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International Alert.

**Addressing Gender-Based
Violence in Sierra Leone:
Mapping Challenges,
Responses and Future
Entry Points**

By Karen Barnes with
Peter Albrecht and Maria Olson

August 2007

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Executive summary

From July 4th-14th 2006, International Alert conducted a mapping of the incidence of GBV and the programmes that are being implemented to address it in Sierra Leone on behalf of Irish Aid. Historically, women have been discriminated against and are heavily under-represented in the traditionally male-dominated political and socio-economic decision-making structures of Sierra Leone. Gender inequalities are prevalent throughout society, with women being more likely to be illiterate and suffer extreme poverty; their rights are frequently violated, and they have little access to resources and opportunities. Gender-based violence (GBV) in its physical and structural forms is endemic in Sierra Leone. It is a security concern that also has broader economic and political consequences. Therefore, failing to engage with the causes and effects of GBV will inevitably have long-term consequences for peacebuilding and development in Sierra Leone.

Contextualising GBV in Sierra Leone

The legacy of the conflict in Sierra Leone, both in terms of widespread sexual violence and the changes in gender roles brought about by violence and displacement, has influenced the nature and extent of GBV in the post-conflict phase. Women have been offered limited assistance to deal with the health, psychosocial and economic consequences of sexual violence experienced during the war and the continued discrimination they face in the post-conflict phase. Furthermore, the failure to put in place mechanisms to prosecute perpetrators of GBV has contributed to a culture of impunity around GBV-related crimes. As such, the important peacebuilding role of women during the conflict has not translated into greater decision-making power in its aftermath.

Key issues

Sierra Leone is a highly patriarchal society, and institutionalised gender inequalities are exacerbated by discriminatory customs, particularly with relation to marriage, property rights and sexual offences. The high levels of illiteracy and poverty amongst Sierra Leonean women prevent them from upholding many of their internationally recognised rights. Similarly, economic insecurity contributes to women's vulnerability to GBV. Their marginalisation from local and national decision-making processes further limits their ability to redress these gender inequalities. Any attempt to address GBV in Sierra Leone must take these post-conflict realities into account and prioritise engagement with both men and women, including national and community leaders who are in a position to influence attitudes towards GBV.

National structures and processes for addressing GBV in Sierra Leone

The national context for addressing GBV provides some opportunities for progress as well as a number of challenges. The current law reform process has led to the drafting of three new "Gender Bills" related to women's rights. Although these Bills were signed into law by the Parliament in June 2007, they will need to be widely disseminated and coupled with sensitisation strategies if they are to have any impact. The recommendations related to GBV in the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission are yet to be implemented, and the Ministry responsible for gender affairs is one of the weakest and least-funded ministries within the government, further constraining implementation. Women's organisations have not been engaged in the security sector reform process, and the police and armed forces remain largely insensitive to gender issues, including GBV. Some promising initiatives such as the Family Support Units within the police force exist. The recent completion of the 1st and 2nd-5th reports on the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women provides useful benchmarks for monitoring the government's progress towards reducing GBV. Policy frameworks that influence the peacebuilding process in Sierra Leone such as the draft Compact being developed by the Peacebuilding Commission and other national stakeholders, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper and the Peace and Consolidation Strategy also provide an

opportunity to address GBV. However, the case remains that GBV has yet to be effectively linked into the broader political, economic and security strategies.

What is being done?

Local, national and international actors are undertaking initiatives that address the cultural, socioeconomic, political and institutional constraints which exacerbate the incidence of GBV in Sierra Leone. Programmes are being designed and implemented in the areas of both prevention and response. However, information, monitoring, evaluation and statistics on who is doing what, which interventions are most effective, and what the priorities of local men and women are is very limited. More research is needed in this regard, and this report could act as a springboard to conduct a more in-depth comparative study of the different problems, opportunities and activities related to GBV across Sierra Leone.

During and after the war, women's organisations have responded to the disruption of social services and community-based structures by developing networks and alternative coping strategies to deal with problems such as food scarcity, sexual violence, and shortfalls in health and education provision. This demonstrates the innovative responses that women develop at the community-level. However, they have very limited resources and capacity for sustaining the implementation of these projects in the long-term, making donor support critical to their ongoing activities. The international community supports a number of important initiatives for women and gender equality in Sierra Leone. Many of the GBV-related programmes supported and implemented by international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) stemmed out of the emergency responses that were launched towards the end of the war. The international community is now moving towards focusing on long-term development, and INGOs are continuing to support a number of economic, political and social initiatives that target women. It is important that INGOs work to improve coordination and avoid duplication, and that they strategise collectively to ensure that their services, particularly capacity-building and awareness-raising, are extended throughout as much of the country as possible. Several donor agencies include small gender-related projects in their strategies for Sierra Leone, but the overall response by the international community to GBV has been ad hoc and relatively uncoordinated. There is currently a degree of momentum for addressing GBV more comprehensively, as Security Council Resolution 1325 is gaining profile and the consequences of failing to deal with gender inequalities are being increasingly recognised.

Moving forward

There is a clear opportunity for a more holistic and cooperative approach to dealing with GBV amongst key stakeholders within civil society, government and the international community. Irish Aid is well-placed to take a leadership role in moving efforts to address GBV forward, in coordination with other key stakeholders from the international donor community and civil society. Areas where key actions could be taken include: more effective coordination and information-sharing between stakeholders; capacity-building and increased funding of civil society organisations; awareness-raising and sensitisation around GBV and related issues; increased support for government services; support for law reform; targeted support for INGO-implemented projects; and more frequent cross-learning and sharing of good practices.

List of acronyms and abbreviations

50/50	Fifty-fifty Group
CBOs	Community-based organisations
CCSEA	Interagency Coordinating Committee for the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women
CSOs	Civil Society organisations
DAW	Division for the Advancement of Women
DfID	Department for International Development
DISECs	District Security Committees
FAWE	Federation of African Women Educationalists
FSUs	Family Support Units
GBV	Gender-based Violence
GoSL	Government of Sierra Leone
GTG	Gender Theme Group
INGOs	International non-governmental organisations
IRC	International Rescue Committee
LAWCLA	Lawyers Commission for Legal Assistance
LAWYERS	Lawyers Yearning for Equality, Rights and Social Justice
LRC	Law Reform Commission
Marwopnet	Mano River Women's Peace Network
MDAs	Ministries, Departments and Agencies
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MSWGCA	Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs
NAPs	National Action Plans
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
NMJD	Network Movement for Justice and Democracy
ONS	Office of National Security
PCHR	Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights
PCS	Peace and Consolidation Strategy
PHUs	Primary Health Units
PROSECs	Provincial Security Committees
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
RCs	Rainbo Centres
RSLAF	Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces
SCF	Save the Children Fund
SCR 1325	UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security
SEA	Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
SLP	Sierra Leone Police
SLWF	Sierra Leone Women's Forum
SLWMP	Sierra Leone Women's Movement for Peace
SSR	Security Sector Reform
TDS	Talking Drum Studios
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UNAMSIL	United Nations Assistance Mission in Sierra Leone
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Emergency Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNIOSIL	United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone

Contents

1.	Introduction	6
1.1	Methodology and structure of the report	7
2.	GBV: Key concepts	8
3.	Linking GBV with peacebuilding and long-term development	10
4.	Contextualising GBV in Sierra Leone	11
4.1	Sexual violence during the conflict in Sierra Leone	11
4.2	Women as peacebuilders in Sierra Leone	12
5.	Key issues	14
5.1	Discriminatory attitudes and practices within the legal system	14
5.2	Economic insecurity and GBV	16
5.3	The exclusion of women from decision-making positions	18
6.	National structures and processes for addressing GBV in Sierra Leone	20
6.1	The Constitution	20
6.2	GBV and the law reform process	20
6.3	The Truth and Reconciliation Commission	21
6.4	The Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs	22
6.5	The security sector	23
7.	Relevant policy frameworks for addressing GBV in Sierra Leone	26
7.1	Millennium Development Goals	26
7.2	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women	26
7.3	Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security	26
7.4	Peace and Consolidation Strategy	26
7.5	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper	27
7.6	Sierra Leone Compact	27
7.7	MSWGCA gender policies	27
8.	GBV: What is being done?	29
8.1	Sierra Leonean organisations	29
8.2	International NGOs	31
8.3	Key donor agencies	33
9.	Good practice guidelines for addressing GBV	36
10.	Recommendations for Irish Aid and other key stakeholders	39
	Annex A. List of people interviewed	42
	Annex B. Selected Recommendations from the TRC Report	43
	Annex C. Terms of Reference	45
	Endnotes	46

1. Introduction

Sierra Leone's ten-year civil conflict was officially declared over in January 2002. Following extensive donor engagement since then, the country is largely considered to be making the transition from post-conflict recovery towards longer-term development. The fighting resulted in the destruction of infrastructure and institutions, spiralling poverty and growing human insecurity, and the breakdown in the functioning of the political system. Sierra Leone was ranked for many years as the poorest country in the world by the United Nation's (UN) Human Development Index (HDI), and even now, more than 70% of the population continues to live below the poverty line¹. The country's descent into war was rooted in many factors, including the exclusion of certain social groups, the corruption and mismanagement of state institutions, extreme inequality and the breakdown of social structures, all framed in the context of regional instability. The international community has invested heavily in Sierra Leone's post-conflict recovery, but a number of significant security challenges remain. The consolidation of peace in Sierra Leone could be undermined, although the increased tensions leading up to the elections in August 2007 fortunately did not turn into the violence that many had feared. Corruption, high youth unemployment, entrenched poverty, and a persistent urban-rural divide are frequently cited as ongoing critical issues that remain to be successfully tackled².

Historically, women have been discriminated against and are heavily under-represented in the traditionally male-dominated political and socioeconomic decision-making structures of Sierra Leone. Gender inequalities are prevalent throughout society, with women being more likely to be illiterate and suffer extreme poverty, their rights are frequently violated, and they have little access to resources or opportunities. This burden affects society as a whole, and can adversely affect the potential for sustainable peacebuilding and development by disempowering and marginalising more than half of the population³. Despite this, gender-based violence (GBV), which can be loosely defined as violence that is directed against a person on the basis of gender or sex, has received relatively little attention in post-conflict reconstruction strategies. As this report illustrates, GBV is to be an endemic problem throughout Sierra Leone, and it prevents women from contributing to and participating fully in peacebuilding efforts.

The social costs of GBV are largely under-estimated and ignored, and it is not generally seen as a security issue that has broader economic or political consequences. It is surrounded by a culture of silence and impunity, and the range and complexity of the underlying causes make it a difficult issue to address. GBV not only manifests itself as physical violence such as sexual abuse of women and children, but also includes forms of structural violence such as discriminatory laws and practices that prevent women from owning property or holding positions of authority within their communities. In short, GBV is a security issue because it is a human rights violation and therefore impacts negatively on the ability of men and women to secure and enjoy their basic rights. It can also feed into broader societal violence and can consequently compromise the country's transition to peace.

From July 4th-14th 2006, International Alert conducted a mapping of the incidence of GBV and the programmes that are being implemented to address it in Sierra Leone on behalf of Irish Aid⁴. In addition to identifying programming by the various local, national and international actors to address GBV and the challenges and opportunities that remain, this report also explores the links between GBV and insecurity in Sierra Leone. While much research has been done on sexual violence during conflict and humanitarian emergencies, there has been comparatively less focus on the dynamics of this form of violence in the post-conflict phase. One notable exception is the 2005 report by the Consortium of Irish Human Rights, Humanitarian and Development Agencies and Development Cooperation Ireland⁵. The Consortium initially came together to identify ways of addressing the high levels of rape in Darfur, Sudan, and has

continued to place an emphasis on the endemic nature of GBV in post-conflict environments and the need for more systematic, coordinated, and multi-sectoral approaches to the issue.

This report goes some of the way towards identifying possible strategies to enhance prevention and response to GBV in the case of Sierra Leone. It is important to note that although the research trip took place in July 2006, the broad context has remained unchanged and the findings are still largely relevant. Where possible, factual information has been updated to reflect changes in programming activities and in the national political context since July 2006. The report is also restricted to evidence gathered in Freetown, as the research team was unable to travel upcountry due to time limitations. The persistent urban/rural divide that exists in Sierra Leone means that the situation facing women in the provinces is often very different from that in Freetown and the Western Area, especially in terms of access to economic opportunities, education and the rule of law. This warrants a further, more detailed comparative study of the issues facing various communities upcountry to permit a more comprehensive analysis of the situation throughout the country.

1.1 Methodology and structure of the report

The findings are based on information collected during interviews with a range of civil society organisations (CSOs), government officials, donor and UN agency staff (see Annex 1 for complete list of individuals met). Extensive desk research on the legal system in Sierra Leone, sexual violence during the conflict, and official documents on peacebuilding and development in the country has also informed the analysis.

Section two of the report defines the key concepts associated with GBV, and links them to peacebuilding and development efforts in section three. The fourth and fifth sections explore the incidence of GBV, examining the different forms that it takes and the factors which exacerbate its occurrence in Sierra Leone. Following this, the sixth and seventh sections examine the existing national structures and processes and policy frameworks that could be used to address GBV. Section eight provides an overview and analyses the effectiveness of some of the initiatives that are being undertaken by the different local, national and international actors to address the problem of GBV. Finally, the report concludes with general good practice guidelines for addressing GBV and specific recommendations targeted at Irish Aid, as well as more general recommendations for other key stakeholders.

2. GBV: Key concepts

Box 1 Terminology

- **Gender:** refers to the roles, relationships, experiences and expectations of men, women, boys and girls that are constructed by society on the basis of their sex. These different roles and relationships are influenced by local contexts and other forms of social differentiation such as age, ethnicity, class, caste, religion and socio-economic status.
- **Gender mainstreaming:** refers to “the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislations, policies or programmes in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated.” (ECOSOC Agreed Conclusions 1997)
- **Gender-based violence:** “Gender-based violence refers to violence that targets individuals or groups of individuals on the basis of their gender. Gender-based violence has been defined by the CEDAW Committee as violence that is directed at a person on the basis of gender or sex. It includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threat of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty.” It is a violation of human rights. (UNHCR Guidelines for Prevention and Response: Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Against Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons)
- **Sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA):** refers to “any abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust for sexual purposes; this includes profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another (Report of the IASC Task Force on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Humanitarian Crises)

GBV is a broad concept, and is present in many different forms within society at any given time. It tends to be mediated by factors such as age, religion, class and disability, and war in particular exacerbates GBV. The recognition of the use of rape and other forms of sexual violence as a weapon of war has increased since the conflicts in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Rwanda, and systematic rape is now defined as a crime against humanity under International Humanitarian Law. Acts of GBV include “sexual violence, domestic violence, sex trafficking, harmful practices such as female genital mutilation, forced or early marriage, forced prostitution, sexual harassment, and sexual exploitation.”⁶ Although sexual violence is often the most immediately identifiable form of GBV, it also includes the structural violence that results from gendered practices, laws and traditions. Examples of structural violence include laws that prevent women from owning or inheriting property and the endemic poverty that leads women and girls to exchange sex for basic goods. Some forms of GBV specifically affect children, such as violence against girls in school by male teachers or male pupils, including rape and sexual harassment. This may lead to their exclusion from school due to stigma, pregnancy or health complications. As a consequence, girls’ capacity to learn and benefit from education is diminished. Both boys and girls are also vulnerable to trafficking, where they can be sexually exploited as well as exposed to child labour. Most fundamentally, GBV is a human rights violation. Governments and the international community therefore have a responsibility to uphold the numerous international standards that are designed to protect the life and liberty of both men and women.

GBV is inextricably linked to the gender norms and unequal power relations present in any given society, and violence against women is one of the most common manifestations of these

inequalities. Whilst women and girls constitute the majority of victims of GBV, men are the most common perpetrators, particularly those in positions of power or authority such as heads of households, teachers, police and army officers, humanitarian workers, or community leaders⁷. It is important to recognise that GBV is linked to social conditioning, which teaches men and women to act in certain ways, and to view certain types of behaviour as acceptable. This gendered stereotyping leads women to be excluded from political and economic decision-making and positions of authority, confining them to the private domestic sphere. The socialisation of gender roles also encourages the perception of women as being objects or the property of men, and can lead to linkages between masculinity and violence⁸. It is clear that to tackle GBV at its root, these processes of socialisation will need to be challenged.

Although men and boys also fall victim to GBV, it has a disproportionate effect on women and girls, who are much more likely to experience GBV in all its forms. The fact that very little information is available on the violence directed specifically at men and boys also makes it difficult to address comprehensively. However, it is clear that in many cases, for example conscription or abduction during armed conflict, men and boys are directly targeted as a result of their gender roles. Further research on male experiences of GBV is needed, particularly on the taboo subject of sexual violence against boys in post-conflict contexts. For these reasons, this report focuses mainly on GBV as experienced by women and girls.

3. Linking GBV with peacebuilding and long-term development

Failing to engage with the causes and consequences of GBV has long-term consequences on peacebuilding and development in Sierra Leone. In addition to the physical insecurity, GBV compounds the many challenges that women face in post-conflict environments such as extreme poverty, the destruction of social networks and coping mechanisms, limited options for employment and livelihood-generation, and exclusion from political and decision-making structures. For example, the inability of many victims of GBV to take advantage of education or employment opportunities and the associated lost productivity impacts on the ability to realize the Millennium Development Goals⁹. Furthermore, the principles of human security are not being preserved if women are experiencing sexual violence and other forms of GBV.

Indeed, “gender inequality, which remains pervasive worldwide, tends to lower the productivity of labor and the efficiency of labor allocation in households and the economy, intensifying the unequal distribution of resources. It also contributes to the non-monetary aspects of poverty – lack of security, opportunity and empowerment – that lower the quality of life for both men and women. While women and girls bear the largest and most direct costs of these inequalities, the costs cut broadly across society, ultimately hindering development and poverty reduction.”¹⁰ These facts provide a clear rationale for the international community to develop more comprehensive and coordinated strategies to approach the issue in post-conflict contexts such as Sierra Leone. GBV has economic, political and social consequences, as well as being the most prevalent security threat for women and girls. Responses to GBV therefore need to incorporate all these aspects to ensure that after the guns fall silent, women can also share in an equal, inclusive, and secure peacetime.

4. Contextualising GBV in Sierra Leone

The incidence of GBV is closely linked to the inferior status of women in Sierra Leonean society, which is strongly patriarchal. This creates a situation where “women and girls in Sierra Leone are subjected to structural discrimination by practice, custom and law.”¹¹ Furthermore, the legacy of the war, both in terms of the sexual violence that was experienced and the changed gender roles brought about by violence and displacement has influenced the nature of GBV in the post-conflict phase. Prior to the war, rates of education and literacy were very low amongst women, and were particularly poor for women living in rural areas. Strong cultural stereotypes prevented women from taking active roles in formal politics, and although 60-80% of the agricultural workload is undertaken by women, they still have little control over economic resources within their households and communities¹². Social indicators such as the very high rates of maternal and child mortality, high illiteracy rates, and the number of girls in school illustrate the costs of discrimination against women in Sierra Leone, as well as the toll of general poverty¹³.

The discriminatory dimensions of Sierra Leonean political and social life have always been there, but they have been exacerbated by the impact and aftermath of the war. The destruction of social networks and structures, the breaking up of families and communities, and the mass displacement of half of the population all resulted in a rootlessness that destabilised traditional value and cultural systems. Whilst this offers the opportunity to renegotiate traditionally held beliefs, it also potentially facilitates a culture of violence where there is little accountability and few inbuilt structures to regulate behaviour, since ties to family and community were so often broken. Men also tend to try to reassert their authority and assume control over economic resources, decision-making and other roles that women may have assumed during the war, as they can feel marginalised in the aftermath.

4.1 Sexual violence during the conflict in Sierra Leone

The war in Sierra Leone was characterized by extreme brutality, and it is widely estimated that up to 250,000 women and girls in Sierra Leone were victims of GBV during the ten-year war¹⁴. Many of these women experienced multiple and gang rapes¹⁵. The report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) finds that “all of the armed factions, in particular the RUF [Revolutionary United Front] and the AFRC [Armed Forces Revolutionary Council], embarked on a systematic and deliberate strategy to rape women and girls, especially those between 10-18 years of age, with the intention of sowing terror amongst the population, violating women and girls and breaking down every norm and custom of traditional society.”¹⁶ In addition to rape, other violations such as sexual violence, abduction, sexual slavery, forced pregnancy, forced labour, mutilation, and trafficking were also experienced. Few women were able to protect themselves from these violations, but those affiliated with the fighting forces were sometimes able to use their position to gain a certain degree of security for themselves and other vulnerable people around them.

The physical trauma associated with sexual violence caused serious reproductive health problems for many women. These include unwanted pregnancies, vesico-vaginal and vesico-rectal fistulas, prolapsed uterus, and infection with sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS¹⁷. Recent research has increasingly documented the close relationship between GBV and the spread of HIV/AIDS. For example, GBV can limit women’s ability to negotiate the terms of any sexual relations, thus rendering them more vulnerable to infection by HIV/AIDS, and it can also impede their ability to access treatment and care¹⁸. Women and girls also suffered depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of the violence. The health system had already been compromised prior to the war due to the lack of access and the poor

standards of infrastructure and service delivery throughout the country. Addressing these physical and mental health problems is expensive and difficult given the lack of qualified medical personnel and facilities in Sierra Leone, therefore the majority of the victims of sexual violence have not had access to health care, counselling or any other kind of medical assistance.

The social impact of GBV on both the victims and their communities has been equally damaging. Women in Sierra Leone have historically had little control over their sexuality, and a premium is placed on girls' virginity which is perceived as 'belonging' to the family. When a woman is violated, particularly if she is virgin, it is not seen just as an individual act but as a violation of the male members of her community. The prevalence of rape and other sexual violations during the war were a direct challenge to many of the norms associated with virginity and women's sexuality¹⁹. Much of the violence was carried out either in front of or by immediate family members, thereby undermining societal and familial ties²⁰. Consequently, after the war many women faced stigma, ostracization and shame, and they were often rejected by their husbands for being raped or having been 'rebel wives'. This stigma was particularly marked in cases where women were pregnant or had given birth to children borne from rape during the war. In some cases, the stigma experienced by women affected by gender-based violence has led them into prostitution as a means of survival, since there are few other options available for women considered to be 'tarnished' by sexual violence. In other cases, women simply chose to remain silent about the abuses they had endured.

This 'double victimization', resulting from the abuses suffered during the war and the stigmatization and marginalization experienced at the end of the war, continues to affect many women and girls in Sierra Leone. They have been offered little assistance to deal with the consequences of GBV, and the general failure to prosecute those responsible for the majority of human rights abuses committed during the war has resulted in little accountability for these crimes²¹. This makes it even more difficult to change attitudes and practices towards GBV in the post-conflict phase, because it exacerbates the perception that these crimes do not constitute a serious violation. Indeed, as the former Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women notes, "the failure to investigate, prosecute and punish those responsible for rape and other forms of gender-based violence has contributed to an environment of impunity that perpetuates violence against women in Sierra Leone, including rape and domestic violence."²²

4.2 Women as peacebuilders in Sierra Leone

It is now widely recognised that conflict throws gender roles and relations into flux, and that women and men are affected differently by conflict. As a result, space can be created for the re-negotiation of gendered stereotypes and the consolidation of gains made by women during conflict. However, at the same time, traditional roles and relations can also be reinforced in the aftermath²³. While the majority of women in Sierra Leone experienced the war as victims, they also perpetrated and collaborated in the violence, and played a role in influencing the conflict dynamics within their homes and communities. Despite extreme difficulties, women cooperated and formed networks to improve access to basic needs such as health and income-generation. They were also increasingly responsible for the welfare of their extended families, even during displacement as the number of female-headed households increased. In addition to developing coping strategies, many Sierra Leonean women were also active in organising and participating in civil society peacebuilding efforts within their communities, and they have continued to play an important role in advocating for peace at the local, national and regional levels.

Prior to the conflict, few women outside of the Freetown elite were able to play an active role in politics, although there were and continues to be some female Paramount Chiefs, mostly in the southern region. The limited power of those who did hold decision-making positions did not effectively translate into an overall improvement in the situation of women²⁴. However, the war gave new momentum to the women's movement and it provided a unifying vision that was seized

upon by the women in Sierra Leone. The Sierra Leone Women's Peace Movement (SLWMP) was established in January 1995 as a result of networking amongst local women's groups²⁵. Women succeeded in playing an influential role during the Bintumani I and II conferences in 1995 and 1996, where they called for elections before peace, and the prioritisation of democratic civilian rule. During the mid-1990s, the women's movement in Sierra Leone was one of the most vocal elements within civil society and women became increasingly aware of their right to participate in the future of the country²⁶.

The SLWMP remained extremely active during the height of the war until 1997 when several key members fled the country. Through participating in marches, sending delegations to meet with the various parties to the conflict, and rallying for peace within their communities, Sierra Leonean women played a critical role in the process of bringing the fighting to an end. Since 2002, women's groups and other civil society organisations have continued to play a key role in advocating for gender equality and implementing community-based initiatives to address the needs of women in areas as diverse as health, education, income-generation, negotiation and decision-making skills, and legal rights. Women's organisations often operate at the grassroots level, and as such, have extensive reach throughout the country. If the capacities of women's organisations are enhanced, they could play an important collective role in influencing local conflict dynamics and fostering efforts to consolidate peacebuilding within Sierra Leone, as they did during the war.

5. Key issues

Sierra Leone is a highly patriarchal society, where the institutional structures that currently exist discriminate against women. These institutionalised gender inequalities are exacerbated by discriminatory traditions and customs, and by the high levels of illiteracy and poverty amongst Sierra Leonean women that prevent them from upholding many of their internationally recognised rights. Their marginalisation from decision-making processes further limits their ability to redress these gender inequalities. Any attempts to address GBV in Sierra Leone must take these realities into account.

5.1 Discriminatory attitudes and practices within the legal system

The legal environment in Sierra Leone is made particularly complex by the co-existence of three different legal systems: general law, made up of statutory and codified law inherited from the era of British colonial rule; customary law, made up of unwritten traditional codes and practices; and Islamic law, where statutes related to marriage, divorce and inheritance law are differentiated from those within customary law. Customary law is protected in the Constitution and is defined as “the rules of law by which customs are applicable to particular communities in Sierra Leone.”²⁷ Because most of the population of Sierra Leone lives outside of the Western Area where Freetown is located, up to 85% of the population falls under the jurisdiction of local courts and the system of customary law. Each system has specific implications for GBV, and the differing practices adopted by each can further complicate efforts to address the problem. The result is that even though women have certain rights in Sierra Leone under general law, the majority of the population follow the practices of the customary system which often exacerbate GBV, and results in the predominance of discriminatory attitudes and behaviour.

There is also a tendency for communities to resort to informal law, where decisions are made by the Chiefs or other traditional leaders rather than going through Local Court authorities who are mandated to adjudicate on matters of customary law. Discrimination and human rights abuses against women are even more pervasive in the informal legal sector²⁸. According to Amnesty International, “not only do Chiefs act outside their jurisdiction, at times they collude with men in the community to forcibly evict women and children from their homes or subject them to arbitrary detention and other forms of gender based violence.”²⁹ Families often resort to the informal legal system due to ease of access, lower costs, and the traditional view that GBV is something that occurs within the private sphere and should therefore be resolved informally.³⁰

Women themselves are also socialised into acceptance of harmful attitudes and practices, and are often unaware about what GBV is and how they can protect their rights. Many women indicate that physical violence perpetrated against them by their male partners is permissible, as they have been socialised to see this behaviour as acceptable and expected. Pursuing recourse against the perpetrators is rarely an option due to stigma, social pressure, expense, lack of awareness and generally prohibitive legal structures. As a result, few women have the ability to challenge the discrimination that they face on a daily basis. Changing these patriarchal attitudes is a gradual and long-term process, yet it will need to be a central element in any holistic strategy to address GBV in Sierra Leone. The tendency to solve disputes around GBV-related offences at the community-level perpetuates the culture of impunity and leaves women to cope with the consequences in isolation while the crimes against them go unacknowledged. Although difficult to measure, anecdotal evidence shows that some forms of GBV directed against children and young women, particularly domestic violence, also appear to be on the increase in Sierra Leone. For example, the myth-making culture where men believe that having sex with children will bring good luck or will prevent or cure HIV/AIDS can result in increased levels of sexual violence against girls. Engaging with these traditional channels of communication is one

way of ensuring that the facts related to women's rights and GBV are transmitted to a wider audience and that these harmful myths are disproved³¹. The women-only secret societies, known as Bondo societies, play an important role in preparing girls for adulthood in Sierra Leone. During the meetings which are often held in the bush, girls are taught about domestic affairs and their responsibilities as wives. They also undergo the traditional practice of female genital cutting, symbolising the transition of girls into women. Harmful traditional practices are a particularly sensitive issue in Sierra Leone, and are shrouded in social taboos. More research on innovative ways to address these practices, where their cultural and ceremonial importance is preserved at the same time as reducing the harmful health aspects, is needed.

Marriage: Under general law, the minimum age for marriage is 18 years. However, until the new Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce Act passed on 14th June 2007, there was no minimum age for marriage under customary law, and as a result early forced marriages are common. This can lead to situations where girls' health is compromised from early sexual activity and where they are more easily violated or exploited. It also leads to low education levels as families are reluctant to invest in sending their girl children to school only to have them leave to marry young. Girls also lose out on educational opportunities due to teenage pregnancies and the demand for their domestic labour. Part of the motivation for early marriage is the dowry payments that girls receive upon marriage, which represent a significant source of income to families given the endemic poverty. However, the economic and personal security of girls is diminished as a result of being financially indebted and dependent on their husbands, and their low education levels leave them few opportunities for generating an independent income. The new Act sets the minimum age for marriage at 18 and requires all marriages and divorces to be registered. It also stipulates that dowries do not have to be returned following divorce or separation and also that child maintenance should be paid, providing increased economic security for women. Polygamy is also permitted in some parts of the country, which can put the health of girls and women at further risk, as well as increase the chance that they could be left economically insecure if the husband favours his other wives.

Property: Women have also been discriminated against by customary law in terms of their ability to own or inherit property. The discriminatory attitudes that prevail make it difficult and can even prevent women from owning dwellings, land or any other kind of property. Women can also be denied tenancy, for instance, unless accompanied by a man. Inheritance laws favour the male family members and widows are often either cast out of their home or 'inherited' into the husband's family if they have no sons to take control of the family's assets. Without owning land women miss out on a vital source of collateral, and are denied the social standing and financial security that property ownership can bring. This became an even greater problem after the war due to the growth in the number of female-headed households who were returning to their communities only to be denied access to their land and property. The lack of access to property deepens poverty and compromises women's economic self-sufficiency, which can increase vulnerability to GBV and other forms of insecurity³². The new Devolution of Estates Act prevents the practice of wife inheritance and also permits women to inherit property from deceased husbands, even in the case where no will has been written.

Sexual violence: Until the passing of the new Domestic Violence Act, the formal legal protection afforded to women from physical or sexual violence stemmed from the outdated Offences Against the Persons Act 1861. According to the TRC report, "the Justice system itself militates against victims of sexual violence taking their matters further. GBV cases are heard in open courts, with perpetrators being allowed to cross-examine victims. Justice officials have little or no understanding of the trauma associated with cases of sexual violence. The courts have too few officials who are trained to deal with these cases. Victims have no access to legal aid."³³ The majority of rape cases that do make it to court tend to have been followed through due to support from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) who heard about the incident and encouraged the victim to pursue legal action. The first successful rape prosecution occurred in 1999, and according to the International Rescue Committee (IRC) only thirty cases of rape were

successfully prosecuted in the period 2003-2005. Although this is an improvement it does not mean that all the perpetrators were actually convicted and sentenced during these trials. There are clearly difficulties in enforcing this legislation such as the need for witnesses to corroborate the victim's statement and the failure of most judicial officials to perceive rape as a serious crime. The sentence for rape is also dependent on the age of the victim and the classification of the crime as rape or unlawful carnal knowledge, leaving the law open to misinterpretation.³⁴ During the course of this research, several people noted that an effort was made in 2005 to 'fast-track' GBV cases in the courts, where the limited capacity and reluctance to prosecute the cases has resulted in a severe backlog. However, the initiative was not sustained and did not appear to be widely known even within the NGO community. The legal system is generally failing to provide effective, speedy and accessible justice for women and children who experience sexual violence, and continued lobbying and capacity building of the government and legal officials will be necessary even with the new law governing sexual offences having been passed.

Customary law in Sierra Leone permits a man to 'chastise' his wife under certain circumstances such as flirting with other men or failing to fulfil her domestic duties, effectively sanctioning domestic violence. This in turn exacerbates the culture of tolerance around sexual violence³⁵. It is far more common for disputes over sexual violence, including rape, to be resolved within the community and outside of the formal justice sector. In line with customary traditions, settlements are also often made within the community between the perpetrator and the victim's family. This usually involves either financial compensation or marriage to the perpetrator or other arrangements between the parties that do not involve the police or legal system. Under the Domestic Violence Act, authorities have more power to respond to these crimes, such as issuing protection orders or barring perpetrators from their homes.

Engaging with men and community leaders: All the legal systems in Sierra Leone are mainly administered by men. This means that these systems are less likely to protect the rights of women and discriminatory decisions can be difficult to overturn. This highlights the need to engage with men to combat GBV, particularly Chiefs and other community leaders who wield authority. Encouraging men to ensure that women have recourse to justice would make them more active participants in efforts to end the culture of tolerance and impunity surrounding GBV, particularly with respect to sexual and domestic violence. For example, because violence against women is not seen as a significant crime there is little interest for court officials to prosecute the cases under general law. Training programmes that incorporate sensitisation and awareness-raising about the importance of prosecuting perpetrators of sexual violence targeting both officials in the legal sector as well as authorities within the communities would help to ameliorate this problem. A strategy that also incorporates consultations with community leaders across the country to identify how to address the issue would be useful.

5.2 Economic insecurity and GBV

Poverty in Sierra Leone is endemic and entrenched and affects all men and women, both young and old. During this research poverty was repeatedly identified by civil society organisations and donor agencies as the key issue impeding the consolidation of peace. The war exacerbated poverty, resulted in a halving of GDP per capita, displacement and injury leading to reduced productivity, widespread corruption, and the destruction of social, economic and political infrastructure³⁶. The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), which was finalised in 2005, reports that approximately 3,360,000 people (70%) in Sierra Leone live in poverty, with 73% of this poverty being concentrated in the rural areas³⁷. According to the PRSP profile, the level of poverty is worse in families that are headed by agricultural workers, where there is little access to health services, or when the education level of the household head is low. Poverty is also more marked amongst women, of whom 74% live on less than 50 cents a day, compared to only 54% of men. Women in Sierra Leone earn only 42% of male-earned income³⁸. The

resulting economic insecurity increases the overall vulnerability of women and this is a key contributing factor to the prevalence and persistence of GBV.

Sierra Leonean women have historically constituted the majority of the rural labour force, often as informal agricultural workers or petty traders. They have played a key role in food production and in providing basic goods for the family, but despite this, women are also frequently economically insecure³⁹. The conflict, particularly due to the widespread displacement, affected the division of labour within society with the result that women assumed new economic roles, in addition to their traditionally held domestic responsibilities. At the same time, the incidence of female-headed households and widows also increased in the aftermath of the conflict and women frequently had to take on the added economic burden of caring for extended families, making them more vulnerable to the adverse effects of resource scarcity. Furthermore, “the disproportionate spread and depth of poverty amongst women results from their long hours of work, lack of access to productive assets and the very low rate of financial returns of the income generating activities in which they engage.”⁴⁰ Discriminatory laws and attitudes compound women’s low economic status and independence, and poor social indicators for women such as school enrolment and literacy rates. In cases where they are not the household head, women tend to have limited decision-making power within the home, which can make them economically dependent and unable to control even the resources that they themselves contribute to the household. This lack of ownership of their own reproductive rights and productive assets further limits their capacity to combat poverty. While economic insecurity is experienced by both men and women in Sierra Leone, “gender based violence impairs women’s economic activities and income generating strategies in the formal and informal sectors [...] thus, gender-based violence intensifies the feminisation of poverty.”⁴¹

The implications of women’s low economic status within the household and the community limits their ability to take actions against GBV, and sexual violence in particular. Women are often reluctant to report sexual or domestic violence involving male family members, given that they often provide them with some degree of financial security. It was commonly voiced that if charges are made, the woman may risk losing her home and may compromise the survival of her dependents. Another offshoot of economic insecurity is the prevalence of SEA that is exacerbated in environments of extreme poverty. Oxfam Sierra Leone conducted a survey in 2006 of approximately 500 randomly selected women in two districts, the Western Area and Kailahun, which showed that SEA is closely tied into livelihood issues⁴². The survey finds that sex is most often being exchanged for basic goods, which reveals the economic dimensions of the discrimination that results in many women living in abject poverty. In 2002, reports emerged of the involvement of humanitarian agency staff in the systematic and widespread SEA of women and children in the refugee camps of Liberia and Sierra Leone⁴³. As in many other cases, SEA was driven by the inability of many women and children to secure access to basic goods. This leads them to exchange sex for food, school supplies, medication and even free and safe access to the camp facilities. So-called ‘survival sex’ or forced prostitution is particularly widespread during and in the aftermath of conflict, where economic insecurity has increased. Furthermore, the destruction of traditional coping mechanisms leads women and children to find alternate means of accessing food, shelter and protection. Although SEA is often considered an issue of exploitation rather than violence, engaging in sexual relations to secure basic goods or protection amount to violence when the effects on the girls and women are taken into account. Similar to other forms of GBV, it is based on an unequal distribution of power.

While there is a link between poverty and vulnerability to violence, GBV itself also brings about a number of negative economic consequences. For example, the low rates of female school enrolment compromises the ability of girl children to learn and acquire skills that will bring them a sustainable income in the future. Some of the most common reasons for not sending girls to school are early marriage, their domestic responsibilities, and their necessary contribution to household income through petty trading or farm work. Because girls are expected to get married and bear children at an early age, the perception that there is no sense in investing in their

education out of an already small household income prevails. The trauma and health complications of sexual violence also lead to reduced productivity for women, as well as potentially causing them to be ostracised from their communities making them even more vulnerable to poverty. Helping women to be economically independent can be an important part of any strategy to address GBV, leading men to view them as partners rather than property. However, it is important to recognise that at the same time, economically empowering women can also contribute to GBV if men feel challenged by women's new roles and independence. Therefore any economic initiatives must be particularly responsive to the gender relationships within society, and the needs and interests of both men and women.

5.3 The exclusion of women from decision-making positions

Although women's right to hold public office and participate in political life is enshrined in the 1991 Constitution, they have been largely absent from the political scene in Sierra Leone. Prior to and during the conflict, only a few women succeeded in taking on senior roles within the government or were Paramount Chiefs. The only peace process that women were able to participate in was held at Lomé in 1999 and resulted in the Lomé Peace Accords. As a result of lobbying by those few women participants, Article 28 of the agreement states that "given that women have been particularly victimised during the war, special attention shall be accorded to their needs and potentials in formulating and implementing national rehabilitation, reconstruction and development programmes to enable them to play a central role in the moral, social and physical reconstruction of Sierra Leone," however this commitment has never been fulfilled, and women are yet to play this central role⁴⁴.

In Sierra Leone, many women lack the capacity or self-confidence to effectively participate in the formal political sphere, both as candidates and as an informed electorate. While many men also face obstacles preventing them from playing decision-making roles, particularly those with less education or income, the domestic responsibilities and traditional patriarchal social relations marginalize women even more. In the run-up to the 2002 general elections, an NGO called the Fifty-Fifty Group (50/50) was established with the explicit aim of empowering women to effectively participate in politics. They were supported by the British Council and other donors to provide awareness-raising and training to women candidates and voters with the aim of increasing the number of women in parliament. As a result, 46 women ran for parliamentary seats in 2002, and seven of the eight political parties fielded women candidates. Eighteen women were successful and subsequently became members of parliament (14.5%), including three Cabinet Ministers and three Deputy Ministers. There was also one presidential candidate. This compares favourably with the previous elections in 1996 when only 5 women became members of parliament (6%) including two Cabinet Ministers and two Deputy Ministers.

As part of the decentralisation process, local elections were held throughout the country on 22nd May 2004. According to an independent team of experts, "approximately 10% of all candidates standing for election across the country were women, and in general women seemed satisfied with their status as voters", although the report also mentions that this falls short of the 30% target that is generally recognised as being gender equal⁴⁵. Following the Local Government elections, 10% of elected Councillors, 5% of Local Council chairpersons, and 7.4% of Paramount Chiefs were women. The Local Government Act also required that 50% of all Ward Development Committees have to be women. In some cases elections had to be held repeatedly to ensure this quota was reached⁴⁶. This quota should help women to attain some level of decision-making authority within their communities, although continued support and training will be necessary to ensure that their participation is effective. Whilst there is still room for improvement, the progress from the 1996 to the 2002 elections demonstrates the positive impact that training, awareness-raising and capacity-building have had on women's overall political participation. These gains need to be consolidated and expanded. However, there are some concerns that the percentage of women in parliament will decrease after the 2007 elections since the Constitution has required a return to the constituency based system. The

proportional representation system, used in 2002, was adopted for an interim period after the war as it was thought to be less divisive. PR is also more accessible to women and generally results in higher rates of women candidates than relying on women being selected to run within their party's constituency. In the 2007 national elections, the three leading parties are averaging only 11% women amongst their candidates contesting parliamentary polls⁴⁷.

6. National structures and processes for addressing GBV in Sierra Leone

According to information collected by the UN peacekeeping mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), there is a higher incidence of rape and sexual violence in post-conflict Sierra Leone than prior to the conflict. The lack of information and the tendency to under-report these crimes makes it difficult to accurately determine the prevalence, although anecdotal evidence would support this claim⁴⁸. This section considers the various structures and policy frameworks at the national level that shape the potential responses to GBV, and offer useful tools to those advocating for more commitment to this issue.

6.1 The Constitution

The Constitution of Sierra Leone was written in 1991, and in theory should protect the fundamental rights and freedoms of every individual. However, the Constitution is ambiguous regarding discrimination based on sex. While gender equality is enshrined in Section 8 of the Constitution, it is contradictory in that Section 27 goes on to permit discrimination in the laws dealing with “adoption, marriage, divorce, burial, devolution of property on death or other interests of personal law”⁴⁹. The implications of this are that even in case where discriminatory customary law has been applied, there is no recourse available within the Constitution. In July 2006, the Chairman of the Law Reform Commission (LRC) announced that the 1991 Constitution would be reviewed with particular attention given to several sections including the discriminatory Section 27, and that a Technical Committee would begin its work immediately⁵⁰. The aim of the review will be to make recommendations of how the Constitution should be updated to reflect changes to the national context and international law that have occurred over the past fifteen years. It will be important to ensure that the review process is open and consultative, and that women and women’s organisations which have been advocating for a revision of the Constitution have access to the Technical Committee’s work.

6.2 GBV and the law reform process

Following the end of the war, the government set up a Law Reform Commission of seven Commissioners, only one of whom is a woman. The LRC was designed to evaluate the laws of Sierra Leone and bring them up to date to reflect the current situation in the country, as well as enhance links between the central justice system and customary law. In July 2003, a conference was held on the “Women’s Law Reform Agenda” to identify the legal reform priorities of women and to enable them to input into the process⁵¹. As a result six key areas for action were identified including education and training, violence against women, and succession and inheritance⁵². The Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights (PCHR) and several civil society organisations, including Lawyers Commission for Legal Assistance (LAWCLA), Lawyers Yearning for Equality, Rights and Social Justice (LAWYERS) and the Mano River Women’s Peace Network (Marwopnet) have been leading the efforts to advocate for the reform of laws that are particularly discriminatory towards women, including those on customary marriages, property inheritance and sexual offences. While the process of drafting these bills constitutes a significant achievement, it was hampered by a lack of coordination. Both the PCHR and civil society groups drafted versions of the same bills under parallel initiatives, which then needed to be harmonised. The three new gender bills were finally passed by Parliament just before it disbanded for the elections, following sustained advocacy and lobbying by women’s organisations. The challenge now remains to publicise and enforce the new bills, and ensure that women’s rights are protected and upheld by this new legislation.

Another important step forward has been taken with the drafting of the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) report led by the Ministry of

Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs (MSWGCA). The report was officially presented to the CEDAW Committee in New York in May 2007 by a delegation from Sierra Leone led by the Deputy Minister for Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, Memunatu Koroma. While this is an important step, it is important to note that since the Convention has not been domesticated by being passed into law by Parliament it cannot officially be upheld by the courts of Sierra Leone⁵³. The process of drafting the initial and second to fifth CEDAW reports resulted in a number of key activities related to the establishment of new structures, the collection of data, and training related to combating discrimination against women⁵⁴. For example, two workshops were convened by the UN Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) in 2005 to educate and support the line ministries in implementing the Convention, which raised awareness about CEDAW and GBV within the government⁵⁵. While the LRC has indicated support for reforming laws that discriminate against women, their actual commitment and political will for moving this agenda forward is not clear. As a result, reforms have been moving at a slow pace, although Parliament may soon be reviewing the amended legislation. In this respect, the international community and women's groups can play a critical role in pressuring the parliamentarians to ensure that the laws actually do get changed after they are reviewed by the LRC. –Given that the passing of the Anti-Human Trafficking Act in 2005 was thanks in part to pressure from USAID, there is evidence that concerted pressure from donors could persuade the Government to take action on gender-related legislation.

Reforming the legislative structures in Sierra Leone is absolutely critical in terms of ending GBV because laws that uphold the rights of women will give them the tools they need to protect themselves. At the same time, however, as was pointed out in meetings with the LRC and the Governance Reform Secretariat, changing legislation is only the first step. Limited awareness of laws and legal processes is exacerbated by low literacy rates, and therefore the wide dissemination of the reformed laws should be encouraged. Judges, magistrates and lawyers along with rural populations need to be made aware of the changes that have been made. The challenge of regulating uncodified customary law practices and changing attitudes towards GBV specifically and women in general also remains, and will need to be addressed through parallel efforts of sensitisation and awareness-raising.

6.3 The Truth and Reconciliation Commission

The Truth and Reconciliation Act of 2000 that established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) instructed that special attention should be given to the issue of sexual violence. Women were also encouraged to participate and testify before both the TRC and the Special Court of Sierra Leone. Similarly, efforts were made to sensitise women about the truth and reconciliation process and to train women to act as testimonial-takers. Victims of GBV were given the opportunity to testify in private, although some women did prefer to speak openly about the abuses that they had suffered. While many testimonies were collected, it is often the case that victims of sexual violence during conflict have few incentives to report these crimes in the aftermath. The stigma that victims face can deter many women, the failure to take the crimes seriously or to provide any kind of reparations means that women don't want to risk further victimisation by coming forward with their stories. In addition to the testimonies, individuals and organisations were also invited to make submissions to the thematic hearings on women and children⁵⁶. These documents constitute a vital source of information about the impact of conflict on women, particularly with respect to GBV.

The TRC report, published in 2004, includes an extensive background on the status of women and girls in all aspects of social, economic and political life as well as a number of specific recommendations pertaining to women and women's rights (see Annex 2). Several of these address the discriminatory structures that continue to exist in Sierra Leonean society, as well as the issue of reparations for the abuses suffered. However, the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) has failed to develop a comprehensive strategy for implementing the TRC recommendations despite repeated commitments to do so. Given the focus on GBV within the

TRC process, the report and its associated recommendations act as an important tool that could be used to lobby the government to address the discrimination that women continue to face in Sierra Leone, as well as to educate and inform the population about the far-reaching consequences GBV has on the lives of those affected.

6.4 The Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs

The Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs was established in 1996 by President Kabbah in recognition of the marginalisation of women and children from decision-making in the country. In 1998, it was combined with the Social Welfare Ministry to become the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs. The Gender Division within MSWGCA is responsible for gender-related issues, and is primarily intended to act as a monitoring and coordinating body⁵⁷. However, the MSWGCA is one of the weakest and least-funded ministries within the government, and it has faced ongoing problems with recruiting and retaining qualified staff. Professional staff were hired in 2003, but several have left, including the former Director of the Gender Division, often for better paid jobs with international organisations. The MSWGCA has plans to deploy gender advisors to each of the four regions of Sierra Leone, but this has not happened to date, largely due to funding and organisational constraints. Officially, most of the line ministries also have gender focal points, but they appear to be largely ineffective, and have only received limited gender training⁵⁸. As a result, it does not appear that there is any effective institutionalised mechanism to ensure a coherent approach for mainstreaming gender within the government's various ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs). Because of its limited capacity and the limited influence that MSWGCA staff have within the government, the Ministry is largely reactive rather than proactive, and is unable to make the most of the opportunities that are presented to it. The MSWGCA also reportedly coordinates Child Welfare Committees and Gender-based Violence Committees in several Districts across Sierra Leone. These committees aim to provide a more holistic response to the problem of GBV, and in particular sexual exploitation and abuse, by involving a range of different actors. However, more research is necessary to determine the exact procedures of these committees and to what degree they are effective in coordinating and monitoring GBV-related priorities.

It appears that committees are frequently set up, but that their impact is limited. This is due to organisational and time constraints, and a lack of coordination and cooperation amongst the different actors. It is also the case that the gender focal points who normally attend these meetings have little decision-making power within their relevant departments and the political commitment at higher levels does not extend beyond rhetorical support. The TRC report suggests that "it would be useful to establish a register listing local and international NGOs, local and international agencies, as well as government agencies working on programmes dealing with gender-based violence."⁵⁹ This is a concrete activity that the MSWGCA is well-placed to undertake, given its representation throughout the country, and the links that it already has with many of the different actors working on these issues. It would be important that this resource would not merely be a register, but rather used as a networking tool for the various actors, as well as identifying good practices and initiatives that could be further supported.

The international community has supported the MSWGCA, and on two separate occasions the Commonwealth Secretariat funded external consultants for 12-month periods⁶⁰. While they were effective in providing guidance to the Ministry in terms of strategic planning and gender training, it is not clear if this type of support has had a sustainable impact. The institutional memory often disappears with the departure of the consultant, leaving behind sophisticated and extensive plans and strategies that there is simply no capacity to implement. Similarly, several donors such as UNIFEM have provided funds, material resources and trainings to MSWGCA staff, but have seen little outputs as a result of their efforts. The donor community appears to be suffering from a certain degree of 'donor fatigue' and are reluctant to continue supporting the MSWGCA, preferring instead to divert limited gender funding to women's organisations. The TRC recommends that the Gender Division be removed from the MSWGCA, arguing that

gender issues receive insufficient attention and would be better positioned within a separate Gender Commission, and there are some rumours in circulation that this may indeed happen⁶¹. To find a sustainable solution to the lack of capacity of the MSWGCA more research is necessary, and an in-depth evaluation of needs, constraints, and strengths may provide guidance on how the ministry could be most effectively supported.

6.5 The security sector

At the end of the conflict, UNAMSIL assumed responsibility for security in Sierra Leone. Following the departure of the peacekeeping force in December 2005, this responsibility has been transferred to the government. The security sector in Sierra Leone incorporates a range of actors, some of the most important ones being the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF), the Sierra Leone Police (SLP), the Office of National Security (ONS), the Ministry of Defence, and the Provincial and District Security Committees (PROSECs/DISECs). Although actors in the security sector generally exclude gender issues from consideration, security has a gender dimension and security actors impact directly on gender roles and relations. Elements within the army and police committed sexual violations during the conflict, and both institutions remain dominated by and biased towards men, which further limits efforts to reform these structures along more gender-sensitive lines. The militarised culture within the security sector can exacerbate and institutionalise GBV, making it even more challenging to deal with GBV within the rank and file of the RSLAF and the SLP. Some human rights issues have been integrated into the retraining of the RSLAF (by the British-led International Military Advisory and Training Team) and the SLP (initiated by the Commonwealth Community Safety and Security Project)⁶². It is critical that such training is being sustained, and ideally expanded. Future initiatives to address GBV should include engagement with the security sector and sensitisation of army and police officers in particular, as well as efforts to increase the number of women working in the security sector.

Security sector reform (SSR) is a key priority in Sierra Leone, focusing on reforming the various security actors and structures to enhance transparency, effectiveness and accountability. The SSR process, including justice sector reform, is explicitly linked with poverty reduction and is being implemented in support of pillar one of the PRSP, reflecting the security-development nexus⁶³. The Office of National Security (ONS) and the associated PROSECs/DISECs provide a mechanism to identify, assess and respond to security threats throughout the country, as well as to coordinate the various security structures. The PROSECs and DISECs were set up as regional forums for local stakeholders to discuss security concerns, and to provide an entry point for civil society input. However, women are underrepresented on these committees and it is not clear to what degree women's civil society groups have been systematically engaged. The PROSECs and DISECs could act as a useful channel to transmit GBV-related security concerns to the government. The local population needs to be made more aware of the potential benefits of the SSR process, and the members of the security committees need to be trained on gender and GBV in particular. It is also important to note that informal structures are very strong in Sierra Leone, and often function better than the formal ones. For example, market women in Sierra Leone devise their own strategies for protecting themselves and their goods in the market in the absence of an effective policing system. The SSR process is intended to result in a strengthening of the formal structures and the extension of effective rule of law and security throughout Sierra Leone.

The poor conditions of service facing government employees are a major concern throughout Sierra Leone's public service and therefore also for the security sector. Working conditions and the livelihood constraints that police and army officers are subjected to can contribute to corruption, as staff seek to supplement their income through bribes or extortion in the course of carrying out their work. A police constable on average receives Le170,000 a month (approximately US\$70), a sum that was determined five years ago (the salary is currently supplemented with a bag of rice, which has a market price of Le70,000, approximately US\$30).

The added pressure of expectations placed upon these individuals to support their extended family creates a further incentive to seek out additional income. These factors are of concern for police officers working in positions dealing with victims of GBV, for instance, because there is the risk that they will request payments from individuals who report incidents of GBV. As public service providers, SLP employees cannot take money for doing their job, but if they do it can deter individuals from reporting crimes due to inability to pay the bribes. This ultimately prevents perpetrators from being prosecuted. Finally, the cramped and sub-standard conditions in the barracks where the officers live can contribute to a rise in domestic violence, prostitution and sexual violence.

Family Support Units: Of particular note are the efforts of the SLP to establish the Family Support Units (FSU), established in 2001 in response to the mass violence that was experienced during the war⁶⁴. The FSUs are specifically designed to respond to incidents of domestic violence. As of July 2006, FSUs were established in 26 locations across the country, including 8 in the Freetown area. The FSUs have a memorandum of understanding with the MSWGCA and also work in partnership with LAWCLA to provide free legal aid to victims. Following the report of an incident of GBV to the FSU, if sexual violence is involved the victim must obtain a medical certificate within 72 hours of first reporting the incident to the police. Once this has been obtained the FSU continues with investigating the case, and their role is to ensure that the perpetrators are arrested and taken to court. Although it is only the State Prosecutor who can prosecute for rape, the legal department of the police decides if there is enough evidence to file the case with the Department of Public Prosecution. Another key element of FSU work is community outreach to inform the population about the consequences of GBV and to raise awareness about role and responsibility of FSUs, as well as the need to press charges against perpetrators. Trained social workers provided by the MSWGCA are supposed to be stationed in every FSU to ensure that women and children are not re-victimized in the interviewing process. However, due to lack of capacity in the MSWGCA social workers are currently only attached to about 30% of the FSUs, although this rises to 75% in Freetown. The FSUs are gradually developing their capacity, and more male and female officers are receiving the training needed to work in the units. However, it is worth noting that while the specific support that the FSUs have received is much needed and commendable, the goal in the medium-term should not only be to train specialised officers that serve in the FSUs. A twin-track approach is needed, whereby all members of the SLP are trained in recognising and responding to GBV-related crimes. This will help to ensure that response to GBV is sustainable and accessible to the whole population, rather than only in areas immediately surrounding the FSUs.

The FSUs are seen as a progressive, innovative response to the problem of domestic violence, and they have served as a good practice for other countries to follow, including Liberia. However, continued organisational obstacles within the SLP towards GBV remain to be addressed. For example, although the FSUs aim to maintain confidentiality, the limited office space in many police stations, particularly upcountry, means that interviews often take place in full view of the public. This puts the victim at risk of stigmatization and may deter some individuals from reporting GBV-related incidents. Furthermore, the FSUs are over-stretched; they are not able to cover all rural areas and they lack basic office supplies. One of the most significant limitations in the FSU system is that they only address domestic violence within the home, which excludes rape and other forms of sexual violence that are not perpetrated by family members. FSU officers are also involved in family mediation which can be positive, but can also encourage families to settle their differences informally, which may not be in the interest of the victim. Though this may inadvertently reinforce social pressure and stigma, it may reflect the fact that there are no alternative options for victims to seek protection, shelter and sustenance outside the home. Whilst the FSUs do not have the capacity to accommodate a broadened mandate, this reinforces the need to ensure that all SLP officers, not just those affiliated with FSUs, are able to identify and address all incidents of sexual violence appropriately. This requires integrating gender and GBV training in basic police training. According to the SLP, the establishment of FSUs has lowered both police and popular

resistance to GBV to the point where there is little stigma associated with reporting these crimes. However, conversations with women's groups countered this claim, and they noted that GBV remains a considerable taboo in Sierra Leone.

7. Relevant policy frameworks for addressing GBV in Sierra Leone

7.1 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

The MDGs explicitly underlie the development strategies currently being implemented in Sierra Leone⁶⁵. Goal 3 is to promote gender equality and empower women, and the indicators used to assess progress are disparities in primary and secondary school enrolment, literacy, the share of women working in non-agricultural jobs, and the proportion of seats held by women in parliament⁶⁶. Ultimately, all eight MDGs are linked to improving levels of gender equality: by increasing women's productivity through improved access to health and education, decreasing their vulnerability to poverty by strengthening their rights and access to opportunities, and enabling them to participate in political decision-making processes will all result in a more inclusive and sustainable development process. The five-year review of progress towards achievement of the MDGs in Sierra Leone indicates that the targets associated with Goal 3 may only potentially be realised. The main obstacles towards ensuring that the targets are met are the ongoing discrimination women face in the law, the weak monitoring and overall capacity of the MSWGCA, and the poor position that women are in following the conflict⁶⁷. The link between the MDGs and GBV is not always clear to policy-makers, but in the case of Sierra Leone, the structural discrimination and inferior status of women must be addressed if the goals are to be realised.

7.2 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

CEDAW is one of the most important international human rights instruments for women, and the government signed onto it without reservation in 1988. Despite the recent completion of the 1st and 2nd-5th reports to the CEDAW Committee, significant obstacles to implementation remain. Its status as a binding human rights treaty makes it a valuable tool in efforts to end discrimination against women, and once it has been domesticated it will be an invaluable platform for measuring progress at combating discrimination and violence against women.

7.3 Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (SCR 1325)

SCR 1325 recognises the vital role that women can play in post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding, and stresses the importance of their full participation. Furthermore, SCR 1325 "calls upon all parties to armed conflict to take specific measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and sexual violence".⁶⁸ SCR 1325 mandates all actors, including national governments, to develop National Action Plans (NAPs) to guide and ensure implementation of the resolution. To date, Sierra Leone does not have a NAP, and nor does it have the capacity to develop a detailed and realistic strategy. Most of the staff within the Gender Division of the MSWGCA only became aware of SCR 1325 in 2005 after gender training provided by UNAMSIL⁶⁹. Given the resistance exhibited throughout the government towards making anything other than a rhetorical commitment to gender issues, an extensive sensitisation process coupled with lobbying from donors and national actors will be needed to encourage the government to fulfil its obligations under SCR 1325.

7.4 Peace and Consolidation Strategy (PCS)

The PCS is the joint strategy of the United Nations and the GoSL, and is intended to guide the transition to long-term development in Sierra Leone, building on the MDGs and the PRSP. Although the PCS hints at the exclusion of women from decision-making and the discriminatory justice sector, it does not make any direct reference to gender inequalities or the important role

that women can play in the consolidation of peace. The PCS is mainly focused on the ongoing security problems in the country such as youth unemployment and the high rates of poverty, yet GBV is not mentioned as an issue linked to these concerns. GBV is, in fact, one of the primary security concerns for women who constitute the majority of the population. It therefore should be incorporated into broader peace consolidation efforts. The PCS outlines the key priority tasks assigned to UNIOSIL and other UN agencies by the Security Council. It is important to note that the Peacebuilding Commission, UNIOSIL and the GoSL are in the process of finalising an Integrated Peacebuilding Strategy which will be another policy framework guiding peacebuilding and long-term development activities in the country. Gender equality has been identified as a cross-cutting issue within this strategy⁷⁰.

7.5 Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP)

The PRSP sets out the GoSL's vision for economic recovery in the country over the next three years, focusing on food security, job creation and good governance. Gender is supposedly mainstreamed throughout the PRSP, which states that "...strategies will focus on establishing a legal framework to address gender-based violence, increasing women's participation in decision-making and reducing the exposure of women and the girl-child in particular to sexual exploitation and abuse."⁷¹ Although some sex-disaggregated data is included and the particular ways in which women are disproportionately affected by poverty are highlighted in the report, the government does not appear to have developed a concrete strategy for achieving these goals within the context of the PRSP. The government undertook a civil engagement process that was designed to sensitise the population about the PRSP as well as to solicit their views for inclusion in the paper, but a review of this process indicates that women were not able to participate fully and that significant obstacles remained in terms of male attitudes about their role in society and economic issues⁷². The limited funds available for PRSP implementation, partly due to ongoing donor concerns related to corruption, makes continued lobbying from national constituents and international stakeholders necessary to ensure that the women's economic insecurity is more comprehensively addressed.

7.6 Sierra Leone Compact

The draft Compact is a framework for cooperation between the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission and the Government of Sierra Leone, and is intended to be a medium-term, flexible framework to encourage accountability and coordination in peacebuilding efforts⁷³. The Compact is intended to be a political framework rather than a comprehensive planning document, but it does set out key priorities, challenges and risks for peacebuilding in the country. Although still in draft form, the Compact highlights gender equality as a cross-cutting issue across the four priority areas: youth employment and empowerment; justice and security sector reform; consolidation of democracy and good governance; and capacity-building. The Peacebuilding Fund has also earmarked \$35 million for peacebuilding projects in Sierra Leone.

7.7 MSWGCA gender policies

The MSWGCA developed two comprehensive gender policies which were passed in Parliament in 2000: the National Policy on Gender Mainstreaming and the National Policy on the Advancement of Women. These two policies and subsequent official statements about the position of women indicate that the government recognises gender inequality as an important issue in Sierra Leone, but it is not clear that the political will to actually implement the policies exists. Although both policies address the structural barriers and discriminatory practices women face, they do not mention GBV as a specific issue. Moreover, the two policies have not been efficiently distributed and therefore are not well-known, if at all, across the board of Sierra Leone's MDAs. For example, the Governance Reform Secretariat is not using the policies in their ongoing work on reforming the civil service due to a lack of awareness⁷⁴. According to the

recently released 1st and 5th CEDAW reports, the policies are “plagued with poor implementation due to weak human, technical and financial resources. They are yet to be widely publicized and partnership with other sectors is grossly lacking, as sectoral gender focal points set up at inception of policy are non-functional due to administrative and other bureaucracies. In spite of these shortcomings, the Division is working with its partners, to create the necessary conditions for effective implementation of the policies.”⁷⁵

8. GBV: What is being done?

Local, national and international actors are undertaking initiatives that address the cultural, socioeconomic, political and institutional constraints which exacerbate the incidence of GBV in Sierra Leone, as well as implementing programmes designed to alleviate its adverse consequences. The focus on GBV largely emerged after the end of fighting, when the extent of sexual violence became clear and the new roles that women had been assuming empowered them to challenge the discrimination that they faced in society. It must be noted that general information as well as monitoring and evaluation and statistics on who is doing what, which interventions are effective, and what the priorities of local men and women are is very limited. In a first step towards addressing these gaps, this section highlights a number of the GBV-related initiatives that are being undertaken in Sierra Leone by local and international actors. The objective of this brief overview is to facilitate information-sharing and the identification of areas for future work.

More research is needed to evaluate the impact of donor interventions as well as the mapping of local CSO initiatives upcountry, where much of the less visible work is being done. This report could act as a springboard to conduct a more in-depth, comparative study of the different problems, opportunities and activities related to GBV across several regions.

8.1 Sierra Leonean organisations

During and after the war, women's organisations have responded to the disruption of social services and community-based structures by developing networks and alternative coping strategies to deal with problems such as food scarcity, sexual violence, and shortfalls in health and education provision. This demonstrates the innovative responses that women develop at the community-level. However, they have very limited resources and capacity for sustaining the implementation of these projects in the long-term, making donor support critical to their ongoing activities. The few organisations that are highlighted below provide a general sense of the kinds of activities that are being implemented by local actors.

Several of the established national NGOs in Sierra Leone such as Campaign for Good Governance and Network Movement for Justice and Democracy (NMJD) engage in a range of human rights and good governance initiatives, and link gender issues into their training and advocacy activities. NMJD, for instance, have been engaged in gender awareness-raising, have organised initiatives for gender justice, and are engaged in a project that seeks to conceptualise gender from an 'African perspective'. More research is needed to assess the scale of programming related to GBV being implemented by NGOs. There are also many community-based organisations (CBOs) in Sierra Leone that run small income-generation and skills-training projects with a gender component. These projects often include a wide range of activities, including psychosocial support for GBV victims and family or community mediation. It is important to note that much of the work addressing GBV is carried out at the grassroots community level, which is not covered in this report. This work is often 'invisible', as these organisations do not have links to Freetown and are often ad hoc initiatives run with few resources. More research will be needed to identify these important community-based initiatives that are in many cases the primary sources of support for GBV victims living in rural areas. These organisations are a key potential entry point for engaging with GBV issues in a more innovative and sustainable way that promotes local ownership. They also may yield more results, particularly in the context of working with men and traditional leaders who may feel threatened by specific GBV-related programming. However, it can be difficult for donor agencies to partner with community-based organisations without going through more established

intermediaries and so creative ways of overcoming this obstacle should be incorporated into programming decisions.

During this research, many specific obstacles were frequently identified by local actors as impeding their ability to address GBV effectively. These included the fact that donor funding is limited, the grants offered are often short-term, and they rarely support the core operational costs of the organisations. Furthermore, the general lack of capacity, education and low literacy rates among women, especially in the rural areas, is also a problem in terms of implementing projects and in ensuring broad representation. One of the advantages of GBV programming, however, is that it is flexible in terms of entry points, which means that there are many possibilities for linking it up to a range of programmatic components such as microfinance, education or human rights work that national NGOs and CBOs are already engaging in. More focused and sustained funding along with improved monitoring and coordination would permit the organisations to capitalise on their specific comparative advantages and would make efforts to address GBV through peacebuilding more sustainable. Furthermore, long-term funding and capacity-building support would enable women's organisations to be able network and strategise collectively to accurately reflect the diversity and interests of Sierra Leonean women.

Mano River Women's Peace Network (Marwopnet): Marwopnet developed out of the joint initiative of women peacebuilders in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea in May 2000, and the network received the UN Human Rights Award in 2003 in recognition of their work⁷⁶. It has a regional base, and focuses on issues such as human security and socioeconomic empowerment of women – in a sense, it is SCR 1325 in action. Marwopnet adopt an approach of lobbying and advocating for peace at the highest levels, and also implement income-generation and skills training projects through the local chapters or individual Marwopnet members. For example, Marwopnet members have been actively monitoring the ongoing conflict in Yenga at the border between Sierra Leone and Guinea which is a potential conflict flash-point in the future. Guinea is seeking to consolidate authority in the region and is reportedly harassing civilians, particularly women who cross the border for trading activities and are more vulnerable to sexual violence.

Although Marwopnet does not state GBV as one of its priorities, it ties in closely with its central objectives. The Sierra Leone chapter has been funded by the IRC to work on the "16 Days of Activism" campaign against GBV, and they have shared the video on the TRC process with police wives and other groups to frame discussions on violence against women. Marwopnet has also been active in advocating for and developing reforms to discriminatory laws with the Parliamentary Human Rights Committee. It is an effective network through which to raise the profile of SCR 1325, and its continued advocacy for including women and gender issues in the peace and security mechanisms of the region is an important contribution to addressing issues of GBV in Sierra Leone. Given that Marwopnet is one of the few regional peacebuilding networks for women, this focus should be maintained to allow a collective response to ongoing insecurity in the Mano River at the same time as each chapter demonstrates an interest in strengthening national activities. Donors could play an important role in supporting this dual track approach to building peace in Sierra Leone.

Sierra Leone Women's Forum (SLWF): The SLWF was formed in 1994 with the motto of "empowerment, equality and development" and is the most developed national network of women's organisations in Sierra Leone. Its membership includes business women, professionals, members of parliament and the government, and community-based organisations. It has a National Assembly comprising 85 representatives from throughout the country, a small National Secretariat, and Executives at various levels, although the links between Freetown and the provinces are not necessarily that strong. The SLWF has received some specific funding for projects, including the holding of a consultation to ensure women's interests were taken into account during the poverty reduction strategy (PRS) process. In 2005, Oxfam funded SLWF under their capacity-building programme to provide for the training of

finance and IT staff, and they would like to build up programming on the ground in areas such as GBV but cite the lack of core funding as a major obstacle. The SLWF submitted a proposal to the World Bank for a project on social inclusion that would focus on engaging and sensitising chiefs and other traditional authorities on gender issues, but as of the time of writing they were yet to receive a response. The country-wide network and broad-based membership of the SLWF could allow for a comprehensive and coherent approach to dealing with GBV-related issues, but before that is possible the SLWF would need support to organise more effectively and to better reflect the diversity and interests of Sierra Leonean women.

Federation of African Women Educationalists (FAWE): The Sierra Leone branch of FAWE was launched in March 1995, by the then-Minister of Education, Christiana Thorpe⁷⁷. FAWE's goal is to eliminate the gender gap in education at all levels through supporting girls and women to access education, and it also engages in a wide range of training and advocacy activities in areas such as GBV, peace education, skills training and child rights. They also provide counselling services for victims of sexual violence, and were particularly active in providing emergency services to displaced women and children during the conflict⁷⁸. The extensive sexual violence that followed the rebel invasion of Freetown in January 1999 prompted FAWE to launch an initiative to help the victims as well as break the taboo around rape. They used their entry-point through education to sensitise girls and their teachers and to provide counselling and medical services to affected girls. According to FAWE, there were 2,350 direct beneficiaries of this programme, implemented with assistance from Medecins Sans Frontières (Holland) and the FAWE regional headquarters⁷⁹. FAWE currently has 24 branches throughout Sierra Leone, and a membership of over 860 people.

In 2006, FAWE secured funding from Action Aid International to launch a project addressing violence against girls in schools. As of last year, they have identified 15 schools in which to work on creating an enabling environment for girls' learning, organizing school clubs to train girls and their teachers, and encouraging attitudinal change to encourage enhanced protection of girls. The FAWE project will also focus on sensitisation within the home to try and change discriminatory attitudes with the aim of encouraging families to value and protect the girl child. The project is also linked to income-generating activities, because children cannot learn if they are malnourished and due to the general discrimination between girls and boys it is most often the girls who will go without food. FAWE also launched a campaign with UNDP immediately after the war that ran for approximately a year to talk to parents in workshops and educate them about GBV and anti-discrimination. FAWE's initiatives are a useful example of how programmes can be designed to target GBV even where this is not their explicit aim, and demonstrate the effectiveness of tying in GBV-related objectives into already existing programming and partnerships⁸⁰. There is little resistance in promoting education, particularly given the government's commitment to the MDGs and universal primary education, and it can provide a useful entry point for targeting more controversial issues such as sexual harassment in schools.

8.2 International NGOs

The international community supports a number of important initiatives for women and gender equality in Sierra Leone. Many of the GBV-related programmes supported and implemented by international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) stemmed out of the emergency responses that were launched towards the end of the war. The international community is now moving towards focusing on long-term development, and INGOs are continuing to support a number of economic, political and social initiatives that target women. It is important that INGOs work to improve coordination and avoid duplication, and that they strategise collectively to ensure that their services, particularly capacity-building and awareness-raising, are extended throughout as much of the country as possible.

International Rescue Committee (IRC): The International Rescue Committee (IRC) began working on sexual violence during the war, and it still has the most comprehensive GBV

programme of all the INGOs operating in Sierra Leone. The first of their sexual assault referral centres, known as Rainbo Centres (RC), was established in Freetown in March 2003 as an extension of their emergency reproductive health programme that began in 1999. The RCs are designed to provide free, holistic care and services to victims of sexual assault, including medical evaluation, psychosocial counselling, and advice on pursuing the incidents with the police and legal system. If a case does make it to court, RC staff members support the victims in court and also conduct family and community mediation as well as home visits to assist those affected by GBV to avoid stigma and rejection. There are currently three RCs established in Sierra Leone located in Kenema, Kono and Freetown. They are all strategically located in hospital settings to avoid the stigma that is often associated with accessing GBV-related services. DfID funded the first three-year phase of the project which ran until January 2006 and targeted service delivery and building the physical structures for the Centres. Following three months of bridge funding provided by UNICEF, the RCs are now being supported by Irish Aid. The next phase of the IRC's work will focus on training and capacity-building of mainstream health workers to respond to GBV. The aim is that the government will assume control of service provision in approximately five years, and it is also hoped that follow-up services will ideally be available through the primary health units (PHUs).

Though the establishment of the RCs is a noteworthy success, they have encountered certain limitations which point to areas that could be improved. As there are only three RCs in Sierra Leone, they do not have a wide reach throughout the population, and the centre in Freetown is particularly difficult to access given its location in the congested eastern part of the city. Although the intention is to enhance sustainability by integrating the RCs into GoSL structures it is not clear that this would be desirable in the long-run. It is unlikely that the government would be able to sustain the existing standards of service provision without considerable support. The demand for the services provided by the RCs is very high and indicates that the international community should support the strategic expansion of the RCs to other regions of the country. Using the PHUs would provide broader access and outreach to local communities and would be more sustainable in the long run, as well as being more cost-effective. This indicates that a dual approach is necessary whereby the RCs could become training hubs, and they could be used to provide training, mentoring and capacity-building for PHU workers in rural areas. This would enable more effective linkages with the work that is being done by the PHUs, both to avoid duplication and to enhance the prospect of sustainability.

Oxfam: Gender equality is a priority within all of Oxfam's programmes, and they have been engaged in GBV-related work through their involvement in the Interagency Coordinating Committee for the prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (CCSEA). The CCSEA includes local and international NGOs, UN agencies and some government officials. Oxfam has taken on coordination of the CCSEA, but ideally it is hoped that a national NGO will eventually be able to chair the committee and take ownership of the coordination process. Through the CCSEA, Oxfam has been involved in training NGO workers in SEA, and they are also funding 50/50 to implement a new women's political empowerment programme. Oxfam is looking towards developing its advocacy around SEA and gender issues more broadly when they have their new gender officer in place later this year. To this end, Oxfam carried out a detailed survey on SEA in the Western Area and Kailahun District in early 2006. Their findings offer considerable insight into the high prevalence of SEA across society, the profile of the victims and perpetrators, the extent of which sex is used as a commodity and the emotional distress that is felt by the victims. This data provides a solid background on which Oxfam and other actors could advocate for the importance of integrating responses to GBV into peacebuilding and development strategies.

Goal: GOAL implements a programme targeting disadvantaged and vulnerable children and youths in nine communities in the Freetown area. They provide safe spaces for both girls and boys including basic shelter and drop-in services, limited literacy and skills training, and family tracing and reunification wherever possible. GOAL also works with young female commercial sex workers, although a staff member pointed out that economic and social pressures can make

prostitution a more attractive option to these girls than the literacy or job training programmes. An element of this programme is to assist the communities in building up the capacity to respond to the needs of disadvantaged children and youth, especially through the Child Welfare Committees that have been established in communities throughout Sierra Leone.

Save the Children (SCF): Through their ongoing work on child protection, SCF have identified the sexual exploitation of children, and GBV more generally, as an issue that needs to be addressed. SCF has recently begun operating a GBV programme in Kailahun as part of a sub-regional initiative. This project aims to build the prevention and response capacities of local communities and to support the government's efforts to strengthen community-based protection mechanisms. The project will target children between the ages of 11-17 in approximately 16 communities, but given the early stage of implementation it is not possible to assess how effective it will be. Given that the project is embedded in community structures and has a focus on building up local capacities, in particular through working with two community-based organisations, it has the potential for long-term sustainability.

Talking Drum Studios (TDS): TDS is an initiative of Search for Common Ground that produces national and district-level radio programmes. TDS' programmes focus on issues such as conflict resolution, HIV/AIDS, corruption and women's rights, as well as using video and print-media to target specific groups. All of their media work emphasises reconciliation and social reintegration as well as raising awareness about issues that have tended to be considered taboo. They produce a radio programme called "Salone Woman" that focuses on the post-conflict challenges affecting women such as violence, political representation, protection issues and property rights. This is the 4th most popular programme produced by TDS in Sierra Leone. TDS is also part of a consortium in Kailahun where it uses its community-based radio programmes as a forum for discussing issues related to GBV. TDS has secure funding until 2008, and prioritises work at the community-level in rural areas, including with women's organisations, to build a culture of trust and to contribute to conflict transformation. Radio is a powerful medium in Sierra Leone given the low literacy rates, and the 'soap dramas' that are acted out over the radio provide an opportunity to discuss sensitive issues that would normally be shrouded in social taboos. These kinds of innovative strategies to disseminate information and sensitise large numbers of the population should be supported, and integrated with GBV initiatives.

8.3 Key donor agencies

Several donor agencies include small gender-related projects in their overall strategies for Sierra Leone, but the overall response by the international community to GBV has been ad hoc and relatively uncoordinated. There is currently a degree of momentum for addressing GBV more comprehensively, as SCR 1325 is gaining profile and the consequences of failing to deal with gender inequalities are being increasingly recognised. This report in part stems from the need for donors to develop more holistic peacebuilding strategies that incorporate GBV, as well as how they can support and monitor the government's efforts. All donor agencies are, through their governments, signatories to the relevant agreements such as CEDAW and SCR 1325 that mandate them to address gender inequality, including when manifested as gender-based violence. The examples below provide an overview of a selection of donor agencies working on GBV-related issues in Sierra Leone to illustrate the kinds of initiatives that have been supported to date. More detailed research would be necessary to monitor and evaluate the specific impact that these, and other, initiatives have had.

Irish Aid: Irish Aid is committed to promoting gender equality throughout its programme and its key policy objectives are identified as: advancing equal rights for women and men; eliminating gender inequalities in access and control of resources and services; and supporting women's equal participation in political and economic decision-making⁸¹. Although the 2004 Gender Equality Policy does not explicitly identify GBV as a priority, the Consortium report points out that, "DCI can be a vehicle to carry GBV dialogue through international processes, human rights

commissions and through its own bilateral governance programmes which have entry points to working with the judiciary.”⁸² The Irish Government also committed to raising the profile and level of resources devoted to GBV prevention and response in its 2005 White Paper on Irish Aid.⁸³

Irish Aid established its office in March 2005, and is planning to engage over the long-term in Sierra Leone. The Irish Aid office in Sierra Leone has expressed an interest in working on gender issues, and has already begun supporting some initiatives. For example, in June 2006, Irish Aid funded a workshop on domesticating CEDAW that involved a range of NGO, government, and international actors. They are also funding the next implementation phase of the IRC’s Rainbo Centres. Irish Aid employs limited staff in Sierra Leone, and although most of their funds are channelled through implementing organisations including UN agencies and INGOs, additional human resource capacity would enhance its ability to engage with additional and alternative partners. As Irish Aid consolidates its presence and increases the budget for Sierra Leone, recruiting additional staff with gender expertise would also provide it with increased capacity to respond to issues related to GBV in Sierra Leone. Furthermore, community-based organisations, especially women’s organisations, offer untapped potential for addressing GBV, but they tend to be under-resourced and have little access to mainstream funding sources. It is therefore recommended that Irish Aid steps up its engagement with other civil society organisations that may be able to act as intermediaries and provide an entry point to support the work of some of these CBOs. Finally, increased in-country capacity at Irish Aid would also enable more substantive engagement in dialogue and policy development at partner and national level.⁸⁴

Department for International Development (DFID): DFID has committed itself to supporting women’s empowerment and gender equality through a number of policy documents. In their 2000 paper on promoting women’s empowerment, the fifth objective of their strategy to achieve international development targets is “to increase women’s personal security and reduce gender-based violence.”⁸⁵ SCR 1325 specifically refers to GBV, and demonstrating its commitment, the UK chose to focus on this issue in 2004 during its Presidency of the Security Council⁸⁶. Furthermore, in March 2006 the UK government released a National Action Plan on implementing SCR 1325, where action point 9 is “to promote justice for women and tackle gender-based violence in post-conflict situations.”⁸⁷ DFID is the largest donor agency in Sierra Leone, having led on the SSR process. Although it does not explicitly state a commitment to gender work in its country strategy documents, policies issued at headquarters stipulate that it should be mainstreamed in all its work. The DFID-funded Commonwealth Safety and Security Programme included a focus on strengthening the police to respond to gender issues, which played an important part in supporting the establishment of the FSUs. DFID also funded the IRC’s Rainbo Centres for three years. DFID has supported women’s political leadership programmes through Oxfam and the National Democratic Initiative, with the aim of addressing women’s exclusion from decision-making positions. A central constraint facing the DFID office in Sierra Leone is that it does not have specific gender expertise, although there is significant momentum from headquarters to increase focus on gender issues and a gender champion has been designated in the field office.

US Agency for International Development (USAID): The West Africa Regional Program of USAID has a gender component, and USAID has supported a range of gender-related initiatives in Sierra Leone. USAID is currently funding a consortium of organisations, including the IRC, Talking Drum Studios, and Centre for Victims of Torture, to implement a project focusing on GBV and trafficking in Kailahun. The goal of this project is to establish multi-sectoral inter-agency collaboration to enhance response to GBV. Three counselling centres have been established, and 11,516 victims of trauma, GBV and other forms of sexual abuse have received counselling.⁸⁸

United Nations: The recent transition to the UN Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL) has resulted in a smaller UN presence than the previous UNAMSIL mission, and the gender advisor position was been terminated. Although the Human Rights and Rule of Law section within UNIOSIL had a gender focal point in 2006, at the time it did not have any current plans to engage with GBV issues. The gender advisor from the UN peacekeeping mission in Burundi was seconded to UNIOSIL for one month in June 2006 to support the office in engaging women in the run-up to the 2007 elections in 2007. A gender advisor was eventually hired on a six-month contract in June and this will provide important support to efforts at integrating gender issues into the work of UNIOSIL.

In contrast to UNIOSIL, the UN Country Team is actively working on GBV through the different UN agencies. UNIFEM has undertaken work on women's access to justice by supporting the LRC, as well as enabling women to testify at the TRC. UNIFEM has also provided several different trainings to the MSWGCA and developed a manual on violence against women with the National Commission for Democracy and Human Rights. UNHCR explicitly recognises the vulnerability of refugee women in the Liberian refugee camps in Kenema, and through partners such as NMJD they are working with the refugees and surrounding communities to provide care for victims of GBV in women's centres. UNHCR also ensure that women have the same control over ration cards as their male family members. Of the six SLP officers in the camp, one comes from the FSU, and UNHCR report that they are cooperating with the police on gender issues, including GBV. UNICEF is involved in networks in Freetown, Bo, Kenema and Makeni to respond to GBV, and according to their figures, 85% of their staff members have received SEA training. UNICEF has also been involved in countering the problem of child trafficking, and is supporting programmes addressing orphans and other vulnerable groups. Following the end of the war, it became evident that girls were being excluded from disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration processes and to address this gap UNICEF established the "Girls Left Behind" project⁸⁹. UNICEF supported community-based organisations to provide a range of skills-training, literacy and numeracy lessons, as well as healthcare and psychosocial support to girl ex-combatants in Makeni, Kono and Kamakwie who were struggling to reintegrate into their communities. Projects that are rooted in the community, and develop local capacities for service provision as well as contain an outreach element to raise awareness and change attitudes about GBV are likely to be more sustainable in the long run.

In addition to the CCSEA which includes several UN agency members, the UN agencies have also set up a Gender Theme Group (GTG) to provide technical assistance and to support gender mainstreaming into the UN country team structures and activities⁹⁰. In particular, the GTG should "identify and promote common ways for the UN agencies to mainstream gender, as well as other strategies for addressing gender-based inequalities and inequities," which gives it a direct mandate to engage with GBV-related issues⁹¹. However, there is little evidence that this has resulted in joint programming or shared information amongst the different UN agencies, and the junior position of most of the gender focal points who attend the (irregular) GTG meetings means that they have limited ability to influence their own organisation's engagement with gender issues. It appears that there may be duplication of efforts, and that the GTG could be more usefully centred on certain key priorities, possibly using the implementation of SCR 1325 as a focus. Whilst gender mainstreaming is supported in all UN policy documents, it is not clear that it is being translated into practice, and the UN agencies should consolidate their efforts to address GBV.

9. Good practice guidelines for addressing GBV

As this report shows, despite the significant achievements that have been made to date, there is much scope for increased commitment to work on GBV-related issues in Sierra Leone. The following good practices highlight ways that donors and other actors could improve the effectiveness and sustainability of their GBV programming.

Partnerships with civil society actors are critical

Responses to GBV should be grounded in local realities and should enhance and build on the already existing capacities of local actors. CBOs are untapped resources in terms of developing mechanisms for prevention and response to GBV, and localised women's organisations are often already doing extensive work to support GBV victims and to lobby for socioeconomic and political reform. For sustainable and effective impact, donors should identify and link up with CBOs and ensure that their initiatives complement the work that is already being done on the ground.

Responses to GBV should be holistic and coordinated

The complex consequences of GBV require coordinated, strategic and holistic programming responses, and efforts to address the root causes and prevent GBV should be integrated into all civil society, INGO and donor initiatives. To avoid duplication of efforts and gaps in access to or provision of services, all stakeholders should focus their commitments and move from ad hoc initiatives towards coordinated long-term engagement, building on each agency's strengths and already existing partnerships. Furthermore, stakeholders should adopt a dual strategy of supporting targeted GBV programmes as well as developing innovative ways of integrating GBV components into already existing projects.

Gender does not mean women: Engaging with men, chiefs and other community leaders

Although GBV affects women and girls disproportionately, men can also be victims and must be part of the solution. Chiefs and community leaders are most often men, and engaging with these key decision-makers is critical if efforts to combat stigma, impunity, and discriminatory attitudes are to be successful. GBV programmes should therefore include space for the participation of men, and strategic partnerships should be developed with key individuals within the community to ensure that they take on the commitment to address GBV.

A culture of impunity prevents access to services and justice

Many GBV victims remain silent due to the stigma, shame and fear that they may be ostracised from their family and communities. This can prevent them from receiving care and support as well as their right to recourse in the law. Addressing the impunity that surrounds sexual violence will help to make GBV-related initiatives more effective. Governments should be encouraged to uphold their commitments to human rights and CBOs should be supported to provide safe spaces and follow-up support within communities. This will help to ensure that the rights of the individual subjected to GBV are at the centre of prevention and response initiatives.

Strong leadership is necessary to counter the culture of impunity

Changing the culture of impunity around GBV will be a long-term and challenging process. Having strong leaders within communities who can act as champions for women's rights and who have the capacity to influence others would contribute to the process of changing attitudes towards GBV. Donors and INGOs could develop programmes to support strong leaders, through capacity-building and training in leadership skills. Both male and female leaders are needed within any given society to provide role models and to begin the process of sensitisation from within the community. Networks of leaders advocating for an end to GBV could then be developed throughout the country, creating a powerful force for change.

The linkages between GBV and economic insecurity should be recognised

Women's economic insecurity and poverty more generally, are inter-linked with GBV, and can trap women and girls in potentially dangerous situations where they are vulnerable to sexual violence and discrimination. Empowering women to be financially independent and providing viable options for income-generation can increase their overall personal security.

Legal reforms should be coupled with widespread sensitisation

The reform of discriminatory laws, particularly those dealing with sexual offences and property rights, is a critical step in reducing GBV. Donors can advocate for reform at the highest policymaking levels at the same time as supporting local actors to lobby their own governments. However, legal reforms should be coupled with extensive sensitisation and awareness-raising programmes to disseminate information on the new laws and how women and men can use them to protect themselves. Radio programmes, drama and other creative strategies should be developed with CBOs to ensure that information about legal reform processes reaches rural areas, particularly illiterate women and girls.

Resources for GBV programming should be increased

The limited financial and organisational capacity of organisations working on GBV constrains their ability to fully address the problem. Donors should provide more targeted, strategic and long-term support to national and international NGOs and CBOs, including core and flexible funding for women's organisations, training, and capacity-building for CBO staff. Similarly, GBV components should be integrated into other project funding wherever possible to maximise impact and ensure that these initiatives are mainstreamed in the peacebuilding process.

Access to services for GBV victims should be improved

Although many innovative services are provided by organisations working on GBV, they are not always accessible to the majority of the population. Medical and legal services should be offered free of charge and accessible to those living in all regions, including rural communities. Further efforts should be made to ensure that the population is aware of these services. Building on service deliverers who are already in place, particularly CBOs and women's networks, can reduce the financial and time-related barriers that many people face, can ensure wide coverage, and can compensate for limited government capacity to provide such services.

Information and data collection on the nature and extent of GBV should be enhanced

Inaccurate and insufficient information about the nature and extent of GBV, especially sexual violence, impedes efforts to address it effectively. All local, national and international stakeholders should work together to ensure that the underlying causes and consequences of GBV are fully understood, and efforts to address them should be more coordinated and transparent.

National actors should be supported to implement and sustain their commitments to addressing GBV

A number of international standards that require governments to address GBV in their national contexts already exist, such as SCR1325. Governments should be supported in their efforts to coordinate and implement efforts to reform laws and practices that discriminate against women and to ensure that gender is effectively mainstreamed throughout all their programmes and policies. Furthermore, civil society, particularly women's organisations, should be strengthened to enable them to participate in implementation processes as well as hold their governments to account.

There should be more monitoring and evaluation of the impact of interventions to address GBV

There is little information about what types of GBV-related interventions are successful in the long-run, and how projects should be designed and implemented for maximum impact. All stakeholders should support monitoring and evaluation of their programmes to increase their

impact over the long term, and should ensure that the associated knowledge and capacity is transferred to local communities to enable them to continue monitoring on a regular basis. Good practices should also be shared between communities in the region and beyond, to enable cross-learning and the exchange of innovative responses to GBV.

Responses to GBV should be incorporated into broader peacebuilding and development goals

The link between GBV and other aspects of peace, security and development should be recognised, and GBV should be mainstreamed into the policies and programmes of all actors, particularly national and international stakeholders. Without addressing the physical, economic, and socio-political insecurity caused by GBV, the attainment of other peacebuilding and development goals will be compromised. The long-term consequences of discrimination against women and gender inequality bring significant costs to society, and acknowledging and addressing GBV as a serious issues will contribute to the consolidation of a sustainable peace.

10. Recommendations for Irish Aid and other key stakeholders

As the findings of this report demonstrate, GBV is a key issue in Sierra Leone that needs to be prioritised within overall peacebuilding strategies. It is important to recognise the important work that has been done so far, particularly by women's groups who often carry out their programmes with limited funds and assistance. However, there is a clear need for more coordination and information-sharing to identify what is being done throughout Sierra Leone to address GBV, particularly at the community level, and the gaps that remain. Irish Aid is well-placed to take a leadership role in moving efforts to address GBV forward, in coordination with other key stakeholders from the international donor community and civil society. This kind of sectoral leadership is time consuming. One helpful way to do this would be for Irish Aid to hire a full-time staff member to work on GBV issues. Ways that Irish Aid can support efforts to address GBV in Sierra Leone include some or all of the following:

Coordination and information-sharing

- A more detailed mapping exercise to determine the extent and effectiveness of efforts to address GBV would be useful. This would also enable identification of the CBOs working in rural areas. This exercise should incorporate consultations with civil society, particularly women's groups, to determine national priorities for action on GBV.
- The mapping exercise would identify the gaps that remain in terms of GBV service provision. This information would enable donor agencies to build on their comparative advantages, and to work with strategic partners to fill the gaps and ensure that all of the population has access to the needed services.
- The mapping exercise would also identify key leaders – local and national, political and from civil society – with the combination of willingness and influence required to lead sustained societal changes of the kind needed to address the underlying causes of GBV.
- The UN Gender Theme Group could be expanded to include donors and other interested stakeholders. If the GTG's capacity were increased by the introduction of more members, a sub-committee on GBV would be one possible way to enhance country-level programmes and policies on GBV. Such a sub-group or steering committee on GBV (perhaps led by Irish Aid) would enable better coordination, prioritisation and disbursement of funding strategically amongst the various implementing partners, encouraging the sharing of ideas and avoiding the duplication of efforts. This committee could be the central coordinating mechanism for the various initiatives related to GBV in the country, and should involve all stakeholders, including the government and NGO representatives.
- The development of a coordinated strategy for engaging with the government would enable women's CSOs to play a more active lobbying role. CSOs should act as monitors or watchdogs on the implementation of key commitments such as CEDAW and SCR 1325. Strengthened national networks would enable them to increase their impact throughout the country, and would contribute to a more coherent response to GBV at the community level. These networks could also contribute to linking upcountry initiatives with those ongoing in Freetown.

Capacity building of CSOs

- CSOs, especially women's organisations would benefit from capacity-building to enhance their ability to lobby for legal reforms, engage with the government and the media, and to communicate with donors to ensure greater awareness of and support for their initiatives.
- They would also benefit from specific training to strengthen their leadership and advocacy around GBV and gender issues more generally. They should also be supported to enhance their strategic engagement with key decision-makers within the government and international community.

Awareness-raising and sensitisation

- A country-wide sensitisation campaign focusing on the issue of GBV to educate the population about the rights of women and girls, using traditional channels of communication as well as print media and radio, could be launched. This campaign would have more impact if it was initiated at a high-level and had the backing of the international community.
- Targeting chiefs, community leaders and other men with further sensitisation and awareness-raising programmes, in particular to combat the tendency to deal with incidents of sexual violence at the community level, is important. Innovative strategies, such as linking GBV to community conflict or HIV/AIDS, can help to convince these individuals to take the issue on board.
- Disseminating the new gender bills, SCR 1325 and CEDAW widely would help to increase awareness of these frameworks among women's groups, helping them to lobby for their rights and improved laws and protection mechanisms.

Support for government services

- Expanding the number of FSUs in Sierra Leone and providing them with adequate staff and resources would enable a greater percentage of the population to access these services. Improving the conditions of service of police and army officers, social workers and other government employees, would also help reduce incentives for corruption and could enhance the quality of the medical and legal follow-up services.
- Increasing the number of female police and army officers and providing all members of the SLP and RSLAF with basic gender and human rights training – and specific training on GBV – would contribute to a more gender-sensitive security sector.

Funding for CSOs

- Making funding more accessible as well as more strategically targeted to CBOs, particularly those based in the provinces, who are working on GBV could lead to more sustainable and inclusive programming.
- Given the funding limitations, it may be beneficial to support CBOs in developing links with established NGOs, especially women's organisations, that could act as a liaison with donors, and provide a more transparent and accountable method of delivering funds.
- In recognition of the impact of economic insecurity on women's vulnerability to GBV, support for income-generation projects targeting CBOs and women's organisations should be continued. These kinds of projects can easily incorporate a GBV component.
- Establishing centres that include safe spaces or shelters in as many locations as possible would prevent women and girls from being re-victimised, given that most incidents of sexual violence occur at the hands of someone known to the victim within the home or community.

Law reform

- All stakeholders can apply pressure on the government and the LRC to push forward with reform of discriminatory legislation.
- To complement legislative reforms, information about the new laws would need to be disseminated widely throughout the country.

Support for INGOs

- INGOs have an important role in linking up with and supporting Sierra Leonean civil society, and particularly women's groups, to implement GBV-related projects. They can bring programming ideas from other countries for adaptation/piloting in the local context.
- INGOs would benefit from continued support to enable them to carry out specific GBV initiatives as well as integrate a GBV dimension into ongoing programming.
- Extending funding for the Rainbo Centres would enable the services to be rolled out strategically to other parts of the country. Training and mentoring capacity could also be integrated into the RCs, enabling the staff to share their knowledge and skills with PHU workers and community-based service providers. Supporting individuals or organisations

within rural communities to act as 'community focal points' for GBV would also give individuals without access to the RCs someone to approach for assistance.

Cross-learning and sharing of good practices

- Important lessons on how to address GBV have been learned in other conflict-affected countries such as Burundi and Liberia. Exposure to different contexts and strategies can sometimes bring about change domestically, and Sierra Leonean women parliamentarians and CSOs may benefit from being accompanied to travel to other regions to learn from what women are doing to address GBV. Good practices could be brought back to Sierra Leone and may in particular help to consolidate the legal reform process.

Annex A. List of people interviewed

Rosaline McCarthy, Sierra Leone Women's Forum Gráinne O'Neill, Irish Aid	4th July 2006
Amie Tejan-Kella, International Rescue Committee Janet Tucker, Marwopnet/FAWE Donald Robertshaw, UNICEF Vandetta Sawyerr, National Democratic Institute Ellie Kemp, Oxfam	5th July 2006
Fenella Kella, Sierra Leone Police Ambrose James, Talking Drum Studio Kadi Fekondo, Sierra Leone Police (FSU)	6th July 2006
Mark White, DFID Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff, Marwopnet Jonathan Sandy, UNDP Osman Gbla, Fourah Bay College	7th July 2006
Peter Henderson, GOAL	8th July 2006
Osho Coker, Government Reform Secretariat Peter Tucker, Law Reform Commissioner	10th July 2006
Charles Vandy, MSWGCA (Gender Division) Benedict Sannoh, UNIOSIL (Human Rights) Olayinka Creighton-Randall, Justice Sector Development Programme	11th July 2006
Moses Zombo, UNHCR Abu Brima, Network Movement for Justice and Development Tom Walsh, British Council	12th July 2006
James Sackey, World Bank Emmanuel Gaima, Decentralisation Secretariat Rashid Sesay, Development Assistance Coordination Office	13th July 2006

Annex B. Selected Recommendations from the TRC Report⁹²

The Commission's recommendations to address structural inequality encompass law reform, access to justice, the abolition of discriminatory customary law and practices, the building of institutional capacity and the establishment of educational programmes to counter attitudes and norms which lead to the oppression of women. The Commission views education, health, economic empowerment and political participation as priority areas for the progressive development of women in Sierra Leone.

Women affected by the Armed Conflict

327. The Commission recommends that a directory be established by the Ministry of Social Welfare and Gender Affairs in conjunction with UNIFEM, the World Health Organisation and other stakeholders which should contain a list of donor agencies and service providers assisting women together with their contact details both in the provinces and Freetown. The emphasis should be on where women can obtain information and access assistance. The launch of the directory should be accompanied by a media campaign. The Ministry of Social Welfare and Gender Affairs should work towards the implementation of this recommendation.

Domestic Violence

329. Women and girls experience great difficulty in pressing charges in respect of rape and sexual violence as police and judicial officers are reluctant to investigate and prosecute such cases. The Commission recommends that the Ministry of Social Welfare and Gender in conjunction with UNIFEM and the Gender Desk of the police work towards the creation of an educational programme for the police, prosecutors and judicial officers raising awareness of issues of gender, educating and training them in the investigation and prosecution of gender-based crimes and sensitising them on how to deal properly with complainants.

Sexual Offences under Customary Law

340. The Commission recommends that the Government work towards the harmonisation of the customary law with the common law and that to ensure laws dealing with the protection of women, particularly in regard to domestic violence and crimes of sexual violence, accord with international human rights standards.

Discrimination against Women

342. Laws that should be repealed include those provisions that discriminate against women in relation to marriage, the administration of estates, inheritance, and divorce and property ownership. This recommendation requires the repeal of sections 26(4)(d) and (e) of the Constitution, which permit discrimination against women in these areas and on the grounds of customary law. Constitutional provisions that authorise discrimination on the basis of gender have no place in a modern democratic society based on equality and respect for human dignity.

344. The Commission recommends that the Government take steps to immediately implement its obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and to ensure that gender is taken into account in all legislation and policy.

Political Participation and Access to Power

350. The Commission further recommends that Government and Parliament work towards achieving 50/50 gender parity in representative politics (Parliament, District Council and Local Government) within the next 10 years.

351. The Commission recommends that the Government work towards achieving a representation of at least 30% women in cabinet and other political posts. Government should

also work towards incrementally achieving 50/50 gender parity in cabinet and political posts within the next 10 years.

Skills training and Economic Empowerment

356. The Commission recommends that micro-credit schemes should target women ex-combatants, internally displaced women, female heads of households and war widows. Those providing micro-credit should be encouraged to incorporate a basic business management course into the provision of micro-credit.

HIV / AIDS

364. The Commission recommends that the Ministry of Social Welfare and Gender Affairs, in conjunction with UNIFEM and the NGO sector, work towards the launching of an education programme, which addresses both men and women on safe sex practices.

Gender Commission

365. The Commission is of the view that gender issues do not receive sufficient attention within the Ministry of Social Welfare and Gender Affairs. The Commission recommends that the Government seriously consider the removal of the gender portfolio from the Ministry of Social welfare and the creation of a gender commission.

366. The Gender Commission should be representative of all sectors of Sierra Leone society. The Gender Commission should co-ordinate and drive all issues pertaining to the advancement of women in Sierra Leone.

The Most Vulnerable

368. The government should provide psychosocial support and reproductive health services to women affected by conflict. These services should be provided free to those who have experienced physical trauma, torture and sexual violence. Government should work towards the early fulfilment of this recommendation.

Annex C. Terms of Reference

Reviewing the status of women in Sierra Leone from a security perspective

Background

The widespread violence in Sierra Leone affected a very large proportion of the population directly, and others indirectly, and has had a deep societal impact, e.g. on the capacity to deal with conflict within intergenerational and gender relationships. It is incumbent on those supporting Sierra Leone's recovery process to take account of these issues, and factor them into their recovery programmes: either through interventions which address them directly, or by ensuring that their other interventions are sensitive to them. The same is true for Liberia.

Irish Aid have requested that International Alert deploy staff to review the way insecurity is affecting women in Sierra Leone/Liberia, with particular attention to gender-based violence (GBV) in the post-conflict context. Alert plans to deploy a team to Sierra Leone +/- 3-12 July 2006; one team member will also spend a short time in Monrovia in the prior week, and will investigate similar issues there – though the main focus will be on Sierra Leone.

Objective

Alert will assess the extent to which the security needs of women are being addressed in Sierra Leone and Liberia, including the extent and impact of GBV, and recommend ways in which Irish Aid, among others, could contribute to improvement. This will involve a kind of strategic gap analysis, identifying opportunities and entry points for long term engagement: these will need to be further explored in detail at a later date.

Output

A report containing empirical examples, analysis and recommendations.

Method

The method, meetings, etc will be discussed and agreed with Irish Aid representatives at the beginning of the mission. It will involve document review and discussions with Irish Aid and other international donors, UN, security sector representatives, NGOs and community members in Monrovia, Freetown and at least one site in Sierra Leone – to be determined – outside Freetown. The preliminary findings will be discussed with Irish Aid at the end of the mission.

The team will consider the following issues:

- The legislative framework within which gender violence is being addressed
- What governmental, donor and NGO initiatives are underway/planned
- Role and capacity of police and judiciary
- Barriers preventing people from accessing security services
- “traditional” or “local” systems for dealing with (or not dealing with) gender violence.

Team members

Three International Alert team members:

- Programme officer for gender and peacebuilding: Maria Olson, who is Alert's representative in the UN and UK Working Groups on Women and Security, and who helped produce the 2004 publication *Inclusive Security, A Toolkit for Advocacy and Action*.
- Senior programme officer for security and peacebuilding: Peter Albrecht, who recently joined Alert after working on Security Sector Reform in Sierra Leone.
- Research associate on gender and peacebuilding: Karen Barnes, who is currently conducting PhD research in Sierra Leone into a similar topic.

Endnotes

¹ Government of Sierra Leone (2005) *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper: A National Programme for Food Security, Job Creation and Good Governance, 2005-2007*. Freetown: Government of Sierra Leone.

² For example, see the *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*.

³ Anette Funk, James L. Lang and Juliane Osterhaus (2005) *Ending Violence against Women and Girls – Protecting Human Rights*, Good Practices for Development Cooperation. Eschborn: GTZ: 6.

⁴ The research was conducted by Karen Barnes, Peter Albrecht and Maria Olson from International Alert's Peacebuilding Issues Program. International Alert is an independent peacebuilding organisation working in over 20 countries and territories around the world. Our dual approach involves working directly with people affected by violent conflict as well as at government, EU and UN levels to shape both policy and practice in building sustainable peace. Our regional work is based in the African Great Lakes, West Africa, the Caucasus, the Andean region of South America, Sri Lanka, Nepal and the Philippines. At both regional and international levels, our thematic work focuses on the role of business, humanitarian aid and development, gender, security and post-conflict reconstruction in the context of building peace.

⁵ See Joint Consortium of Irish Human Rights, Humanitarian and Development Agencies and Development Cooperation Ireland (2005) *Gender Based Violence: A Failure to Protect, A Challenge to Action*.

http://www.gbv.ie/gender_based_violence_study.pdf

⁶ Joint Consortium (2005): 1.

⁷ Joint Consortium (2005): 1.

⁸ For example, see R.W. Connell (1987) *Gender and Power*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press and Cynthia Enloe (2000) *Bananas, beaches and bases: Making feminist sense of international politics*. London/Berkeley: University of California Press.

⁹ Mary Jennings and Sherry McLean (2005) *Gender-based Violence Study*. Consortium of Irish Human Rights, Humanitarian and Development Agencies and Development Cooperation Ireland: 12.

¹⁰ World Bank (2003) *Gender Equality and the Millennium Development Goals*. Washington, DC: World Bank: 1. http://www.mdgender.net/upload/monographs/WB_Gender_Equality_MDGs.pdf

¹¹ Human Rights Watch (2003) *"We'll kill you if you cry" Sexual violence in the Sierra Leone conflict*. New York: Human Rights Watch: 5.

¹² Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2005) *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. Volume 3b. Freetown: Government of Sierra Leone: 108 Vol. 3b

¹³ United Nations (2005) *Human Development Report 2005*. <http://hdr.undp.org/statistics/data/countries.cfm?c=SLE>.

¹⁴ For an overview of GBV during the war see Human Rights Watch (2003) and the TRC Report (2005).

¹⁵ Physicians for Human Rights (2002) *War-related sexual violence in Sierra Leone: A population-based assessment*. Boston: Physicians for Human Rights: 2-4.

¹⁶ TRC Report (2005), Vol. 3b: 162.

¹⁷ HRW (2003): 50-1; United Nations Economic and Social Council (2002) *Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, submitted in accordance with Commission on Human Rights resolution 2001/49, Addendum Mission to Sierra Leone (21-29 August 2001)*, E/CN.4/2002/83/Add.2: para 60-64.

¹⁸ For example, see Harvard School of Public Health (2006) *HIV/AIDS and Gender-Based Violence Literature Review*, Program on International Health and Human Rights, Harvard. Available at:

http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/pihhr/images/Final_Literature_Review.pdf

¹⁹ TRC Report (2005): 196-7.

²⁰ TRC Report (2005): 197.

²¹ The Lomé Peace Agreement of 1999 controversially granted amnesty for crimes committed during the war, including sexual violence, although the UN succeeded in appending a hand-written note at the last minute exempting crimes against humanity such as systematic rape from this clause.

²² Report of the Special Rapporteur (2002): 2.

²³ For example, see Sheila Meintjes, Meredith Turshen and Anu Pillay (2002) *The Aftermath: Women in Post-conflict Transformation*. London: Zed Books.

²⁴ TRC Report (2005): 94-96.

²⁵ Although most women's activism is Freetown-centred, during the fighting many women from rural areas were displaced and fled to the capital, which enabled them to participate in the peace movement.

²⁶ Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff (2000) "Sierra Leonean Women and the Peace Process", *Accord issue 9*, Conciliation Resources. <http://www.c-r.org/our-work/accord/sierra-leone/women-peace.php>

²⁷ HRW (2003): 15.

²⁸ See Amnesty International (2006) *Sierra Leone: Women face human rights abuses in the informal legal sector*. London: Amnesty International.

²⁹ Amnesty International (2006): 1.

³⁰ For an extensive analysis of the parallel systems of formal and customary law as well as the coexisting formal and informal structures see Amnesty International (2006).

³¹ The statistics reported by the IRC's Rainbo Centre indicate a rise in child abuse.

- ³² Also see TRC Report (2005): 219.
- ³³ TRC Report (2005), Volume 3b: 211 para 503.
- ³⁴ For details on the prosecution of sexual violence under formal and customary law see HRW (2003): 19-22.
- ³⁵ Amnesty International (2006): 9.
- ³⁶ PRSP (2005): viii.
- ³⁷ PRSP (2005): 20.
- ³⁸ United Nations (2003) *United Nations Human Development Report 2003*.
http://hdr.undp.org/statistics/data/country_fact_sheets/cty_fs_SLE.html
- ³⁹ TRC report (2003): 100 para 69-70.
- ⁴⁰ LAWCLA (n.d.) *Unequal Rights: Discriminatory Laws Against Women in Sierra Leone*: 4.
- ⁴¹ Funk, Lang and Osterhaus (2005): 27.
- ⁴² Oxfam/Lucy Pettman (2006) *SEA Prevalence Survey, Findings Report*. [not published]
- ⁴³ Joint Consortium (2005): 24; UNHCR/Save the Children (2002) *The experience of refugee children in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone based on initial findings and recommendations from assessment mission, 22 October-30 November 2001*.
<http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/AllDocsByUNID/6010f9ed3c651c93c1256b6d00560fca>.
- ⁴⁴ Peace agreement between the Government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone, Lomé. <http://www.sierra-leone.org/lomeaccord.html>
- ⁴⁵ Commonwealth Secretariat (2004) *Sierra Leone Local Government Elections: The Report of the Commonwealth Expert Team*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat: 15-17.
- ⁴⁶ Government of Sierra Leone (2004) *Local Government Act*, Section 95-6. http://www.daco-sl.org/encyclopedia/3_strat/3_3/GoSL_Act03Rev_LocalGovernment.pdf
- ⁴⁷ Concord Times "Sierra Leone Women Sidelined in Upcoming Campaign", 29 June 2007.
<http://allafrica.com/stories/200706290689.html>.
- ⁴⁸ Amnesty International (2006): 8.
- ⁴⁹ Government of Sierra Leone (1991) *The National Constitution of Sierra Leone*. Section 27 (1).
<http://www.statehouse-sl.org/constitution/>
- ⁵⁰ "Sierra Leone: 1991 Constitution to be Reviewed", *Concord Times (Freetown)*, July 28, 2006. Available at:
<http://allafrica.com/stories/200607280902.html>
- ⁵¹ MSWGCA/IRC/LRC (2003) *Building A Women's Law Reform Agenda*, Women's Law Reform Workshop, 8-10 July 2003.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*
- ⁵³ CEDAW (2006) *Combined initial, second, third, fourth and fifth periodic reports of States parties: Sierra Leone*. CEDAW/C/SLE/5: p.24 para 9.1
- ⁵⁴ See CEDAW (2006) p. 20-22.
- ⁵⁵ See DAW (2005) *Implementation of CEDAW: Report of a Training Workshop*, 4-8 April 2005, Freetown, Sierra Leone.
- ⁵⁶ TRC Report (2005), Appendix 2. <http://www.trcsierraleone.org/pdf/APPENDICES/Appendix%20%20-%20Submissions.pdf>
- ⁵⁷ TRC Report (2005): Appendix 2, 352.
- ⁵⁸ DAW (2005): 10.
- ⁵⁹ TRC Report (2005): Vol. 3b.
- ⁶⁰ The first consultant was hired in 2000 and helped to develop the MSWGCA's two gender action plans, and the second consultant provided expert advice on integrating gender issues into the country's PRSP in 2004.
- ⁶¹ TRC Report (2005): 173.
- ⁶² The International Military Advisory and Training Team (IMATT) led by the UK, has been tasked with rebuilding the RSLAF into an effective, professional and democratically accountable force. IMATT has been responsible for the retraining of the armed forces and in this capacity can play a key role in ensuring that human rights and gender issues are effectively mainstreamed into the training being given to the RSLAF. For more information on the security sector in Sierra Leone see Peter Albrecht and Mark Malan (2006) *Post-conflict Peacebuilding and National Ownership: Meeting the Challenge of Sierra Leone*. Accra: KAIPTC/ZIF.
- ⁶³ See Albrecht and Malan (2006).
- ⁶⁴ It is important to note that the FSUs are only concerned with violence that occurs within the family setting, and so gender-based violence that occurs outside of the home falls within the remit of the general duty police officers who are expected to investigate those cases. The FSUs were established largely due to the initiative of Kadi Fekondo, currently Assistant Inspector-General of the SLP, who was working in Kissy at the time and identified domestic violence as a problem that the police had little capacity to address.
- ⁶⁵ See <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>.
- ⁶⁶ World Bank (2003): 3.
- ⁶⁷ See Government of the Republic of Sierra Leone (2005) *Millennium Development Goals Report for Sierra Leone*. http://www.sl.undp.org/files/Sierra_Leone_MDG_Report.pdf#search=%22gender%20MDGs%20sierra%20leone%22
- ⁶⁸ See United Nations (2000) Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security
- ⁶⁹ Conversations with staff from the Gender Division, July 2006.
- ⁷⁰ The PBC, established as an inter-governmental advisory body in December 2005, is mandated with supporting the consolidation of peace and serving as a forum for coordination and information-sharing amongst key donors and

other stakeholders. For more details about the PBC and gender issues see NGO Working Group (2006) *SCR 1325 and the Peacebuilding Commission, Six Years On* report. New York: NGOWG.

⁷¹ PRSP (2005).

⁷² Mary McKeown (2005) *Review of Civic Engagement in the Sierra Leone PRSP Process*: 20.

⁷³ *Sierra Leone Compact – The United Nations Peacebuilding Commission and the Republic of Sierra Leone Framework for Cooperation: Building on Progress*. First draft for discussion on June 22nd, PBC Formal Country-Specific Meeting on Sierra Leone.

<http://www.peacebuildingcommission.org/files/uploads/Draft%20Sierra%20Leone%20Compact%20June%2015.doc>.

⁷⁴ Ministries currently under review include the MSWGCA, the Ministry of Justice/Office of the Attorney-General, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

⁷⁵ CEDAW (2006) p. 29 para 10.6.3-4.

⁷⁶ See Marwopnet-SL information pamphlet.

⁷⁷ See FAWE-SL chapter pamphlet. Christiana Thorpe is now the National Election Commissioner, and it is the first time that a woman has been appointed to this post.

⁷⁸ TRC Report (2005): See FAWE's submission.

⁷⁹ FAWE and FESIL magazine, Vol. 7, September 2005: 11.

⁸⁰ Joint Consortium (2005): 47.

⁸¹ Development Cooperation Ireland (2004) *Gender Equality Policy*. Dublin: Department of Foreign Affairs: 7.

<http://www.irishaid.gov.ie/Uploads/Gender%20Equality%20Policy.pdf>

⁸² Joint Consortium (2005): 53.

⁸³ See Government of Ireland (2005) *White Paper on Irish Aid*. Dublin: Government of Ireland: 61-2. Available at:

<http://www.irishaid.gov.ie/whitepaper/assets/White%20Paper%20English.pdf>.

⁸⁴ Joint Consortium (2005).

⁸⁵ DFID (2000) *Poverty Elimination and the Empowerment of Women*. London: DFID: 29.

<http://www.dfid.gov.uk/pubs/files/tspgender.pdf>

⁸⁶ Nicola Johnston (2005). *Evaluation of DFID Development Assistance: Gender Equality and Women's*

Empowerment, Phase II Thematic Evaluation: Conflict and Post Conflict Reconstruction. London: DFID: 14.

⁸⁷ UK National Action Plan to implement SCR 1325 (2006), <http://www.fco.gov.uk/Files/kfile/ActionPlanForUKWG.pdf>: 10.

⁸⁸ See "Cross-border Peace Building activities in the Mano River Union",

<http://www.usaid.gov/missions/warp/cprevention/cbprograms/mru.htm>

⁸⁹ Karen Barnes (2005) *Mi Hart don Col: An evaluation of the Girls Left Behind Project*. Freetown: UNICEF-Sierra Leone.

⁹⁰ See UN Gender Theme Group *Proposed Terms of Reference*, Sierra Leone.

http://www.undg.org/documents/4385-Gender_Theme_Group_TOR__Sierre_Leone_.doc. Members of the UN Gender Theme Group include UNIFEM, UNAMSIL/UNIOSIL, UNHCR, UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNICEF, WHO.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² These constitute a selection of recommendations. For the full list please see TRC Report (2005): 168-76.