

SIERRA LEONE

WOMEN'S MANIFESTO 2023

ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY

women have limited participation and representation in politics and decision-making

arbitrary arrests and detention of female activists,

women are at higher risk for Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

Women have traditionally been forced to choose between maintaining a career and a family rather

Structural challenges hinder women's access to land

OUR RIGHTS, TODAY!



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ACRONYMS

ACHPR	African Charter on Human and People's Right
APC	All People's Congress
APPWA	All Political Party Women Association
AUGP	African Union Gender Policy
BPA	Beijing Platform for Action
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women
CGG	Campaign for Good Governance
CLR	Customary Land Rights
C4C	Coalition for Change
CHISEC	Chiefdom Security Committee
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DISEC	District Security Committee
DBPR	District Block Proportional Representation
DYC	District Youth Council
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights
ECSL	Electoral Commission Sierra Leone
EMB	Electoral Management Bodies
FBO	Faith Based Organization
FDGs	Focus Group Discussions
GEA	Gender Empowerment Act
GEWE	Gender Equality and Women Empowerment
GFR	Gola Forest Reserves
GoSL	Government of Sierra Leone
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ICCPR	International Convention on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Convention on Economic Social and Cultural Rights
LRC	Land Rights Commission
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
MAWOPNET	Mano River Union Peace Network
MOGCA	Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs
MTNDP	Medium Term National Development Plan
NaCSA	National Commission for Social Action
NOW	National Organization of Women
NPRC	National Provisional Ruling Council
PAR	Participatory Action Research
SLPP	Sierra Leone People's Party
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UN	United Nations

UNDRIP

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People

UNGA

United Nations General Assembly

USAID

United States Aid for International Development

WM

Women Manifesto

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This is a product of a collaborative approach adopted by civil society organizations (Campaign for Good Governance (CGG), the Fifty-Fifty Group and the Social Development Enterprise (SEND) Sierra Leone and their donor partners-, Christian Aid, Government of Ireland, Trocaire and Action Aid.

Special recognition goes to the Consultant, Ms Valnora Edwin, and her team, Hon. Dr. Bernadette Lahai and Mr. Charlie Hughes, for conducting the consultations, compiling, editing, and presenting the diverse views and perspectives into a single user-friendly women's manifesto that gives the voice of the women of Sierra Leone. We recognize the project team staff of CGG, SEND and the 50/50 group who accompanied and provided valuable support to the Consultants.

We thank all participants for their valuable time and contributions during the consultations held in the various districts and regional levels.

We acknowledge and extend our appreciation to all other individuals, organizations and groups who contributed to the production of this rich and comprehensive document.

FOREWORD FROM MEMBERS OF THE STEERING GROUP

Dear fellow advocates for women's rights and equality in Sierra Leone,

As we gaze into the future of Sierra Leone, we must recognize the critical role that women play in driving development. Despite notable progress in recent years, women continue encountering obstacles that impede their full participation in society. Hence, we present the 2023 Women's Manifesto, a collaborative effort between SEND Sierra Leone, the 50/50 Women's Group, and the Campaign for Good Governance.

This manifesto represents the culmination of extensive consultations held at the district, regional and national levels and the analysis of the current situation in Sierra Leone, with a specific focus on women's rights and equality. It reflects the voices of various stakeholders, including women's groups, civil society organizations, and other key informants. We are confident that the practical recommendations outlined in the manifesto will build on the achievements made for the advancement of women in Sierra Leone.

The manifesto is structured into seven sections, each addressing a distinct aspect of women's lives in Sierra Leone, from their socioeconomic well-being and opportunities to human rights and the rule of law, the effects of climate change and the environment, freedoms, democracy, good governance, and political parties. In each section, we offer clear and concise analyses of the challenges faced by women and practical recommendations for advancing their rights and equality.

For instance, in the section on women's socioeconomic well-being and opportunities, we underscore the cultural and structural obstacles that hinder women's access to education and employment opportunities. We recommend expanding educational opportunities for women and girls, extending the reach of livelihood initiatives, and enforcing relevant acts to increase women's access to land and property.

The section on women, human rights, and the rule of law highlights the distressing levels of violence against women and girls in Sierra Leone, despite introducing key legislation to protect them. We propose establishing local and national partnership boards for domestic abuse, expanding state presence and increasing institutional availability, and strengthening legislation to safeguard women against cyberbullying.

Similarly, the section on women, climate change, and the environment spotlights the challenges encountered by female farmers, such as the need for more access to productive resources. We recommend investing in renewable energy and creating women-specific processes to combat deforestation.

Ultimately, this Women's Manifesto provides a roadmap for advancing women's rights and equality

in Sierra Leone. We urge all stakeholders to prioritize women's issues and work towards fostering an enabling environment that promotes gender equality and enables women's full participation in all aspects of life. Together, we can attain a more equitable and just society for all.

This manifesto underscores the commitment of the donors, funding partners, and NGOs to promoting women's empowerment in Sierra Leone.

We extend our most profound appreciation and acknowledgement to Irish Aid, Trocaire, Christian Aid, and Action Aid for their unwavering financial support and continual involvement, accompaniment, and assistance in aiding our partners to navigate the manifesto procedures.

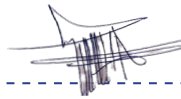
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Section 2 of the GEWE Act is aligned with section 58 (2) of the Public Elections Act, 2022, which provides one female in every three nominations for parliament and local councillors. It, therefore, implies that a lot needs to be done to ensure at least 30% female representation in parliament and local councils.

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INTRODUCTION

1.0

BACKGROUND

Women in Sierra Leone are under-represented in politics. They face widespread discrimination, such as the perspective that women are less effective leaders than their male counterparts. Such misogynistic views negatively impact their full participation in electoral activities and **create barriers for women to become political candidates and/or electoral administrators.** At the same time, women are at higher risk for Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV), which comes in the form of **domestic violence, sexual assault, marital rape, school-related sexual abuse, and harmful and cultural practices such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).**

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Based
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Women consistently confront challenges when becoming members of political parties and attempting to be involved in political spaces. **Notably, they experience difficulties navigating disproportionately male-dominated political structures and networks in financing election campaigns, meeting allies, and commanding respect.** Women also often face SGBV discrimination within the political space of Sierra Leone, especially at the level of political parties. Lower literacy levels and inadequate knowledge of rights and political processes imposed on women throughout their lives further restrict Sierra Leonean women's capacity to participate on a ground of equity alongside males.

Usually, the participation of women in politics is a fundamental tool and pre-requisite for ensuring gender equality and the promotion of genuine democracy across societies. It serves as a strong facilitator of women's direct engagement in public decision-making, including **interpreting and ensuring better and sustained accountability to the agencies of women.** The absence of women in Sierra Leone politics suggests their well-being is not adequately accounted for or considered.

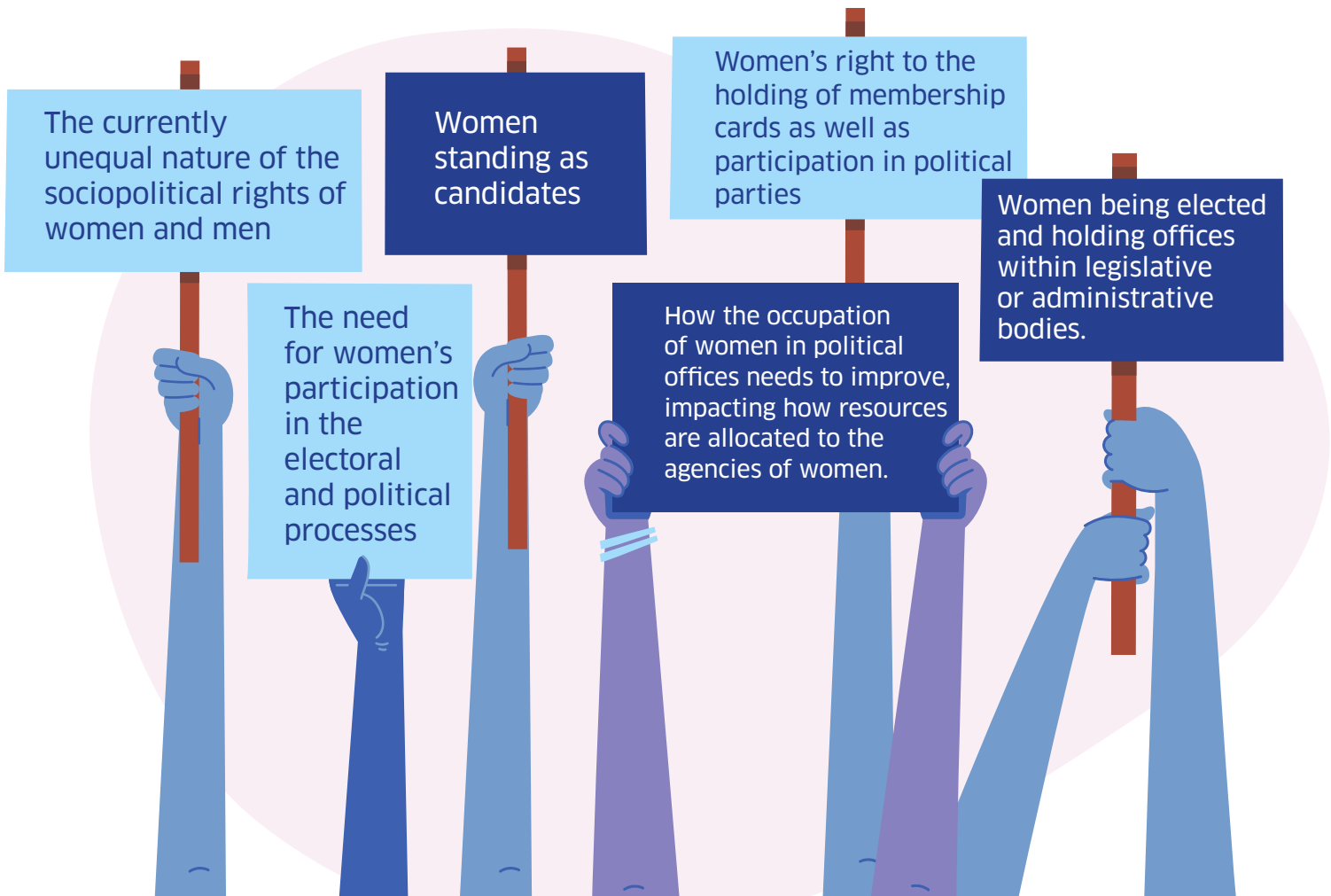
Throughout electoral cycles, many stakeholders are committed to promoting gender equality and women's participation in their respective action fields. Such stakeholders include, but are not limited to, **political parties, Electoral Management Bodies (EMB), election observers, and international electoral assistance providers. Commitments and pledges tend to be numerous,** such as the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), The Beijing Platform for Action (BPA) and, the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR) on Women's Rights. While there exist many calls for action from notable international institutions, the actualization and on-the-ground practice of such standards still has women facing significant challenges regarding equal opportunities and full participation in all aspects of politics, including the democratic spaces of their respective societies.

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Alongside these global efforts are members of this steering group comprised of leading civil society organizations, governments, and private sectors taking action to bring women into governance through initiatives such as training women leaders to boost their skills and capacities for effective participation in electoral processes, especially as candidates. Another action is through the provision of microfinance programs that aims to increase women's access to financial resources and improve their status.

To some degree, these efforts are paving the way for women in Sierra Leone to participate in politics, business and civic activities; however, the full and effective participation of women in elections and political governance is yet to be actualized. There is a great need to recognize:

- The currently unequal nature of the sociopolitical rights of women and men
- The need for women's participation in the electoral and political processes
- Women's right to the holding of membership cards as well as participation in political parties
- Women standing as candidates
- Women being elected and holding offices within legislative or administrative bodies.
- How the occupation of women in political offices needs to improve, impacting how resources are allocated to the agencies of women.



THE RATIONALE OF THE MANIFESTO

the manifesto aims to draw the attention of policy and development practitioners to the importance of increasing women's participation in politics

This Manifesto analyzes impediments to women's political participation in Sierra Leone and recommends strategies for uptake by political parties and relevant stakeholders for promoting gender equality in Sierra Leone. Historically, Sierra Leone has **demonstrated many instances of class divisions, sectionalism, and gender inequality, further compounded by the civil war of 1992-2002 and struggles over natural resources.** Comparably, family and social and political structures, including property rights, have become patrilineal, resulting in the need for women to depend more on their male counterparts for sustenance.

Through their work across Sierra Leone, **SEND Sierra Leone, the Fifty-fifty (50/50) Group, and the Campaign for Good Governance (CGG) formed a steering group to develop the 2023 Sierra Leone Women's Manifesto,** which is expected to detail assigned roles and commitments for the active participation of women, especially in politics and elections, and particularly for the upcoming general elections of 2023 in Sierra Leone. Intently, the manifesto aims to draw the attention of policy and development practitioners to the importance of increasing women's participation in politics by detailing the many sociocultural, socioeconomic, and sociopolitical challenges they face.

The Manifesto seeks to widen the political field for the equal participation of women in electoral processes and political governance architectures. **The manifesto also intends to form the basis for the CGG, the Fifty-Fifty Group, SEND Sierra Leone and other significant stakeholders** in developing robust advocacy strategies on women's participation in politics and governance procedures in Sierra Leone. This Manifesto has been

developed during this specific time to prepare for the upcoming 2023 general elections and is geared towards **addressing the most pressing needs of women across Sierra Leone.**

The Manifesto also proposes to influence and redirect policy support for female candidates, including promoting their activities throughout the lead-up to the 2023 elections. The Manifesto will serve **as a guide for policy engagements, campaigns and interventions with duty bearers and other relevant stakeholders** once it has been approved and aims to present precise documentation of challenges women face in full participation in Sierra Leonean political spaces.

For the Manifesto to achieve its goal of influencing and redirecting policy support for female candidates and political activity promotion in the 2023 elections, it begins by **identifying gender gaps that are associated with the politics and governance** of Sierra Leone. A list of policy recommendations is made after that, which are expected to address cardinal issues of gender

² The CEDAW Convention & the Beijing Platform for Action Reinforcing the Promises of the Rights Framework, Timothy & Freeman (2000)

³ Regional study on women's political representation in the Eastern Partnership countries, Council of Europe (2017)

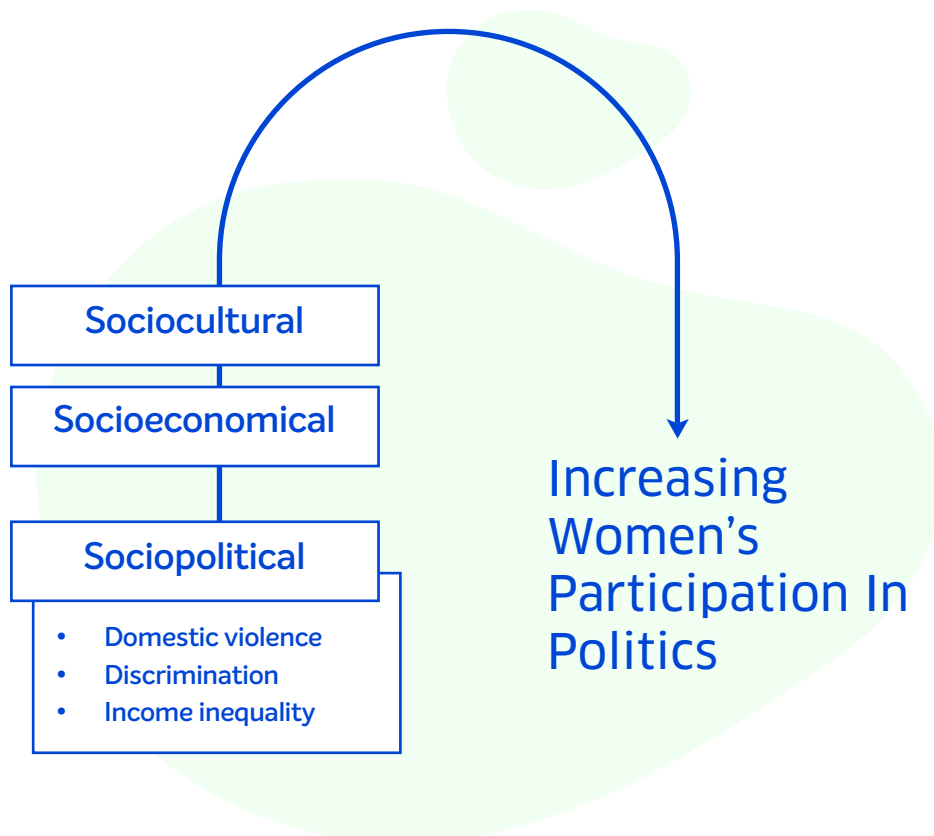
⁴ CGG Capacitates 100 Female Candidates, AYV (2020)



inequality, including **formulating advocacy strategies for CSOs** to engage with policy-makers and development partners towards adequately addressing issues of inequality between women and men in Sierra Leone.

The primary objectives of the manifesto are twofold. Firstly, it aims to draw attention to crucial issues that impact women and their ambitions. It also highlights women's specific demands and expectations for the country's political governance. Secondly, the manifesto strives to promote women's active participation in electoral processes and politics across Sierra Leone. The manifesto proposes critical activities to determine women's involvement in decision-making and leadership roles. **These activities involve conducting desk research, including reviewing three previous manifesto documents and the constitutions of various political party manifestos.** The review focused explicitly on clauses related to female empowerment. Additionally, consultations were conducted in ten (10) districts and five (5) regions, engaging various women's groups and leaders, specifically focusing on women who belong to marginalized identities. These groups include **women with disabilities, women from remote and rural areas, and civil society organizations (CSOs) representatives.**

Additional activities were organized, including targeted consultations with women actively involved in politics or advocacy in Sierra Leone, specifically focusing on those already affiliated with political parties. A national validation process was also conducted to verify the information gathered during these consultations. The consortium team plans to launch the manifesto nationally to increase its reach, leverage, and impact. Additionally, advocacy and tracking tools were created to document progress towards implementing the recommendations outlined in the manifesto.



⁵ MUNAFA: Social Microfinance in Sierra Leone, Entrepreneurs du Monde (2021)
⁶ Examining Gender Inequality in the Post-Conflict Peacebuilding Efforts of Sierra Leone, Borishansky
⁷ Ibid.



PROCESS

METHODOLOGICAL
APPROACH

2.0

PROCESS: METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

To achieve the manifesto's objectives, representatives from diverse women's groups and institutions were consulted through a district and regional consultative process. The consultations brought together a broad range of women, including nurses, teachers, entrepreneurs, farmers, tertiary institution students, current and former councillors, political party representatives, journalists, market women, members of disability associations, young female leaders, security sector representatives, as well as traditional and religious leaders. The sessions occurred in Koinadugu, Bombali, Kambia, Port Loko, Kono, Bo Moyamba, Kenema Districts, and the Western Rural Area. Each session comprised at least 45 women to ensure a comprehensive representation of views.

At the regional level, the consultations were held in the four regions covering the West, North West, North, East, and South of Sierra Leone. Like the district consultations, each session brought together 45 women from diverse sectors. In addition, separate sessions were held for women from the All-Political Parties Women's Association (APPWA), with 50 women representing 15 political parties in attendance. Furthermore, 10 women professionals from accounting, education, legal, and CSOs participated in a virtual focused group discussion.

The selection of participants for each consultation was based on two primary criteria - their professional background and level of engagement in women's rights and empowerment activities. The organizers aimed to capture diverse views and perspectives, considering a broad spectrum of ages and backgrounds to ensure an inclusive participant pool of women.



Women and girls are often the most vulnerable during natural disasters and may be subjected to gender-based violence in refugee camps or other temporary shelters.

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GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXT

OF SIERRA LEONE

3.0

GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXT OF SIERRA LEONE

SIERRA LEONE

This manifesto provides a comprehensive analysis of Sierra Leone's geopolitical context. Sierra Leone is a West African country that gained independence from British rule in 1961. Freetown, the capital city, commands one of the world's largest natural harbours. While subsistence agriculture remains the primary source of livelihood for most of the population, the country is also a mining centre, with significant deposits of diamonds, gold, bauxite, and rutile.

Sierra Leone has had a tumultuous political history marked by conflict and mismanagement. The country experienced a brutal civil war that lasted from 1991 to 2002. Since the end of the conflict, the government has focused on rebuilding the country's infrastructure and promoting reconciliation. As of 2021, Sierra Leone's population is 8,420,641 million, with women accounting for 52%.

The country's economy has faced several challenges, including limited fiscal space and weak institutions inherited from its post-colonial history. Various crises, including the Ebola epidemic, global commodity price collapse, and natural disasters like mudslides and floods, have hampered Sierra Leone's sustained economic growth. Most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have had significant social and economic impacts on the country, resulting in high inflation and socioeconomic vulnerability.

Sierra Leone's agricultural sector employs more than three-fifths of the country's population and produces primarily for the domestic market. The sector was once the focus of development projects, including funding from the World Bank, which aimed to improve agricultural productivity. However, agricultural production declined drastically during the civil war.

The country's forest sector covers over one-third of the land and significantly contributes to the economy. Timber is a significant forest commodity, primarily produced for domestic and export markets. Sierra Leone's waterways host diverse fish, but illegal fishing activities and the civil war have negatively impacted the fishing sector.

Sierra Leone is a constitutional republic with a unicameral parliament and three government spheres: national government, local councils, and chiefdom councils. The country's legal system is based on the Common Law system, with the Supreme Court as the highest court of appeal. The country is divided into six administrative regions and 22 councils, with paramount chiefs and chiefdom councillors leading each chiefdom.

Sierra Leone holds presidential, parliamentary, and local council elections every five years. The upcoming general election will occur on June 24th, 2023, under the District Block Proportional Representation System. The country's main political parties are the All-People's Congress and the Sierra Leone People's Party. The ruling SLPP has endorsed President Julius Maada Bio as its presidential candidate, while the APC has appointed Samura Kamara as its political flag bearer. Sierra Leone faces the challenge of enhancing transparency in managing its natural resources and creating a secure fiscal space for development while addressing issues such as weak infrastructure and widespread poverty.

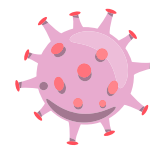
One of the world's largest natural harbours. Sierra Leone's waterways host diverse fish



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Subsistence agriculture remains the primary source of livelihood for most of the population



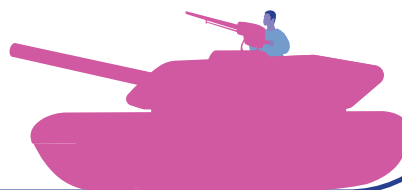
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1961
Independence

1991 - 2002 Sierra Leone has had a tumultuous political history marked by conflict and mismanagement. The country experienced a brutal civil war that lasted from 1991 to 2002.

POLICY & LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

FOR WOMEN'S SOCIO-
ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL
EMPOWERMENT

4.0

POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR WOMEN'S SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT

During the development of the manifesto, relevant documents were reviewed, **including the Constitution of the Republic of Sierra Leone; the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act of 2022 of the Republic of Sierra Leone; the constitution of political parties, especially the two main political parties SLPP and APC.** It also presents summary information from relevant national policy-related documents and reports, referring to critical international protocols and conventions, including documents shared by other professional individuals and organizations.

4.1.1. UNDERSTANDING OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Conceptually, political participation refers to voluntary activities undertaken by the mass public through established structures to influence public policy and action, either directly or by affecting the selection of persons who make and implement policies. **As a fundamental tool and prerequisite for ensuring gender equality and promoting genuine democracy through women's participation in politics.** This encompasses the engagement of women's views, activities and actions in the design and implementation of public policies, including ensuring that their well-being is accounted for across all levels of society.

The participation of women in politics is highly hinged on policy and legal frameworks. These frameworks, when developed, will play a critical role in the advancement of women's participation in politics and the political governance of states, especially with the adoption of special measures such as quotas, which have shown to be critical factors for increment in women's representation in the body of elected citizens. When political parties are mandated to mainstream gender within their internal organization, this is echoed through the developments of gender-sensitive legal and policy frameworks, as well as practices towards ensuring gender-balanced candidate recruitment and supporting women politicians in their campaigns. As part of the principles to guide this process, **adopting a human rights-based approach, a culture of inclusiveness, transparency, accountability, integrity, and effective collaboration,** are critical characteristics that can effectively facilitate the achievement of a social contract where women have equal participation in decision-making and positions of power.

4.1.2. SOME POLICIES AND STRATEGIES FOR WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS

In addition to its established constitution, which is the organic law of the land, Sierra Leone is a signatory to many international instruments to ensure gender equality and more effective participation of women in politics and elections. Some of these instruments include:

- The African Union Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality signed in 2004
- The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa in 2003

⁹ Overview of SL: A World Bank Report (2023)

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Politics and Participation, Uhlener (2015)



- The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) adopted in 2007 by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)
- The African Union Gender Policy (AUGP) in 2009
- The African Charter on Human and People's Rights in 1981
- The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women adopted in 1979 by the United Nations, among others.

These are in addition to crucial national policy documents and institutions that have been developed for a more democratic and balanced society. **These policies and institutions include the Gender Equality and Women Empowerment Act (GEWE) of 2022 and the three Gender Acts (GA) of 2007: 1) The Domestic Violence Act, 2) The Devolution of Estates Act; 3) The Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce Act.** Subsequently, this legislative framework was bolstered by enacting the Sexual Offences Act (2012) to end the culture of impunity for those found guilty of having perpetrated sexual offences.

4.1.3. THE 1991 CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE

Within the 1991 Constitution of the Republic of Sierra Leone, as indicated in Chapter II, Section 5, under the Fundamental Principles of State Policy, it is provided that Sierra Leone as a republic 'shall' be based on the **principles of freedom, democracy and justice**. It also states that the security, peace and welfare of every citizen of Sierra Leone, regardless of gender, shall be the primary purpose and responsibility of the government and that the provisions of the constitution shall ensure the participation of everyone in the governance of the state.

Under the Fundamental Human Rights and Provision for the Individuals component of the Constitution, every person in Sierra Leone, including women, is entitled to the fundamental human rights and freedoms detailed in the laws. This includes **the right to political opinion and political participation**. It also includes the **freedom of conscience, expression, assembly and association, protection from discrimination, and the deprivation of property without compensation**.

Sierra Leone as a nation is a signatory to the Maputo Protocol, which demands all state parties and document signatories must ensure equal inclusion of both women and men.

These principles within the constitution are the very basis for why women of Sierra Leone, **constituting the largest segment of the country (52%)**, lawfully should have all rights to participate in politics and the political governance of the state. However, it is essential to note that the Constitution is not gender specific, and this lack of specificity is one reason women face unequal political representation. Sierra Leone as a nation is a signatory to the Maputo Protocol, which demands all state parties and document signatories must ensure equal inclusion of both women and men.

The Maputo Protocol also instructs state parties, including Sierra Leone, to ensure the integration of a gender perspective in the various policies, decisions, legislation, development plans, programmes and other activities in the life of a nation.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Impact Assessment: The Three Gender Acts in Sierra Leone, Irish Working Group, (2018)

¹⁵ The Constitution of Sierra Leone (1991)

4.1.4. GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT (GEWE) ACT OF 2022

Unlike many previous documents on women's rights, **the GEWE Act 2022 emphasizes promoting effective political participation, empowerment, equal opportunity and protection from discrimination and sexual violence for women in Sierra Leone.** Section 2 of the GEWE Act is aligned with section 58 (2) of the Public Elections Act, 2022, which provides one female in every three nominations for parliament and local councillors. It, therefore, **implies that a lot needs to be done to ensure at least 30% female representation in parliament and local councils.** The Act also allows the President to **"take due consideration of the possibility of appointing at least 30% of women to the cabinet and other government positions and for other appointments made by persons other than the president"**.

Additionally, private institutions must employ at least 30% of women, including 30% of women, in decision-making positions at all levels. The Act also extends maternal leave from 12 weeks to 14 weeks and ensures financial inclusion for women. Overall, the GEWE Act aims to ensure that women's voices are heard and represented in all spheres of public life in Sierra Leone.

Other sections of the law provide equal pay for males and females employed within the same organization and with the same qualification, experience, grade and job description, **including equal opportunities for training, education and scholarship opportunities for males and females employed within the same entity.**

The GEWE Act's provisions contribute to the Maputo Protocol's objectives of guaranteeing women's rights to participate in political processes. Article 9, Section (1) gives basic instructions to state parties that sign the protocol, providing that **every government should take specific and positive action towards promoting participative governance and the equal participation of women in the political life of the various states.** This is instructed through affirmative action on the part of governments, as well as enabling national legislations and other measures to ensure that full participation for women is facilitated in any election without discrimination.

4.1.5. PUBLIC ELECTIONS ACT 2022

Parliament passed the Public Elections Act in 2022 as part of the overall electoral reform agenda proposed after the 2018 general elections. **The Act seeks, among others, to strengthen electoral administration, improve elections funding, strengthen the independence of the Electoral Commission and promote inclusive elections.** Although some provisions of the Act use gender bias language by mostly using the **male gender (he/him)** to represent both male and female, section 58(2) states that of every 3 candidates nominated to contest an election, one of the candidates shall be a female. This provision needs to meet the high expectations of women for a minimum 30% quota of female representation in politics and governance processes. Even where 30% nomination of women is possible, it does not directly follow that 30% of women will be elected to parliament. More engagements at all levels involving all stakeholders will be required in this regard.

¹⁶ Protocol to the Africa Charter Human & Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, Article 2, Section (1), subsection (a) and (c), (2003)

¹⁷ The Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment Bill (2021)

¹⁸ Protocol to the Africa Charter Human & Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, Article 2, Section (1), subsection (a) and (c), (2003)¹⁹ The Constitution of Sierra Leone (1991)



4.1.6 POLITICAL PARTIES REGULATION COMMISSION ACT OF 2022

The Political Parties Act of 2022 was also **promulgated on December 30th, 2022**. This Act provides for regulating and registering political parties by sections 34 and 35 of the Sierra Leonean constitution and other related matters.

Like the GEWE Act, section 41 of the PPA is in line with section 58(2) of the Public Elections Act for the nomination of women. The PPA Act also allows political parties to have **at least 30% placement for women in executive positions**. The Act also demands that adequate provisions be made in executive positions, again from ward to national level. Concerning in section 42, is the use **"may"**, which does not prima facie, **make placing 30% of women in political party executive positions mandatory**. However, section 44 (b) stipulates penalties the PPRC could impose on political parties who contravene the provision of Part IX (Political Inclusion) of the PPA. This impliedly means that political parties are rather mandated to comply with sections 41 to 43 of the PPA, 2022.

4.1.7. The Proportional Representation (PR) System

Following the Supreme Court Ruling, parliamentary and local councillor elections will be conducted through the PR system. In practical terms, this means that there will be various types of electoral systems, **including the two-round system (run-off) to conduct the presidential election**, the first-past-the-post (simple majority) system to conduct Mayors and Chairpersons elections and the proportional representation (District Block) system to conduct parliamentary and local councillors elections. In addition to the legislation mentioned above, the PR system will also be critical in increasing the potential for more women's representation in parliament and local councils. However, more efforts are required to support ongoing public education on the system, especially when researches indicate women's awareness about the PR system and new legislations is critically low.

5.0



THE MANIFESTO

Since 2002, the women of Sierra Leone, with support from CSOs, have been developing and reviewing manifestoes for women, including outlining their visions for gender equality and women's empowerment in the country at various levels of government. These Manifestoes were continuously shared with all political parties before and during every public election to encourage parties to incorporate the information in the documents, with the end goal being their incorporation into the national development agenda. Given that the 2023 public elections are about to be conducted, there is a need to review the 2017 Women's Manifesto in light of emerging and changing national and international issues. Therefore, the development of the 2023 Women's Manifesto is imminent.

In that respect, representatives from various women's groups and institutions were consulted at district and regional consultative processes. These included consultation with nurses, teachers, entrepreneurs, farmers, students in tertiary institutions, former and currently serving councillors, representatives of political parties, journalists, and associations for persons with disabilities from across the districts. Others consulted included young female leaders, the security sector, and traditional and religious leaders.

Specific sessions were held for women from the All-Political Party Association (APPA), the Market Women Association and women from various professional associations, such as engineering, the health sector, law,

architecture, the entertainment industry, the sports industry, the academic realm, and CSOs. Six individuals were also interviewed at the level of Key Informant Interviews.

A similar methodology was adopted for all other consultations held, where the team of field researchers and those consulted extracted prominent issues from the 2017 Manifesto. These highlighted issues were then presented to the group, and the group was asked to come up with new, emerging problems and remove issues that were no longer deemed relevant. This approach was undertaken as a means of improving the document.

Next, the groups were divided into subgroups, where each was expected to rank the previously identified issues in order of importance. The issues labelled as the most significant across the subgroups were then used to write four priority recommendations for addressing the problems from the Manifesto. A section was added where participants felt that an issue was important and needed to stand alone. Then, at a plenary session, each group presented what they had deemed the most pressing issues and their recommendations, followed by suggested interventions from the floor.

The second session focused on developing advocacy strategies by the smaller subgroups, where each was assigned a different issue to focus on. Their task was to identify advocacy activities for the various problems identified

and the targeted participants, objectives to be achieved by the strategies, alongside timelines and which individuals/organizations should be deemed responsible for what needs to be done.

The plenary was convened again to present each subgroup's report, with most presentations conducted at the district level. At regional consultations, a consolidated report of the district consultations was presented, followed by group work to rank the themes/issues again, followed by the provision of priority recommendations for action. The same procedure was conducted for the advocacy strategy development. A similar consultation was then held with the All-Political Party Association (APPWA) in Freetown. Though they represent various political parties, they agree with the issues that negatively impact women.

The analysis also considered responses from the KIIs and FGDs conducted with relevant stakeholders and groups of female representatives. Each analysis was followed by participants' recommendations towards advancing women's rights and equality, particularly in politics.

This portion of the manifesto analyses the priorities emanating from the district, regional and national consultations.



5.1.1 WOMEN'S SOCIOECONOMIC WELLBEING AND OPPORTUNITIES



Sierra Leone faces several challenges in promoting gender equality and improving women's socioeconomic well-being and opportunities. **Major socio-cultural factors have historically and currently affected the upward mobility of women's socio-economic wellbeing, including teenage pregnancy, early childhood marriage of girls, etc.** These practices create significant barriers for girls and young women to access education, thereby negatively affecting their ability to gain employment and full empowerment. These patriarchal hindrances have resulted in many Sierra Leonean women facing inaccessibility to education, employment, and positions within governing offices.

Structural challenges hinder women's access to land, including the right to inherit and bequeath property.

Structural challenges hinder women's access to land, including the right to inherit and bequeath property. Despite recent legislation such as the Land Rights Commission Act (2022) and the Customary Land Rights (CLR) of 2022, which promote women's access to land, there are critical challenges in implementing these laws. **Women have traditionally been forced to choose between maintaining a career and a family rather than being given the opportunity for both.**

Beyond these cultural and structural barriers, several major issues concern women's socioeconomic well-being and opportunities in Sierra Leone. According to the World Bank's data on gender indicators in Sierra Leone, the gender gap in education is still prevalent. In 2018, **the literacy rate for females aged 15 and above was 46.4%, while the literacy rate for males of the same age group was 63.2%.** In 2019, the net enrollment rate for **primary education was 77.3% for girls and 83.3% for boys,** indicating a gender gap of 6 percentage points. **The net enrollment rate for secondary education in Sierra Leone was 25.8% for girls and 32.2% for boys in 2019,** indicating a gender gap of 6.4 percentage points. In 2019, the gross enrollment rate for **tertiary education was 2.2% for females and 3.8% for males,** indicating a gender gap of 1.6 percentage points. According to UNICEF, the completion rate for primary education in Sierra Leone is lower for girls than boys, **with only 57% of girls completing primary education compared to 66% of boys.** The statistics suggest

that there is still a significant gender gap in education in Sierra Leone, particularly at the secondary and tertiary levels.

According to the World Bank, **only 15% of women aged 15 and above in Sierra Leone participate in the formal labour force, compared to 56% of men.** (Source: World Bank – Gender Data Portal). The gender pay gap in Sierra Leone is also significant, with **women earning only 75% of what men earn.** (Source: World Bank – Gender Data Portal). Women in Sierra Leone also face challenges in accessing credit and other financial services, which limits their ability to start and grow businesses. (Source: UN Women – Sierra Leone). **Sierra Leone has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world, with an estimated 1,360 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births.** (Source: UNFPA – Sierra Leone). Access to healthcare services in Sierra Leone is limited, particularly in rural areas, and women are disproportionately affected. According to the World Health Organization, **only 41% of births in Sierra Leone are attended by skilled health personnel, and only 44% of the population has access to basic healthcare services.** (Source: World Health Organization – Sierra Leone). Despite the GEWE Act's intention for women's representation in political positions, women face significant political under-representation. Addressing these issues is critical to promoting gender equality and improving women's socioeconomic well-being and opportunities in Sierra Leone.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC WELL-BEING OF WOMEN, ESPECIALLY IN POLITICS:



Prioritize women's and girls' needs, particularly reproductive health services, and ensure affordable and quality healthcare services are accessible.



Encourage and enforce gender-responsive budgeting across all sectors to allocate funds for gender mainstreaming programs.



Strengthen political parties' and policymakers' commitment to promoting gender equality by ensuring women's full participation and representation in political leadership, decision-making processes, and governance at all levels.



Conduct targeted awareness-raising campaigns to promote gender equality and women's empowerment, including education and awareness-raising programs for men and women and community and religious leaders.



Engage men and boys in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment through targeted programs and campaigns to change social norms and attitudes towards women and girls.



Foster partnerships and collaboration among government, civil society organizations, development partners, and the private sector to promote women's socioeconomic empowerment.



Regularly monitor and evaluate progress towards achieving gender equality and women's empowerment, including implementing gender-sensitive policies, laws, and programs.

5.1.2 WOMEN, HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE RULE OF LAW



Sierra Leone faces significant challenges related to women, human rights, and the rule of law. **Despite recent legislation and campaigns, violence against women and girls remains high.** The country also has one of the highest rates of female genital mutilation in the world. Sierra Leone's constitution demands respect for every citizen's human rights, and the **Maputo Protocol requires the government to ensure that women have access to judicial and legal services.** However, discrimination against women persists in **areas such as employment, education, and decision-making positions.** Many women face barriers to accessing justice, particularly in cases of gender-based violence, due to a lack of resources and cultural attitudes. Child marriage is

²² SL Sexual Offences Act (2012)

²³ SL The Devolution of Estates Act (2007)

²⁴ SL National Land Commission Act, 2022

prevalent and significantly affects girls' health, education, and well-being. Additionally, women are underrepresented in political leadership positions in Sierra Leone.

Limited information is available about women and girls in detention in Sierra Leone. However, according to reports by human rights organizations, there have been cases of arbitrary arrests and detention of female activists, politicians, and others beyond constitutional limits.

**arbitrary
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detention
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others beyond
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limits.**

In its 2021 report on Sierra Leone, Amnesty International raised concerns about the arbitrary detention of human rights defenders, including women, who were reportedly arrested and held for extended periods without trial or access to legal representation. The report also highlighted the use of excessive force by security forces during protests, which has led to injuries and deaths.

Similarly, in its 2021 report on Sierra Leone, Human Rights Watch documented arbitrary arrests and detention of opposition politicians, journalists, and activists, including women. The report noted that some of these individuals were held incommunicado, without access to legal counsel or family members, and were not charged with any crime.

Overall, while information on the situation of women and girls in detention in Sierra Leone is limited, reports from human rights organizations suggest that there have been arbitrary arrests and detention of female activists, politicians, and others beyond constitutional limits. This highlights the need for more excellent protection of human rights and due process in the country.

Addressing these issues requires a multi-faceted approach that includes strengthening the justice system, promoting women's empowerment and political participation, and changing social norms.

²⁵ SL Customary Land Rights Act (2022)

²⁶ SL The Public Elections Act (2022)

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS AND STRENGTHENING THE RULE OF LAW FOR THEM:



Strengthen the local police partnership board to monitor and report issues of domestic abuse, violence against women and girls and other related abuses.



The enforcement of punitive measures against law enforcement officers involved with violating the rights of women/girls who may be subject to being held in their custody.



A review of the penal code for deferred sentences for pregnant women, lactating mothers and women with children under five will be conducted.



Expand state presence and increase the availability of institutions such as the Police especially Family Support Unit in rural communities ensuring they have received specific training and sensitization on the social well-being of women.



The strengthening of legislation aimed at protecting women against cyberbullying.

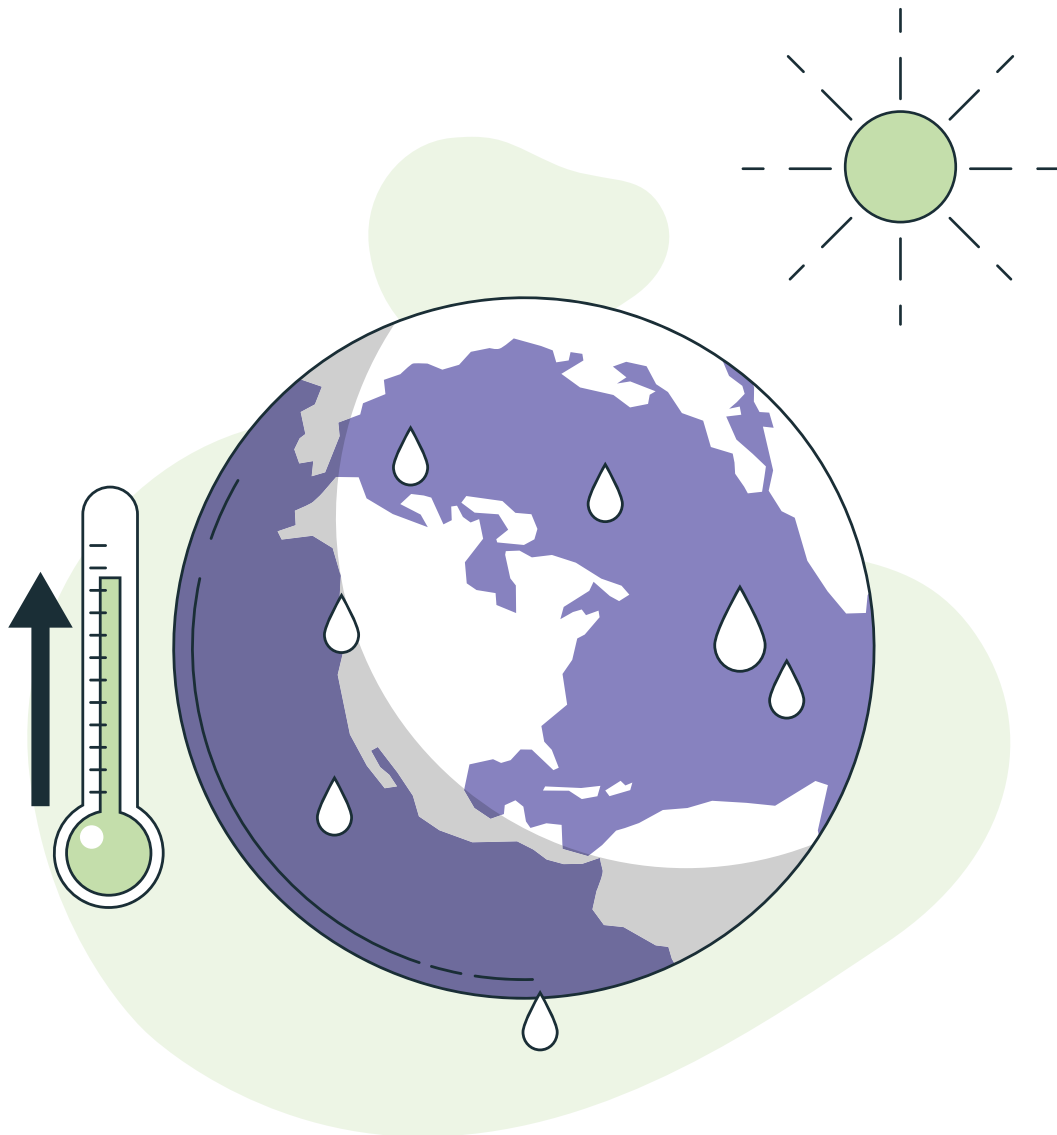


An agenda is created and pursued to increase opportunities for women to serve as Section Chiefs and Court Chairpersons.



Increase the popularization of women's rights laws, including ensuring women are given the right to bail defendants.

5.1.3 WOMEN, CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE ENVIRONMENT



Women in Sierra Leone face significant challenges related to climate change and the environment. **Women are the primary farmers in Sierra Leone, and agriculture is a critical source of income for many households.** However, climate change is causing unpredictable weather patterns, leading to crop failure and food insecurity. In 2017, it was estimated that **3.5 million people were food insecure in Sierra Leone**, with women and children being the most affected. Sierra Leone is vulnerable to natural disasters such as flooding and landslides and other climate influenced disasters. **In August 2017, mudslides and flooding killed over 1,000 people and left thousands homeless.** Women and girls are often the most vulnerable during such disasters, as they may not have access to safe shelters, clean water, and sanitation facilities. Sierra Leone has one of

the highest rates of deforestation in the world. Deforestation disproportionately affects women, as they are the primary fuelwood collectors and other forest products. Without access to these resources, women may have to travel further distances to collect them, losing time and productivity. **Women comprise only 15% of landholders in the country, and many are excluded from traditional land tenure systems.** Women and girls are at higher risk of health problems related to the environment, such as respiratory illnesses from indoor air pollution caused by using firewood for cooking and heating. **Women and girls are often the most vulnerable during natural disasters and may be subjected to gender-based violence in refugee camps or other temporary shelters.**

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WOMEN'S WELL-BEING IN TERMS OF CLIMATE CHANGE:



The government and other stakeholders should support women farmers to help them adapt to climate change, including access to climate-smart agriculture practices, drought-resistant crops, and improved irrigation systems.



Early warning systems should be developed and implemented to prepare for natural disasters like flooding and landslides. These systems should be gender-responsive and consider the unique needs of women and girls during emergencies.



The government and other stakeholders should ensure that women and girls can access safe shelters and sanitation facilities during natural disasters. This includes providing separate facilities for women and girls and ensuring they are safe from gender-based violence.



Sustainable forestry practices should be promoted, including using alternative fuel sources and implementing reforestation programs. Women should be included in decision-making processes related to forestry practices.



Efforts should be made to increase women's access to land, including reforms to traditional land tenure systems and legal support for women to assert their land rights. This will help women to farm and earn an income, reducing their vulnerability to climate change.

²⁷ Beyond the Politics of Men: Empowering Women to be Effective Political Actors in Sierra Leone, Search for Common Ground (2021)

²⁸ SEND Sierra Leone, Women Candidates' Training Manual (2019)²⁴ SL National Land Commission Act, 2022

²⁹ SEND Sierra Leone, My Political Journey Handbook (2019) ²⁶ SL The Public Elections Act (2022)





Efforts should be made to address indoor air pollution, including promoting clean cooking technologies and alternative fuels. This will help to reduce the risk of respiratory illnesses for women and girls.



Prevent gender-based violence during natural disasters: The government and other stakeholders should develop and implement measures to prevent it, including providing separate facilities for women and girls and ensuring they are safe from violence.



To commit to a moratorium on logging, especially in reserved areas.



To commit to banning the export of timber.



The strengthening of the Ministry of Lands' town and country planning unit to enforce laws addressing appropriate land areas for the construction of buildings. (Strengthen the capacity of city and district councils for land use planning).

³⁰ Beyond Politics of Men: Empowering Women to be Effective Political Actors in Sierra Leone, Search for Common Ground (2021).

³¹ SL The Political Parties Act (2002)

5.1.4 WOMEN, PEACE, SECURITY AND SOCIAL COHESION



Sierra Leone has made some progress in implementing national and international frameworks **for women, peace, and security, but some key concerns still need to be addressed.** There needs to be more implementation of the National Action Plan (NAP) on UNSCR 1325. Sierra Leone developed a NAP on UNSCR 1325 in 2010, which includes strategies for promoting women's participation in peacebuilding and conflict resolution. However, implementing the NAP could have been faster, with limited resources allocated. Sierra Leone has weak institutional frameworks for gender mainstreaming. **It lacks robust frameworks for gender mainstreaming in peace and security initiatives.** This has resulted in limited progress in integrating gender perspectives into peacebuilding and conflict resolution strategies. Despite the country's **efforts to combat sexual**

and gender-based violence, the prevalence of such violence remains high in Sierra Leone. **The government needs to do more to address the root causes of this violence, including poverty, gender inequality, and harmful cultural practices.** Women and girls who have experienced sexual and gender-based violence **face significant barriers to justice and reparations.** This includes limited access to legal aid, a lack of awareness about their rights, and the stigmatization of survivors. Women's participation in decision-making processes related to peace and security needs to be higher in Sierra Leone. There is a need for greater efforts to promote women's participation at all levels of decision-making, including in the security sector.

In terms of the core pillars of prevention, protection, relief, and recovery, there have been some positive developments in Sierra Leone. For example, **the government has established a national emergency response system for sexual and gender-based violence** and has developed a survivor-centred approach to addressing such violence. However, there is still a need for greater efforts to prevent sexual and gender-based violence, protect survivors, and ensure their access to justice and reparations.

There must be a gender-responsive approach at the community and national levels to address the issue of peace, security and social cohesion for women. Due to the patriarchal nature of society, **most, if not all, decision-making levels of the security apparatus are managed by men.** Increasing the implementation of legislation that promotes equality for women, and addresses barriers they face, such as the **Sexual Offences Act 2012, Devolution of Estate Act 2007, the Land Rights Commission Act 2022, the Customary Land Rights, 2022, and the Public Elections Act 2022,** amongst others, will contribute towards strategically positioning women as partners in development processes. At the same time, community initiatives that include the police partnership Board, District Security Committees, and Community Security Committees must be designed to accommodate a higher representation of women at decision-making levels.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WOMEN'S WELL-BEING IN TERMS OF CLIMATE CHANGE:



Increase access to education for girls and women to increase their participation in decision-making processes and reduce harmful traditional practices.



Strengthen legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms to protect women's rights, prevent gender-based violence, and ensure women's participation in decision-making processes.



Provide training and sensitization on gender issues to security personnel, community leaders, and the general public to promote gender equality and prevent gender-based violence.



Increase access to resources for women affected by climate change and environmental degradation, including natural resources for sustainable livelihoods.



Involve women in developing and implementing policies and programs related to peace, security, and social cohesion at all levels.



Ensure that women have access to affordable and quality healthcare services to address health problems related to environmental pollution and climate change.



Increase the representation of women at decision-making levels of the security sector, including police, military, correctional services, and the Ministry of internal affairs. Also, increase opportunities for women to lead peacekeeping operations and strengthen their role in peace-building processes.



Maintain the ban on secret societies during elections.



Strengthen and expand referral pathways for sexual and gender-based violence matters at the Chiefdom level, ensuring speedy trials for SGBV cases.

5.1.5 WOMEN'S HEALTH, SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS



Over the years, the government of Sierra Leone has initiated programmes and projects, including enacting legislation geared towards strengthening healthcare services to women and girls. Despite these laudable efforts, healthcare delivery for women and girls remains challenging. There are concerns regarding women's sexual and reproductive rights in Sierra Leone. **Access to family planning services remains limited, with only 15% of married women using modern contraception.** This lack of access **can lead to unintended pregnancies, negatively affecting women and limiting their educational and economic opportunities.** Unsafe abortions are also a concern, **with an estimated 30% of maternal deaths** in Sierra Leone being caused by unsafe abortions. The legal framework surrounding abortion is restrictive, with abortion only permitted

in cases where the life or health of the woman is in danger. However, many women may still seek out unsafe abortions due to the lack of access to safe and legal options.

Gender-based violence, including sexual violence, is also a significant concern in Sierra Leone. Women and girls are at risk of sexual violence during and after the country's decade-long civil war. Despite introducing the **Sexual Offences Act in 2012**, which criminalizes various forms of sexual violence, the law's implementation remains weak, and cases of sexual violence often go unreported or are not adequately prosecuted. **This lack of justice can have significant psychological and physical consequences for survivors.**

Specialised personnel, trained technicians, the provision of functional equipment, the expansion of services to remote parts of the country, and the low ethical and professional character of medical personnel are among the many challenges women and girls face in the system disproportionately. Healthcare services to address cancer, diabetes, and hypertension among women, especially outside the capital city and rural communities, continue to be a significant challenge.

WE ENCOURAGE POLITICAL PARTIES TO INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING IN THEIR PARTY MANIFESTO:



Increase access to family planning services, including modern contraception, to reduce unintended pregnancies and promote women's reproductive rights.



Improve the implementation of the Sexual Offences Act to ensure survivors of sexual violence receive justice and support.



Strengthen medical personnel's training and ethical standards to improve healthcare delivery, particularly for women and girls.



Strengthen medical personnel's training and ethical standards to improve healthcare delivery, particularly for women and girls.



Expand healthcare services for cancer, diabetes, and hypertension to rural communities and remote parts of the country.



Ensure hospitals access reliable electricity and water supply to improve service delivery and patient outcomes.



Provide comprehensive support and education for persons with HIV, hepatitis, and tuberculosis, particularly in rural areas.



Encourage private sector investment in hospitals through specialized incentives to improve healthcare infrastructure.



Improve coordination and resourcing of institutions focused on training healthcare providers to promote quality healthcare delivery.



Enact legislation on women's health and reproductive rights to promote gender equality and access to healthcare services.



Provide inclusive family life education to young girls and boys to promote healthy behaviours and prevent adverse health outcomes.



Invest in training medical doctors in public health management and leadership skills to improve healthcare delivery at all levels.

5.1.6 WOMEN, DEMOCRACY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE



The main issues and opportunities for Women, Democracy and Good Governance in Sierra Leone **include** **due to cultural and societal barriers, discrimination and violence against women in politics, and insufficient legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms.** In addition, limited access to information and resources for women to engage in political and civic activities, exclusion from decision-making processes related to peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction, and limited participation of women in local governance structures undermine their ability to advocate for their rights and interests. Furthermore, **women's voices and concerns are ignored in the development and implementation of policies and programs related to democracy, good governance, and human rights,** and they are exposed to gender-based violence, harassment,

and intimidation in the political and civic sphere, which undermines their ability to participate fully in democracy and governance processes. Although there are promising initiatives, such as the **Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Act (2022)**, there are concerns over implementation, including the lack of a 30% quota provision for elective and appointive positions and challenges in implementing recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Report 2004 of Sierra Leone related to gender justice, particularly in increasing women's representation as national decision-makers.

WE ENCOURAGE POLITICAL PARTIES TO INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING IN THEIR PARTY MANIFESTO:



Strengthen legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms to protect women's political rights, prevent gender-based violence, and ensure women's participation in decision-making processes.



Provide access to information and resources for women to engage in political and civic activities, including voter education and political party participation.



Increase women's participation in local governance structures, such as Chiefdom Councils and Ward Committees, and ensure their voices and concerns are heard in policy development and implementation processes.



Address gender-based violence, harassment, and intimidation in the political and civic sphere through increased awareness-raising, stronger legal frameworks, and improved enforcement mechanisms.



Implement the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Report 2004 related to gender justice, including increasing women's representation as national decision-makers.



Ensure the full implementation of the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Act (2022), including a 30% quota provision for elective and appointive positions.



Increase funding and resources for women's organizations and civil society groups that advocate for gender equality, women's empowerment, and political participation.

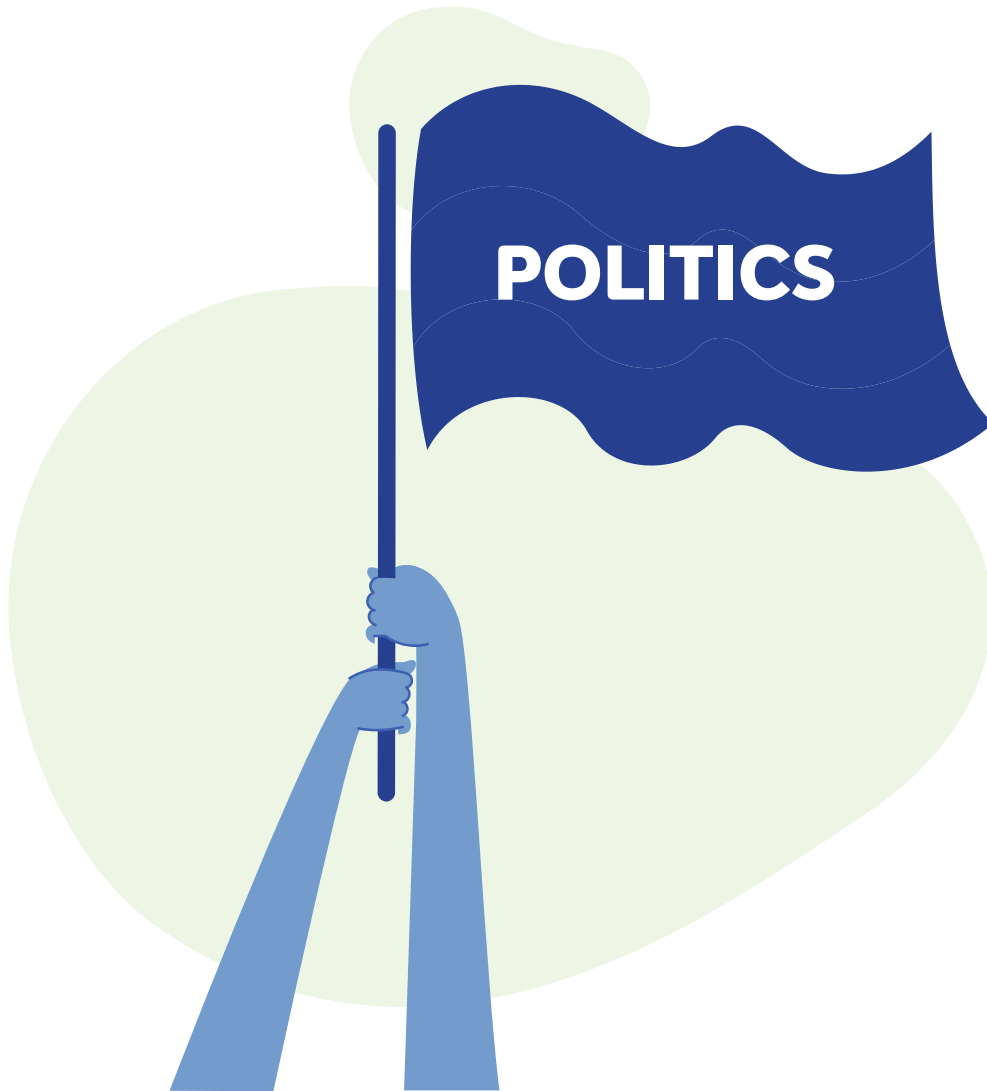


Encourage political parties to nominate and support more women for elected and appointed positions in government and public institutions, including parliament, local councils, and the judiciary.



Work with women's groups and civil society organizations to develop and implement gender-responsive policies and programs related to democracy, good governance, and human rights.

5.1.7 WOMEN AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION



Statistics show that since the presidential elections in 2018, growing social instability has further exacerbated the already-existing low participation of women in local and national decision-making processes. Towards ensuring the success of women in the 2023 general elections, SEND Sierra Leone and several NGOs have mobilized and trained several women interested in their people's political representation through the TRAINING AND ACCOMPANIMENT MANUAL FOR ASPIRING WOMEN CANDIDATES and MY POLITICAL JOURNEY HANDBOOK developed by SEND and Trocaire and other CSOs (CGG, ABC Dev. NMJD and WOFRHAD). These publications and manuals were created to increase female interest in politics and their engagement with elective positions.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WOMEN'S EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS:

30%

Include provisions in manifestos to increase the representation of women in elected and appointed positions in government and public institutions, including parliament, local councils, and the judiciary, by implementing a 30% quota provision for elective and appointive positions.



Provide opportunities and information on networking, knowledge exchange, and learning for women in different political contexts.



Develop and implement gender policies within political parties.



Commit to implementing laws and policies that promote women's political participation as enshrined in the Public Elections, Political Parties, and the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Acts.



Initiate processes to support a referendum to adopt a new constitution for Sierra Leone that is gender transformative in all aspects.



Strengthen political parties' and policymakers' commitment to promoting gender equality by ensuring women's full participation and representation in political leadership, decision-making processes, and governance at all levels.

KEY PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

The consultations yielded a wealth of valuable information about the main issues concerning the public. Participants were asked to identify two or three priority demands, which the manifesto team reviewed in detail. Based on this review, several prioritized recommendations were formulated for political parties to incorporate into their manifestos.

The prioritized recommendations encompass various issues, including education, healthcare, gender equality, and environmental sustainability. To effectively address these issues, it is essential to adopt a comprehensive and holistic approach that considers the interconnectedness of these factors.

The prioritized recommendations serve as a blueprint for political parties' manifestos. By incorporating these recommendations into their platforms, political parties can demonstrate their commitment to addressing their constituents' most pressing issues and contribute to building a more prosperous and sustainable future for all.

1

Encourage and enforce gender-responsive budgeting across all sectors to allocate funds for gender mainstreaming programs.

2

Engage men and boys in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment through targeted programs and campaigns to change social norms and attitudes towards women and girls and commit to strategies for eliminating FGM in Sierra Leone.

3

The enforcement of punitive measures against law enforcement officers involved with violating the rights of women/girls who may be subject to being held in their custody.

4

A review of the penal code for deferred sentences for pregnant women, lactating mothers and women with children under five will be conducted.

5

Expand and increase the availability of institutions such as the Family Support Unit and police and magistrates in rural communities.

6

The strengthening of legislation aimed at protecting women against cyberbullying.

7

The government and other stakeholders should support women farmers to help them adapt to climate change, including access to climate-smart agriculture practices, drought-resistant crops, and improved irrigation systems.

8

Sustainable forestry practices should be promoted, including using alternative fuel sources and implementing reforestation programs. Women should be included in decision-making processes related to forestry practices.

9

Efforts should be made to address indoor air pollution, including promoting clean cooking technologies and alternative fuels. This will help to reduce the risk of respiratory illnesses for women and girls.

10

Commit to a moratorium on logging, especially in reserved areas and sustainable timber exports to ensure the forest in Sierra Leone is not depleted.

11

Provide training and sensitization on gender issues to security personnel, community leaders, and the general public to promote gender equality and prevent gender-based violence.

12

Ensure that women have access to affordable and quality healthcare services to address health problems related to environmental pollution and climate change.

13

Increase the representation of women at decision-making levels of the security sector, including police, military, correctional services, and the Ministry of internal affairs. Also, increase opportunities for women to lead peacekeeping operations and strengthen their role in peace-building processes.

14

Maintain a zero-tolerance policy for cyberbullying and intimidation of women on social media.

15

Ensure hospitals access reliable electricity and water supply to improve service delivery and patient outcomes.

16

Enact legislation on women's health and reproductive rights to promote gender equality and access to healthcare services.

17

Provide inclusive family life education to young girls and boys to promote healthy behaviours and prevent adverse health outcomes.

18

Ensure the full implementation of the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Act (2022), including a 30% quota provision for elective and appointive positions.

19

Develop and implement gender policies within political parties.

20

Initiate processes to support a referendum to adopt a new constitution for Sierra Leone that is gender transformative in all aspects.

CONCLUSION

6.0

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, ensuring women's effective participation in politics within the West African nation of Sierra Leone is paramount and essential. Sierra Leonean women have played a substantive role in the country's postwar (2002) stabilization, especially towards attaining and maintaining its current peace and national stability. The government of Sierra Leone is obliged by international conventions and protocols to ensure the protection and promotion of women's social, economic, and political rights, including ensuring that women are supported in national elections and appointed positions.

Even though this Manifesto is focused on women's political participation in the upcoming elections of 2023, it is important to highlight the challenges expressed in the provided recommendations to adequately address gaps in the legislative and judiciary branches of the government. Women account for more than half of the Sierra Leonean population; therefore, it is an obligation of state-related institutions, ministries, departments, and agencies who are mandated by the constitution to work assiduously in ensuring that the rights of women are respected and that they are given the same opportunities as their male counterparts.

This Manifesto aims to ensure that women's rights in the general Sierra Leonean society are protected and that they can fully participate in politics at all levels.

It is also in the hope of women who took part in consultations that these recommendations will contribute to furthering women's engagement and accessibility to full rights within the political and public realms of Sierra Leone. This Manifesto should be seen as a property that belongs to every Sierra Leonean, including boys and men and women and girls. All individuals are strongly encouraged to take full ownership of this document and ensure its implementation at all levels.





A BETTER DEMOCRACY
IS A DEMOCRACY WHERE WOMEN DO NOT
ONLY HAVE THE RIGHT TO VOTE AND TO ELECT
BUT TO BE ELECTED

**“ IF YOU WANT SOMETHING SAID, ASK A MAN
IF YOU WANT SOMETHING DONE, ASK A WOMAN**

The feminine political voice is personal. It's intimate. It's caregiving and life enhancing.
IT'S ABOUT BRINGING MORE LOVE, CARE AND JUSTICE INTO THE WORLD. IT'S ALSO FIERCE AND DETERMINED.
-TABBY BIDDLE

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**I HOLD THE POWER TO REPRESENT
MYSELF
MY WARD
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