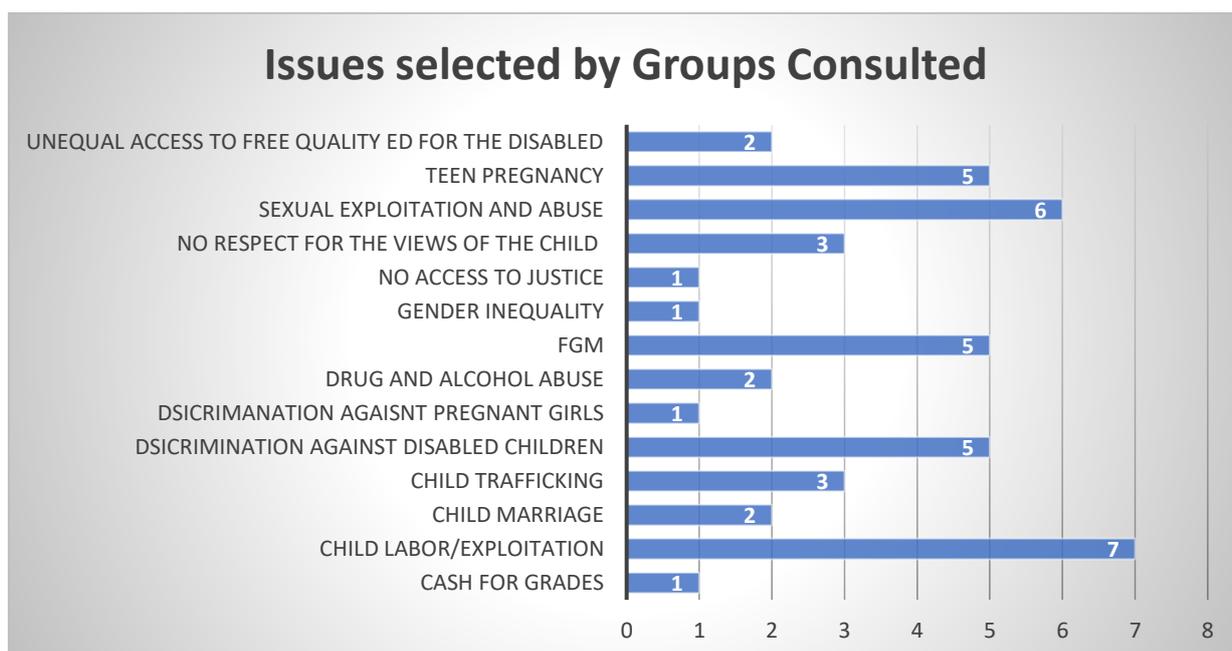
Children's List of Issues

Following these presentations, children in small age groups in 7 districts identified the following as issues affecting children in Sierra Leone that need to be addressed for children and young people to survive, develop, be protected, and to participate in family matters and in school and public decision making on matters that relate to them in particular:

1. Sexual exploitation in Schools/ Sex for Grades/ "Sexual Marks"
2. Sexual Violence/Rape
3. Domestic violence
4. Child Prostitution
5. Neglect from Parents
6. Child Trafficking
7. Discrimination against disabled children/Unequal access to FQSE, unfair treatment in the justice system
8. Teen Pregnancy/Teen Mothers
9. Early Marriage
10. Child Labor
11. No respect for the views/opinions of the child/ Freedom of expression and participation
12. Female Genital Mutilation
13. Education not appropriate for the disabled
14. Drug Abuse
15. Discrimination and Stigmatisation of Pregnant Teens and teen mothers in school and the family
16. Free health care not reaching children above 5 years
17. Bullying "EVERYWHERE!"
18. Cash for Grades in school
19. Unfriendly justice system for children and young people/No access to Justice
20. Gender Inequality

Out of these long list children in 10 small groups prioritised 14 issues. The number of times the groups selected an issue is seen in *Figure 1*. Those issues identified by children in remand home, orphanages and school for the disabled have been placed under the respective topics as relevant.

Figure 1: Issues Prioritised by Children



This list has been further compressed to 10 by combining issues of similar themes which this report will cover.

These include:

1. Child Labor and exploitation, including child trafficking
2. Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
3. Children with disabilities Discrimination
4. Harmful Practices
5. Education
6. Respect for the views and freedom of expression of opinion
7. Access to justice
8. Protection from drug and alcohol abuse by children
9. Discrimination
10. Children in Alternative Care

Characteristics of children and young people consulted

102 children and young people aged 10 to 17 years were consulted, 41% were female, 59% Male. 21.5 % (n22) were disabled.

Figure 2: Proportion by age of children consulted

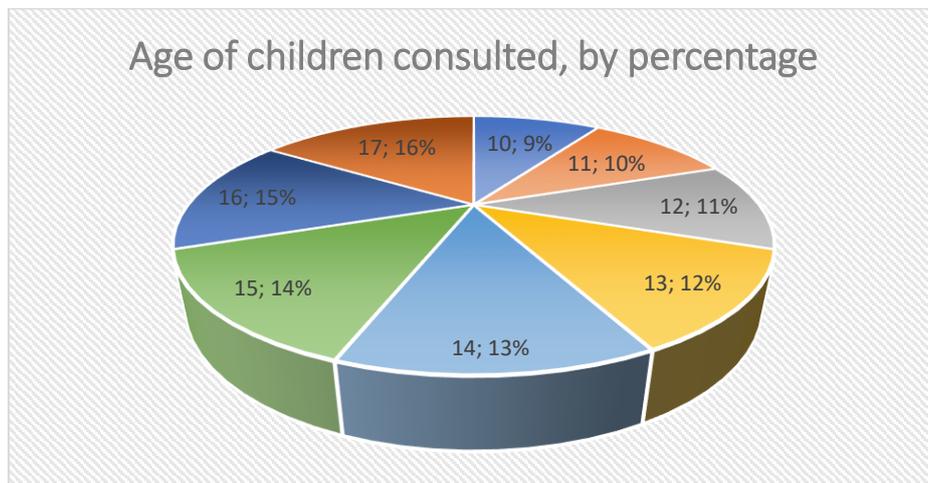


Figure 3: Proportion of Children with disabilities consulted, by sex

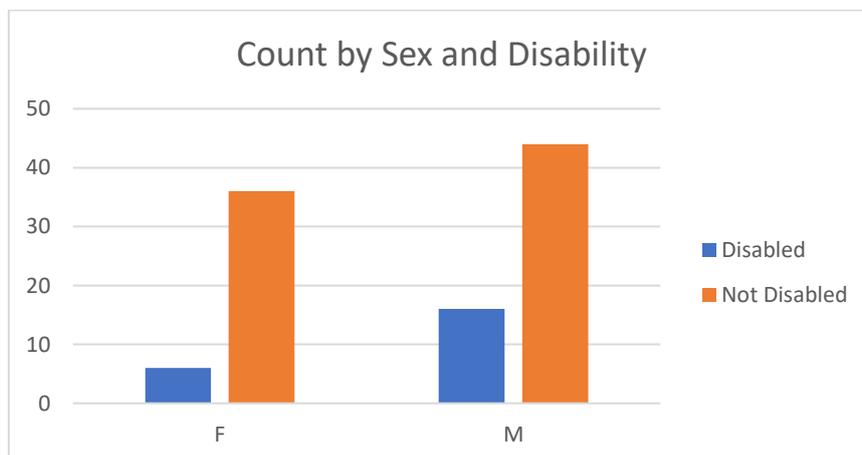
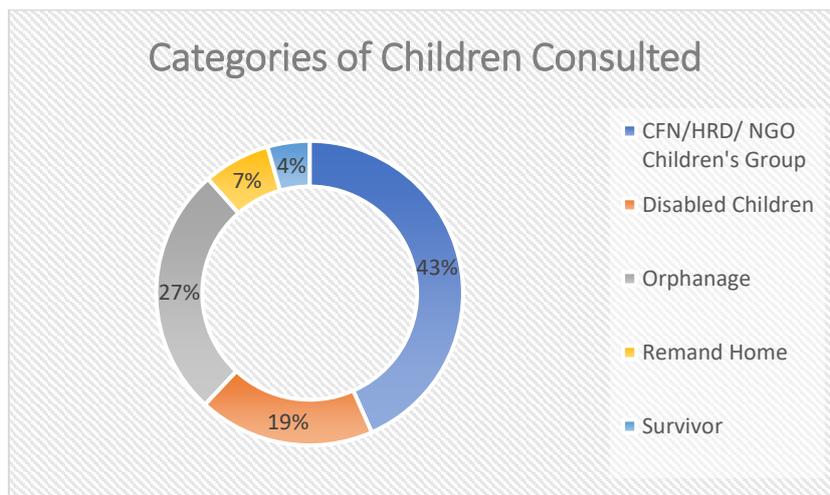


Figure 4: Categories of Children Consulted



What the Children have to say - Our rights, Our Say!

Child labor and exploitation, including child trafficking

How are our rights realised on Child Labor and Child Trafficking?

- Sierra Leone has ratified the ILO conventions on children involvement in hazardous/child labour.
- Sierra Leone has good laws on child labour.
- Reduced rate of child labor since the Free Quality School Education Program was launched.
- Through awareness raising campaigns, a lot of children have come to know their rights and realize that Child Labor is a violation of their rights.
- NGOs undertaking intervention in combating child labour
- Development of Street Children strategy is in progress.
- There is a law on Anti-human trafficking.
- Civil Society Organisations and NGOs are implementing programs that are geared towards combating child trafficking.

How are our rights violated regarding Child Labor and Trafficking?

- Consistent domestic work: In most houses, children have to fetch up to 15 five-gallon containers of water in the morning before going to school, which causes harm to children's welfare and education. Also Younger Children below 15 have to do all the house chores before being allowed to go to school
- Exploitation of work during school hours. some children engage in menial jobs as "fitter"/Auto Mechanic Apprentices, Laborers at construction sites during hours that they should be in school.
- Child Labor is contributing to other issues affecting children, including:
 - Exposure to a higher Risk of Sexual Violence as street traders.
 - Increase In the number teenage Pregnancies in Communities.

- Engaging in strenuous or dangerous Jobs which might be injurious or harmful to their health and well-being e.g. Stone Mining, Timber Logging.
 - Being Used as Domestic servants depriving them access to education.
 - Lack of physical protection when children are engaged as street traders.
 - Lack of access to Proper Sanitation leading to health problems.
- Absence of physical protection when street trading.
 - Depreciation of child's mental health, esteem and development.
 - Leads to high rate of Child Trafficking.
 - Stop Children from going to school.
 - Leads to teenage pregnancy, sexual penetration and early marriage.
 - Inadequate monitoring of work sites to ascertain whether children are not recruited.
 - Slow/weak implementation of child labour laws.
 - No State investment to end child labour. It is not in government agenda.
 - Victims have no means/channel to seek redress.
 - Weak implementation of child labour laws.
 - Weak implementation of anti-trafficking laws.
 - Unregulated domestic fostering and adoption processes.
 - Weak monitoring of border crossing point.
 - Inadequate personnel to monitor anti-human trafficking.
 - High number of internal trafficking.

What can government /adults do to help improve the situation for children on child labor and trafficking?

- Government should "put more strength and enforcement on the Child Right Act."
- Government should implement laws that prohibit children selling during school hours and also to strengthen enforcement to prosecute parents or guardians of any child caught street trading during school hours.
- Government should periodically send Inspectors to schools to assess the welfare of the children in schools
- Sensitize Parents on the dangers of over working or street trading on the health and well-being of the child.
- Create awareness on this issue in schools.
- Creation of safe space for children to share their views and problems without fear of being intimidated.
- There should be more awareness on the issue at district level to curtail child labor and child street trading.
- Government to conduct massive awareness raising campaign on child labor.
- Government to provide funding to remove children from the street.
- Government to enforce laws pertaining to child labour.
- Labour authorities/ministry to intensify its monitoring of work sites.
- Government to recruit and train more social workers/labour official.
- Government should introduce functional reporting hot lines to report incidences of child labour.
- Government to fully implement the anti-human trafficking law.
- Victims of child trafficking should have free medical and compensation.

- Government should intensify its public sensitization on the negative effects of child trafficking.
- Government to recruit, train and deploy social worker in border crossing point.
- To facilitate national engagement on the effects of child trafficking.

How can children participate or express our views on child labor and trafficking at home, in school and in public?

- Children should report any incidence of child labour.
- Undertake school outreach and talk on the negative effects of child labour.
- Platforms should be established for children to engage with the government/ministry on child labor and child trafficking.
- At home we should be responsible for minor domestic chores and educate our parents/guardian on child labour.
- In the public, Children must be able identify and report any incident of child labour
- In schools children should be given the opportunity to form school clubs and support them to engage their peers on child trafficking.
- In public children should be given the opportunity to raise awareness and educate the populace on the negative effects of child trafficking.
- In school we can raise awareness by encouraging Teachers and Administrators to be more involved in the welfare of the children, to check-in with the parents as to why their child has been missing school.
- Start campaign to Stop Domestic or Farm Labor in exchange for grades in provinces and rural areas.

Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

How are our rights realised on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse

- There are laws that have been passed by parliament in the CRA in 2007 and Sexual Offences Act that clearly states the penalty associated with sexual abuse exploitation and abuse.
- Free health care for pregnant girls.
- The lifting of the ban on pregnant girls to take public exams.
- The government has taken measures towards addressing sexual offences through the establishment of sexual offence model courts, One stop centres providing different services.



- Lifetime sentencing for perpetrators of sexual violence in the law

How are our rights violated regarding Sexual abuse and exploitation?

- Parents or elders attempt to settle the issue as a "Family" matter instead of reporting to the police and getting justice for the victim.
- It is common practice for teachers to demand sex in return for grades in school
- No friendship with most boys without sex.
- Adult males entice young girls to sex as away of life and use sex for money.
- High Rate of Rape/Sexual violence despite the laws.
- Negligence by the government to put measures in place to address Sex for grades or 'Sexual Marks' in schools.
- Teen pregnancy as a result of SEA leads to discrimination in school and community and girls dropping out of school.
- Early childbirth can lead to early death and medical complications.
- Lack of Basic Needs-Food, Shelter, Clothing.
- Lack of Parental Care to provide basic needs of food, shelter and clothing makes some girls go to the streets for child prostitution.
- Stigmatization of pregnant girls.
- When teachers demand for cash or sex in return for grades causes students to stop coming or drop out of school.
- When teachers demand money from students to collect assignments, report cards or show grades, it causes some students to have to choose between either eating lunch or paying, thereby leading to starvation.
- Physical Violence as children are usually beaten for getting pregnant.
- Weak family support towards girl child education can make children prone to sexual exploitation.
- Little or no parental monitoring of girls.
- Complex channels for vulnerable girls and their families to seek redress.

TEENAGE PREGNANCY POEM

A person with out the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree with out root.

Sierra Leone, Sierra Leone, Sierra Leone.

Where is our glory,

Where have we dump our culture, Who are we, and what is our story?

The one we were expecting to become our father, have now become our husband,
The one we were expecting to become our teachers, have now become our sex mate, mama Salone.

The one we were expecting to become our brothers are now fighting us.

girls are struggle,
girls are Supprings!

where is our pride today ~~the~~ papa government. trabalism, nepotism have bring us apart.

What can Government/Adults do to help improve the situation for children regarding sexual abuse and exploitation?

- Government should put measures to fully prosecute offenders to the fullest extent in order to discourage future offenders.
- Parents should interact and communicate with their children so the child can feel safe reporting such issues to them.
- Sex Education in Schools.
- Formation of Social Clubs and Organization that conduct sensitization to students on this issue.



- Parents should provide care, supervision and the basic needs of their children to prevent them seeking other ways to survive.
- Government should implement laws that punish teachers demanding sex for grades.
- Access to safe health care and services and contraceptives for adolescents.
- Knowledge of rights.
- Any adult that impregnates a child under 18 years should be imprisoned for life.
- Implement strict laws against having sex with underage children with long Prison sentences for offenders.

- Encourage children to Report those who abuse them.
- Male involvement to tackle the root causes.
- Include sex education and life skills in school curriculum
- Fast track sexual offence cases in court.
- Government to invest in measures that are meant to combat teenage pregnancy
- Children especially girls should have free access to health facilities.
- Government to work with child protection organization and children led groups to foster positive parenting
- CSOs doing campaigns should work with children and they must be seen as advocate on SGBV issues.

How can children participate or express our views on Sexual abuse and exploitation of children?

- Encourage friends to abstain from sex to prevent teenage pregnancy.
- Sensitization on the issue from those that have been through similar circumstances.
- Avoid Peer Group Influence to engage in early sexual activity
- Teach peers on contentment and ambition for the future
- Report anyone that sexually/ Inappropriate talks to, touches or abuses you.

- At home children should report any male advancement
- Adolescent safe spaces should be established to help create platform for children to interact and learn about adolescence.
- Be vocal to discourage family compromise to settle case out of court when abuse occurs.

Children with disabilities.

How are the rights for children with disabilities realised?

- The enactment of the Persons with Disability Act.
- The law makes provision for free education and medical services for disabled children.
- NGOs and CSOs are implementing projects on disability issues.
- Sierra Leone has established a National Commission for Persons with Disabilities
- Sierra Leone has integrated disability in health, education and other social security schemes.
- More adults with disability are being given the opportunity to express their views on issues affecting the disabled which includes children with disabilities.

How are the rights of children with disabilities violated?

- Weak/Non-enforcement of Laws that punish discrimination against the disabled
- Unequal access to Quality Education.
- Disabled children are not allowed or given opportunity to partake in extracurricular activities in school.
- Disabled children are segregated, sidelined and discriminated in schools and communities.
- Discrimination from parents and care-givers.
- No ramps to access public infrastructure by disabled children.
- Limited social security for disabled children and their families.
- Weak community support mechanisms.
- Stigmatization meted on children with disability in communities and schools.
- Disabled Children are not given the right to participate and express their views in school and Community activities.
- Little or no Parental Care.
- Disabled students have limited or no access to education.
- Little or no social welfare in cases where both the parent and the children are disabled.
- Lack of Physical protection.
- Would starve without the benevolence of others.
- Poor national investment on disability issues.
- Growing and persistent stigma of disabled children.
- Disabled children helping their parents to beg on the street causing them to not attend or drop out of school.

- Some Parents are ashamed of their children, often hiding or abandoning them
- Resources are mostly for sighted children.
- Heckling and taunting from people in the streets.
- "Children with disabilities do not have a place to report discrimination or stigmatization. Even the police taunt us when we report to them. They even ask 'did you see who slapped you?' to a blind boy."
- Children with disability have to pay for services when they go to hospital. They are not treated if they do not pay.
- Physical abuse almost daily from other children in the communities.
- Girls have problem finding people to plait their hair and are often reprimanded in school for it.
- Discrimination and hiked prices in marketplaces.
- Lack of Recorders for taking notes in class in primary school. Only those who attended regular secondary school are provided recorders. "Teachers do not dictate for us to write and since we do not have recorders it is very hard for us to follow call lessons."
- No platform for children with disability to contribute to national development conversations.

What can Government/Adults do to help improve the situation for children with disabilities?

- Conducting Sensitization Campaigns on disability.
- Provision of basic needs and equipment (Crutches, Braille, White Canes, etc) for disabled children.
- Support poor families with disabled children to provide parental care and basic needs
- Enforce laws to punish discrimination against disabled persons.
- Free Medical Care for disabled Children.
- Make Public Buildings disabled friendly.
- Have road and traffic signs that allow disabled people to safely cross streets.
- "More Visits from the President and other Dignitaries to schools for the disabled so we also feel we matter".
- Provision of Computers in schools for the blind to use.
- Disabled children should be fully involved in all matters involving them at all levels.
- Government should make sure that all schools are disabled- friendly.
- Government should create special recreational facilities for disabled children.
- Government to fully implement laws for disabled children.
- Government to scale up social schemes targeting disable children and their families.
- Government to undertake measures that are disable friendly towards the implementation of projects.

How can children participate or express our views on the rights of children with disabilities?

- Encourage disabled people that disability is not inability and that despite being disabled, they can still live a rich and full.

- Create awareness on disability and encourage students not to discriminate against disabled children
- Children with disability should be encouraged to participate in family matters and in school affairs.
- Children should engage with community stakeholders to foster the inclusion of children with disability in their plans
- Human Rights Clubs in school can monitor and report on disability issues.

Harmful Practices

How Are our rights realised on Protection from Harmful practices for children?

- There is a ban on all traditional secret societies as a result of COVID-19 pandemic.
- Government has put measures prohibiting FGM on children under the age of 18 without their consent.
- Global and regional pressure to end child marriage.
- Sexual offence is punishable by laws
- CSOs and NGOs are implementing projects aiming at reducing child marriage and FGM.

How are our rights violated regarding harmful practices?

- No law making FGM illegal in Sierra Leone.
- Children are not involved the decision to be initiated for FGM or not.
- Extreme pain during FGM and lack of health care services in the bush to properly treat children in need of treatment leads to lifetime health issues.
- Adolescent girls face discrimination and stigmatization in their communities for not being initiated or cut.
- FGM and Child Marriage are considered cultural and traditional practices and should be left alone by NGOs.
- Adolescent girls are forced into early marriages
- No respect of the view of the child: Cultural and traditional values are imposed on children despite their objections.
- "No protection from abuse. FGM is extremely painful as sharp instruments are used to cut girls. This is aimed at reducing sexual pleasure which also constitutes a violation of the human rights of the child"
- Children sometimes have to miss days/weeks of school during the FGM initiation process impacting their education
- Victims of FGM have no means/channel to seek redress/justice
- Conflicting laws on age of marriage; 16 and 18 years
- Children in rural communities are more exposed to child marriage



- Some religious families subject girls into early marriage.
- Parents and caregiver subject girls into force marriage to get out of poverty.

What can Government/Adults do to help improve the situation for children regarding harmful practices?

- Government to enact specific legislation that will prohibit the practice of FGM.
- Government to enforce the ban on underage initiation
- Advocacy and awareness raising programs to help combat the practice of FGM
- Sensitize in the community on the dangers of FGM
- Raise awareness in Local communities targeting “Soweis” and parents against the practice.
- Government to harmonise the age for marriage at 18 years
- Government to further invest in girls’ education especially in rural settings

How can children participate or express our views on harmful practices against children?

- Organizations like Children’s Forum Network (CFN) should stand up and speak out to end the practice of FGM and child marriage
- Raise awareness on this issue and the dangers of FGM
- At home girls should resist and report any incidence of child marriage
- Adolescent safe spaces should be established
- Suspected FGM cases should be reported and stopped

Education

How Are our rights realised on Access to quality education?

- Teacher are Provided to educate and cater to the special needs of disabled children in some schools.
- Provision of special schools e.g. Blind School, School for the Deaf, etc. and provision of basic school materials to these schools.
- Ban lifted on pregnant teens attending school and taking exams.
- Through the “Hands Off our Girls Initiative, more girls are able to attend school regularly as they are provided sanitary pads in schools.
- Provision of Covid 19 prevention kits in school
- Because of the Free Quality School Education many children have been enrolled into schools

How are our rights violated regarding access to quality education?

- ‘Sexual Marks’ by teachers leads to teenage pregnancy. It causes lack of concentration on the child’s academic work and also leads to examination malpractice.

- 'Cash for grades' - teachers demand money or favors in return for grades. "If you do not pay the teacher you will be failed no matter how well you perform in exams. This reduces the child's motivation to learn."
- Little consideration for the inclusion of the disabled in the Free Quality School Education programme
- No provision of school-feeding from the government for poor and disabled children
- Poor infrastructure for disabled children. Most schools are not disabled friendly
- The disabled children not considered in the distribution of school buses. Buses do not stop for them.
- Notes are not dictated in class for blind students, and they have to pay fellow students to read for them to take notes.
- There are insufficient school buses in rural areas. They are centralized in big towns.
- Insufficient Sitting accommodation in school for the number of students per class in most schools
- Some schools lack trained and qualified teachers especially for exam classes
- Poor sanitation facilities in schools
- Although ban has been lifted, pregnant girls are still not having access to many school and examinations.

What can Government/Adults do to help improve the situation for children access to quality education?

- Government should put measures in place to severely punish teachers demanding sex from students.
- Government to prioritize adolescent girls education
- Provide School Feeding for disabled children
- Provide better/trained teachers and care-givers in schools
- Provision of the needs of disabled or impaired children e.g. braille and typewriters.
- Provide school buses for children in rural areas not only in central areas
- Provide educational learning materials for children with disabilities e.g. typewriters/ computers, Braille, Crutches, Stylus.
- Provide proper sanitation facilities in schools
- Make it mandatory for all schools to allow pregnant girls access to school and examinations
- Involvement of Children when making educational policies
- Government should put laws and measures in place to put an end to the practice of sex or cash for grades in schools by punishing offenders with dismissals and lifelong prison sentences.
- Provide more trained teacher for Special Need Students, i.e. hearing or visually impaired students, so all students can have equal opportunity to learn.
- Need to put measures in place for integrating Special need students, instead of building separate schools for them
- Impaired Students Need to be allocated more time during examinations and consideration should be given when conducting examinations so the questions are not biased against Special need students e.g. Oral English Exam for Deaf Students.

How can children participate or express our views on access to quality education?

- Use extra-curricular school activities to talk about poor quality of education, abuse for grades and equal access to quality education for all children

Respect for the views of the child and freedom of expression of opinion

How are our rights realised on respect for the views and expression of opinion of children?

- There are organizations to help give children and young people opportunity to express their views on disability issues in big cities.
- CSOs and NGOs demonstrating commitment to promote children participation
- The formation children's groups including the Children's Forum Network (CFN)

How are our rights violated regarding respect for our views and opinions?

- Despite the platforms provided, views of children are not considered in decisions affecting them.
- "Objections on matters affecting us fall on Deaf Ears"
- Verbal or physical abuse when children try to express their views, affects the esteem of the child.
- Children are not given the opportunity to talk at public meetings
- No national framework by government as to how children's views can be incorporated into national policies and programmes on issues affecting them.
- Minimal levels of consultation with children towards national development.
- Children's views are not respect in society. Provision are not made for children to contribute. "We are given deaf ears"

What can Government/Adults do to help improve the situation for children regarding respect for the views and opinions of children?

- Create more platforms for children to safely express their views and opinions without repercussion.
- Child Inclusion in policies and programmes. "Children should be listened to and included in decision making because their opinions matter."
- When given, opinions of children should be taken into consideration
- Have Suggestion boxes in schools.
- Government to develop a framework to include children in policies and programme development.
- Support Organizations where children can gather and express their views

How can children participate or express our views on the views and expression of opinion of children?

- Encourage disabled children to publicly express their views in school and community matters.
- "We should motivate ourselves and be bold when expressing our views. We should not be afraid, ashamed of saying something important"
- Children are to respect for each other's view and opinions when taking decisions on matters that affect them.
- Children to demand their space on national issues
- In the homes children must be part of family meetings
- Literary and Debating society (L&DS) should be established/set-up in all schools to help with children public speaking skills.

Access to justice for children

How are our rights realised on access to justice for children?

- The Child Rights Act makes provision for protecting children in the justice system.

How are our rights violated regarding access to justice for children?

- Children are kept with adults in prison as there is no remand home while attending courts in the North and East of the country
- Children in remand are not given quality education
- Health of children in remand not catered for.
- Meals are insufficient and not provided in time at the remand home

What can Government/Adults do to help improve the situation for children regarding access to justice for children?

- Education- Provide means for children to continue their education even in detention.
- Provided skills training so they can be productive when they are released into society
- Provision of basic clothing items as most do not have visiting family members and have to wear the same clothes for months.
- Improve water and sanitation facilities at remand homes
- Provide recreational facilities e.g. TV
- Clemency for minor offences.
- Government, partners and NGOs should capacitate and support child advocacy organizations to raise awareness on child justice.

How can children participate or express our views on access to justice for children?

- Child advocacy organizations to be doing awareness raising campaigns on justice for children issues.

Protection from drug and alcohol abuse by children

How are our rights realised on Protection from drug and alcohol abuse?

- There are laws for government to protect children from illegal drug use and sale.
- High level of awareness raising in the media

How are our rights violated regarding drug and alcohol abuse?

- Parents send children to buy drugs and alcohol.
- Street trading of drugs and alcohol makes it easier to access by children.
- Laws not implemented to ban the sale of drugs to children.
- Proper care not taken when drugs are being distributed by pharmacies and medical facilities, which leads to them getting to the streets where children access them.
- No regulation restricting the of sale of drugs to children
- Poor education on Drug Abuse
- Mental /Psychological problems as a result of drug abuse are not treated. Leads to Children especially boys dropping out of school.

What can Government/Adults do to help improve the situation for children regarding drug and alcohol abuse?

- Parents should be penalized by law for sending children to purchase drugs and alcohol.
- Drug Addiction should be studied as a topic in school
- Sensitization in the communities on the dangers of drug abuse
- Stop street trading of drugs.
- Laws should be implemented to ban the sale of drugs to children
- Proper care must be taken when drugs are being distributed
- Strict measure and penalties for Dealers to curtail the high rate of selling drugs to children.
- Awareness raising in communities on the dangers of drug abuse.
- More support should be given to organizations to increase massive sensitization on drug abuse.
- Health Authorities should monitor and supervise the import of drugs into the country
- Criminalize drug purchase and sales to children
- Government to intensify its public sensitization on the negative effects of drug and substance abuse.

How can children participate or express our views on drug and alcohol abuse?

- At the home children should be given the opportunity to report any attempt of drug and substance abuse initiated by an adult.

- In schools, children should be given the opportunity to form anti-drugs club and support them to engage their peers.
- In public children should be given the opportunity to raise awareness and educate the populace on the negative effects of drug abuse.

Children living in/in need of alternative care

How are the rights of children in alternative care being realised?

- Residential care homes provide all children with birth certificates.
- There are policies and laws that regulate alternative care institutions.
- There are institutions available to support children in need of alternative care. In these centre children in need of alternative care are mostly protected and taken care of.

How are the rights of children in alternative care being violated?

- No Free Health Care from government for orphans and vulnerable children. The Institutions pay for the children's medical bills.
- Children in need of alternative care who are not in care facilities usually engage in street trading, street begging or farm labor to survive, where they face discrimination, emotional abuse and corporal Punishment.
- Orphans not in care centres are normally used as domestic servants and are overworked.
- Orphans usually do not have the freedom to express their opinions in any matter.
- "I know of orphans who are verbally, emotional abuse and physical abused and given heavy work by their foster parents."
- Orphans often live in fear of war and strife, crime and natural disasters and are not getting psychosocial support to deal with their fears.

What can Government/Adults do to help improve the situation for children regarding children living in alternative care?

- Provision of free health care for Orphans and vulnerable Children
- Have a scheme to provide basic needs for orphans without alternative care.
- Monitor and inspect the orphanage regularly
- Provide regular counselling services to orphans
- Strengthen National Security.

How can children participate or express our views and opinions on children in alternative care?

- Peer engagement with other orphans who may be distraught or traumatised.

Conclusion

We the children are happy that government has passed laws on sexual offences and have programmes in place such as the Free Quality Free Education, Free Health Care Initiative and the policy lifting the ban of pregnant teens from attending school and sitting to exams, and strategy for the reduction of teen pregnancy.

We will want to see the full implementation of these laws and programmes to include all children under 18 years and the involvement of children in the planning and implementation of programmes and laws relating to the issues we have highlighted in the report.

We are hopeful for improvements in child rights implementation in the next five years because we have been given the opportunity to express our views in this report which we expect will be taken into account.

Teenage Pregnancy - A Poem

Why should my fun have to end this way?

I thought that this was just the beginning

I see my friends go out to have fun

and all I can do is watch as they pass by.

As they set forth to discover their youth

I'm well on my way towards ending mine.

They call me irresponsible.

They think my life impossible.

When they look at me, they only see the pregnancy

But they don't see the pain, trauma, molestation that only I know

Mom and Dad are disappointed in me

Friends and Family criticize me

My life wasn't built on perfections. Does it seem as if I feel ashamed?

Does it seem as if I am the one to be blamed?

So many questions left unanswered because I don't know I am underage and pregnant.

Written by a 17 Year Old Girl, Sierra Leone (June 2021)