

Consultation Recommendations

Vision of the Women of Sierra Leone

- ◆ We want to live in a country that is at peace.
- ◆ We want to bring up our children so that they respect peace, democracy, the rule of law and equality between women and men.
- ◆ We want to live in a country where the economy is stable, goods and services are affordable, skills training and financial, business and other opportunities are provided, so that we are economically empowered.
- ◆ We want to live in a country where we walk with pride and participate fully at the highest levels of politics and public service without fear or harassment.
- ◆ We want to live in a country where every woman is safe from all forms of abuse, all forms of violence including rape, sexual and other forms of abuse.
- ◆ We want to live in a country that practises zero tolerance of violence against women.
- ◆ We want to live in a country where every woman is an educated woman and every woman is a healthy woman.
- ◆ We want to live in a country where every woman is aware of her legal and human rights and where the government, judiciary and legal systems promote and protect these rights.
- ◆ We want to live in a country where there are gender-sensitive health, social and other programmes which effectively address the spiralling incidence of HIV/AIDS and STIs, bearing in mind the special needs and problems of women, boys and girls of the armed forces.
- ◆ We want to live in a country that provides a stable, secure and safe environment for our young women and men to actualise their potentials, and where they are encouraged and empowered to participate in decision-making at all levels.

Following the feature presentations at the consultation, participants convened in thematic working groups to examine more closely the issues raised in the presentations, and came up with recommendations and a national plan of action designed to facilitate the successful integration of gender equality into the post-conflict reconstruction process in Sierra Leone.

Objectives

The objectives of the consultation were to:

- ◆ Map out the impacts of the conflict on women and girls, men and boys in the political, legal, economic and social spheres;
- ◆ Assess what programmes are currently in place by key stakeholders including government, civil society, and international agencies;
- ◆ Identify the gaps in programming, and which agencies are best placed to respond to these needs;
- ◆ Identify capacity-building, networking and coordination to integrate gender equality into all aspects of the reconstruction process—the political, legal, economic and social;
- ◆ Identify ways in which the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs could be strengthened to play a lead role in integrating gender into post-conflict reconstruction; and
- ◆ Identify mechanisms for strengthening the partnership between women, men and young people in the post-conflict reconstruction process.

Background

The consultation took place within the framework of Commonwealth and international mandates, including the following:

- ◆ The 1991 Harare Declaration issued by Commonwealth Heads of Government, which affirmed the Commonwealth's fundamental values of democracy, the rule of law, independence of the judiciary, just and honest government, and gender equality.
- ◆ The implementation of the 1995 Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development, and its update on Advancing the Commonwealth Agenda into the New Millennium (2000-2005), which were endorsed by Heads of Government (Edinburgh, 1997; and Durban, 1999). Commonwealth Ministers responsible for Women's/Gender Affairs set targets of 30% of women in political and public decision-making at all levels, and in all peace initiatives including conflict prevention, mediation, resolution, peacekeeping and peacebuilding.
- ◆ The Beijing Platform for Action and Beijing Plus Five Outcomes Document, which addressed women in armed conflict, and access to political decision-making as critical areas of concern.

- ◆ For the first time in its history, the UN Security Council held a 2-day debate on Women, Peace and Security (24-25 October 2000). It was chaired by Namibia and 43 countries spoke, including 18 Commonwealth countries. It resulted in an 18-clause Security Council resolution that mandates the UN Secretary-General to involve women at the highest levels in conflict resolution and peacekeeping missions, address the impacts of armed conflict on women, and importantly to report to the Security Council on progress made.

The Security Council debate built on key recent initiatives: (i) Graça Machel's review (1996-2000) dealing with the impact of armed conflict on women and children; (ii) the Windhoek Declaration and Namibia Plan of Action on mainstreaming gender in peace support operations (May 2000); (iii) the Brahimi Report on UN Peace Operations (S/2000/809); (iv) the Burundi peace negotiations in Arusha headed by Nelson Mandela, which drew on the Women's Peace Conference representing women from the 19 political parties to the negotiations (July 2000); 23 of the women's proposals were used in the peace agreement, including issues of women's rights under the new constitution, their contribution to economic reconstruction, and their role in conflict prevention and resolution.

Recommendations

The following are the recommendations of the National Consultation:

Gender Equality in Political and Public Decision-Making

- ◆ The Government of Sierra Leone should take concrete steps to implement the Commonwealth and UN target of 30% of women in parliament, local government, and public decision-making in the forthcoming elections. This should be done by an Act of Parliament that allocates no less than 30% of seats to women in Parliament and local government.
- ◆ The National Electoral Commission should make it mandatory for political parties to integrate gender into all areas of their election manifestos, setting targets for the next five-year period based on Beijing, Commonwealth and African commitments.
- ◆ Government in collaboration with civil society should undertake a public sensitisation programme on the electoral process that asserts women's right to equal political participation and representation. To ensure transparency, fairness and equity, the electoral system should combine the best aspects of proportional representation and constituency-based elections.

Gender Equality in Human Rights and Legal Reform

- ◆ The Government of Sierra Leone should take action within a period of 3 years to review and reform the laws which are weighted against women, such as laws relating to inheritance, violence against women, divorce, etc. In order to facilitate this process, the Law Reform Commission should be reactivated.
- ◆ Given the high incidence of illiteracy and lack of information about the law, action should be taken to ensure that there is an increase in access to basic education; that media coverage is extended to all areas using local languages, and that women should be educated about their rights.
- ◆ Research should be carried out to identify the traditional beliefs and practices that are gender discriminatory, to disseminate the research findings nationally, and to enact laws to abolish discriminatory traditional practices.
- ◆ Government should put in place legislation relating to the censoring of films and drama.

Violence, Sexual Abuse and Crimes Against Women and Children

- ◆ To address poverty which makes women and girls more vulnerable to sexual, and other forms of abuse, mechanisms must be put in place to increase their access to non-traditional and other emerging forms of employment that will provide financial independence.
- ◆ The violence against women and children that is endemic and has been aggravated by the war persists because of the culture of silence and acceptance of the abusive behaviour by men in positions of power and authority.
- ◆ The formal, non-formal and traditional educational systems should, as a matter of extreme urgency, be overhauled with a view to establishing programmes and curricula to bring about attitudinal and behavioural change. Sensitisation of parents, guardians, opinion leaders and especially young boys and men should occur simultaneously. The message for Sierra Leone is that there should be zero tolerance against violence against women and children in all its forms.
- ◆ Gender-sensitive training should be organised for law enforcement officers, especially the police, army and prison officers, to ensure that they enforce the law in all cases of violence against women and children. Gender-sensitivity, fairness and justice should prevail in all processes including prosecution, collection and use of evidence, treatment of victims. In all cases, regardless of the seniority of the officer, disciplinary and criminal action must be taken against any law enforcement officer who is either a perpetrator of violence against women and children or fails to enforce the law fully.

- ◆ A special court should be set up to deal with violence against women and children immediately.

Resettlement of Displaced Civilians and Resettlement/ Rehabilitation of Ex-Combatants

- ◆ In light of the problem of poverty that particularly affects women being resettled, they should be provided with support services for nutrition, health and childcare.
- ◆ Since women being resettled suffer from underemployment, low productivity and dependence, they should be provided with productive skills and encouraged in productive enterprise.
- ◆ There should be parity for all groups including deprived residents of the war-affected communities and internally displaced persons living in the homes of friends and relatives. Skilled workers in their various communities should be encouraged to participate in the reconstruction process.
- ◆ Special attention should be paid to child ex-combatants and young drug addicts in all communities in Sierra Leone by government and other stakeholders.
- ◆ Rehabilitation and resource centres should be established nationwide, in consultation with recognised organisations of the disabled. The disabled must be represented in consultative groups, district communities, etc., through their organisations.
- ◆ Rapid information dissemination should be available to support programmes for community activities for the benefit of all stakeholders to facilitate networking and collaboration—using traditional methods in addition to the electronic media. Information should include details of activities carried out and packages provided in order to avoid misunderstanding.
- ◆ Regular assessment and re-assessment of programmes are required to ensure that they meet emerging needs and challenges that have not been foreseen.

Gender Issues in Poverty, Economic Recovery and Empowerment

- ◆ Government and other providers of education and related services should put in place mechanisms that will enhance coordination and collaboration including facilities for constant monitoring and evaluation of progress.
- ◆ Investment opportunities, particularly for women, should be enhanced by: (i) facilitating the acquisition of capital in the form of low-interest credit from reputable financial institutions; (ii) providing agricultural and other related inputs including processing, transportation and marketing facilities for rural residents, particularly women; (iii) providing access to training to enable men, women and

young people to operate businesses and other income-generating activities with more expertise.

- ◆ Government should grant concessions to companies and industries that employ a certain percentage of the disabled.

Gender Equality in Health, HIV/AIDS and STIs

- ◆ The government should review its national health policy to ensure that it is gender-sensitive, and responsive to the special health needs of women, including the protection and promotion of women's sexual and reproductive rights, and the provision of services.
- ◆ Apart from providing basic equipment and personnel, attempts should be made to train in specialist areas and to procure the necessary equipment to enhance the distribution of medical services.
- ◆ A special gender-sensitive programme should be put in place to address the spiralling incidence of HIV/AIDS and STIs, which is now approaching epidemic proportions.
- ◆ Due to the decline of all structures and systems in the health sector as a result of the war, there should be a complete review of the health service to address the physical, mental, psycho-social and other needs of women, men, boys and girls. Such a review should include health provision at grassroots and community levels, access to hospital facilities in all regions, and the provision of psychosocial counselling.
- ◆ Community-based rehabilitation programmes should be set up to address the needs of war-wounded victims with disabilities. This community-based initiative should provide training for the making/manufacturing of rehabilitation aids, e.g., crutches and wheel chairs.
- ◆ A revised Family Life Education Curriculum that addresses the needs created by the conflict should be taught at the educational levels 1, 2 and 3, bearing in mind the different impacts of the conflict on girls and boys. The existing curriculum for the training of nurses should be reviewed and updated to address the psychosocial needs of the traumatised population.
- ◆ Training schools for nurses and midwives should be established in all regional headquarters of the country to provide easy access to professional skills, to rural women and girls in health and other health-related disciplines.
- ◆ Steps should be taken to either reduce the cost or provide free medical services for poor men.

Gender Equality in Education, Training and Employment

- ◆ More effort should be directed toward reducing the high illiteracy rate among the population, especially among women. Substantial resource allocation should be made for the provision of functional literacy programmes throughout the country. Adult learning and teaching methods/ techniques should be included in the teacher-training curriculum.
- ◆ The unit for the disabled at the Ministry of Education should be run by trained and qualified staff. The unit should promote the immediate enactment of legislation for the disabled. Special education for the disabled should be included in the national curriculum.
- ◆ Special schools should be established for the blind, deaf and mentally challenged in the provincial headquarters to ensure accessibility. The Ministry of Education should ensure the provision of Braille and other educational aids for the blind. Government should provide mobility and hearing aids for the physically disabled and hearing impaired.
- ◆ The Ministry of Education should put in place measures to ensure that grant-in-aid/ scholarships are awarded to female students enrolled in the faculties of pure and applied sciences and engineering.
- ◆ Sharing of available limited resources between the formal and non-formal educational programmes should be encouraged.
- ◆ Programmes should be launched at community level throughout the country to address the special educational and training needs of school dropouts.
- ◆ Revision of teachers' conditions of service should be undertaken to encourage them to stay.
- ◆ More resource support should be given to training institutions to enhance middle level human resource development.
- ◆ Collaboration should be established between the Ministries of Labour and Education, in the area of human resource planning and development.
- ◆ A policy should be formulated on the informal sector.

The Role of Young Women and Men in Post-conflict Reconstruction

Given that the existing situation in Sierra Leone does not provide adequate foundation for the optimum development of young women and men socially, economically, politically and culturally, resulting in the marginalisation and frustration of all youths, leading them to all forms of negative living and actions... we, the women, men and

young people in partnership for post-conflict reconstruction, hereby resolve that our vision for young men and young women is as follows:

- ◆ that young women and young men should have adequate and free access to education and training opportunities at all levels taking into account/cognisance of the culture of peace, democracy and positive change;
- ◆ that affordable health care and shelter should be accessible to all;
- ◆ that government should launch a vigorous campaign nationwide to eradicate drug abuse;
- ◆ that a stable, secure and safe environment should be ensured to enable young women and young men actualise their potentials;
- ◆ that young women and young men should be encouraged and empowered to participate in decision-making at every level;
- ◆ that line ministries and NGOs should coordinate efforts with the view of providing job-oriented training for young women and young men;
- ◆ that all human rights are youth rights;
- ◆ that a National Service Scheme should be introduced to enable young people to serve in other regions of the country, away from their homes. This should act as their voluntary service;
- ◆ that government should revisit the draft national youth policy with a view to ensure its enactment into law, adequate dissemination and implementation;
- ◆ that a Ministry of Youth should be created, a young woman be appointed as Minister, and professionals in youth work are employed.

Our goal is to establish a National Youth Policy and National Youth Council to ensure representation by all youths, especially the most marginalised, to serve as a mouthpiece for young people.

Mechanisms

The government needs to strengthen the capacity of the national gender machinery, the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, to provide policy and strategic direction in all gender-related matters. In this regard, there is need to ensure that adequate human, technical and fiscal resources are put in place for sustained policy formulation and advice. The national gender machinery also needs to provide inputs to ensure equity in response to the needs of all women, men, youth and children in Sierra Leone.

The Government should establish an independent National Gender Commission, which should report directly to the Office of the President, and have the mandate to ensure that the Government implements a number of international agreements to which it is a signatory. The Commission should seek to promote gender equality, and protect and promote the rights of women and children. It should monitor all national programmes relating to gender equality undertaken by governmental and non-governmental organisations, both local and international, to ensure that gender commitments are met, including the recommendations of this national consultation. The Commission would also act as a watchdog to advocate and promote critical, new and emerging gender issues which require national attention, and challenge national efforts to achieve higher levels of attaining gender equity.

Government should consider civil society as a fifth estate.