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**Peace Agreements as a Means for Promoting Gender Equality and Ensuring**  
**Participation of Women**

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## **Sierra Leone Case Study**

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### **Peace Agreements as a Means for Promoting Gender Equality and Ensuring Participation of Women-“A Framework Model Provisions”**

#### **Background**

The process towards peace often follows two parallel paths: The first focuses on formal peace negotiations by political leaders, in some cases mediated by external parties in an attempt to reach a peace agreement. The second comprises a wide range of informal activities, usually orchestrated by heterogeneous groups of voluntary grassroots organizations that seek to draw attention to particular issues during the transition period and thereby influence the formal process. This paper concentrates on peace agreements as a means of promoting gender equality and ensuring the participation of women. A Framework Model provision explores both paths, using the Lome Agreement process as a case study.

Sierra Leone, which covers 73,328 sq. km on the west coast of Africa, has a population of 4.5 million people, 51 per cent of them women. Though endowed with strategic mineral resources that include diamonds and rutile, the country sits at the bottom of the Human Development index with a ranking of 173 out of [173...].<sup>1</sup> Opportunities for women have traditionally been limited, in some rural areas non-existent. As mothers, wives and caregivers, women have disproportionately borne the burden of the country's economic decline.

Independent since 1961, Sierra Leone retained Dominion status within the British Commonwealth, becoming a Republic in 1971 and, after 25 years of one-party rule by the All People's Congress, adopted a new Constitution providing for multi-party democracy in 1991. Civil war broke out in March 1991 and was formally concluded by in the 1996 Abidjan Peace Agreement of 30 November 1996, the ECOWAS Conakry Peace Plan of October 1997 and, finally, the Lome Peace Agreement signed on 7 July 1999. Analysts attribute the conflict to the long dictatorship; its centralization of power; massive state corruption, including maladministration by traditional chiefs; the politicization of the police and the armed forces; and the abject poverty of the vast majority, coupled with massive unemployment, particularly among young people. The war in neighbouring Liberia became an additional contributory factor.

The war resulted in massive destruction of the country's existing infrastructure, including an education system that had been able to cater to only 45 per cent of Sierra Leone's children before hostilities erupted. Of the human disasters that remain to be tallied accurately, the war left 75,000-100,000 dead and approximately 250,000 amputees. In addition to the 500,000 who fled the country another 179,000- 2,000,000 were internally displaced.

The effects of the conflict on the country's female population have been particularly devastating. Over 12,000 girls were pressed into armed service. Another 257,000 women and girls have either been raped or otherwise sexually exploited, many forced into prostitution. Many have endured forced pregnancies and contracted HIV/AIDS or other STDs as a direct result of the conflict. All in all, 72 per cent of the country's women have suffered human rights abuses, at least half of these seriously victimized. Given the destruction of the country's earlier social service infrastructure, neither the remaining healthcare institutions nor the schools can hope to care for current psychosocial trauma. Although the framework exists, policies relating to the continuation of girls in education for pregnant girls are rarely enforced

### **Women Mobilizing for the Peace Process**

In addition to the peacekeeping and negotiation efforts of the international community, national and local civil society organizations made major contributions to resolving the conflict and keeping the peace. Although this paper focuses on the Lome peace agreements and closely associated activities, no account of the peace process in Sierra Leone can slight women's involvement in the formal peace process, which began well before.

As early as 1995, and simultaneously with women in Freetown, women in Pujehun, in the eastern province of Sierra Leone, attempted to negotiate directly with the leaders of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). Led by Elizabeth Lavalie, the venture ended in disaster -- the murder and abduction of a number of the women by RUF fighters.

However, even in mid-1994, women's NGOs under the umbrella name of the Women's Forum had decided to take collective action on issues of common concern in the context of preparations for the up-coming Fourth UN World Conference on Women in Beijing. The Women's Movement for Peace was also at this time in formation. Given that the rebellion had engulfed the entire country by this point, these groups inevitably turned their attention on its impact on women and women's role in resolving the mounting conflict. Led by the Sierra Leone Women's Movement for Peace, the Women's Forum initiated a debate on peace by 1995, arguing not only that the crisis had become too serious to be left to the military Government then in power, but that women had unique skills to bring to the peace process. The Movement adopted an assertive political strategy of organizing marches, discussions, Muslim and Christian prayer meetings and the mobilization of women from varied backgrounds throughout the country. These women also lobbied all parties to the conflict, pushing the Government and the RUF accountable for its commitment to the international community to move to democratic rule, together with its allies, towards negotiations. The Movement also persuaded the international

community to take the war seriously. At the same time, high-ranking rebel women were often using their positions as commanders to protect abducted women and girls and to help them escape; such efforts pointed in some sense to the potential support of RUF women for a negotiated settlement.

A second strategy of the Sierra Leone Women's Movement for Peace focused on establishing democracy by holding multi-party elections as a means of resolving the conflict. Women's groups participated in the two national consultative conferences -- Bintumani(1) in 1995 and Bintumani (2) in February 1996 -- which set the agenda for elections and the peace process. Women's participation and votes in these two conferences became the turning point in the national decision to proceed with multi-party elections and a negotiated settlement of the conflict. These women also called for women's constituting half the delegates of any formal peace negotiation body. Following the Bintumani consultations, women stressed the urgency of addressing issues such as thirty percent representation for women consistent with the Beijing declaration, women's literacy, health care, and entrepreneurship to reduce poverty, along with the reform of laws detrimental to women on divorce, property, marriage and inheritance.

Although only a few women ran for office, women served widely in the electoral process itself as making inputs into the electoral legislation for 30% representation, election trainers, polling officers, and local election monitors to ensure that the Interim National Electoral Commission could fulfill its mandate and hold elections on the due date. The March 1996 elections produced a civilian government and Sierra Leone's first Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs. The ministry adopted a cross cutting approach to ensure each ministry took into consideration in their budget and accountability procedures gender perspectives and to monitor the process to make sure women were given prominence. In November of that year, the new Government signed the Abidjan Peace Accord with the RUF, which lacked participation of civilians. However, a *coup d'etat* by elements of the National Army ousted the government in May 1997.

Nonetheless, from 1997-1999, women's advocacy within and outside Sierra Leone attracted international attention. Through the UN office of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), the organization's Sierra Leone section provided regular briefings to the Security Council members on the situation of women in the conflict in Sierra Leone and conveyed women's concerns and recommendations. In addition, through their regular reports on worldwide violations of women's rights, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, *Médecins Sans Frontières* brought international pressure to bear for expediting a resolution of the conflict. Urgent Action Fund USA a women's right foundation provided timely financial support for women to utilize opportunities for intervention in international debate. Further women refugees from Sierra Leone in Guinea, Gambia, England and the United States contributed to the debate on serious violations of women's human rights and the imperative of women's participation in the peace process. Individual Sierra Leonean women outside the country maintained contact and kept up an international lobby.

By 1999, the reinstated civilian government of Sierra Leone requested the National Commission for Democracy and Human Rights of Sierra Leone to organize the National Consultative Conference, which attracted many civil society groups including women's groups. Using the Abidjan Peace Accord as its framework of reference, the Conference provided a national platform for exchange of views on the peace process and reached consensus on the cease-fire, civil-military relations, amnesty and immunity, power-sharing and the role of civil society. Inter alia, the Conference requested civil society groups to serve as observers at the peace negotiations.

Moreover, during the National Consultative Conference, the newly created OAU Women's Commission for Peace issued a statement calling for the integration of women into the peace process. This effort was further supported by a call from the Task force of African NGOs and *Femmes Africa Solidarité*, under item 12 at the 55<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission of Human Rights, which condemned the violence against women in Sierra Leone, called for support to the country's women through renewed political will to resolve the conflict peacefully, and requested the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women to visit Sierra Leone. In addition, a WILPF briefing paper to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs. Mary Robinson, urged her to review the findings of the Special Rapporteur prior to her own visit to Sierra Leone. The brief also urged the High Commissioner to call for accountability for violations of human rights through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission proposed by the women of Sierra Leone during the National Consultative Conference.

In June 1999, during her visit to Sierra Leone, the High Commissioner signed a human rights manifesto declaring and reaffirming unwavering commitment to non-discriminatory promotion of all human rights for all Sierra Leoneans. In particular, paragraph 8 of the Manifesto recognized that all the parties to the manifesto (the Government of Sierra Leone, the National Commission for Democracy and Human Rights, the National Forum for Human Rights, the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General) 'understood that the rights of women must be understood, protected and promoted with complete commitment and consistency, the this regard the **“Government paying priority attention to the implementation of its obligations under the CEDAW----- and the UN will continue to provide technical support and assistance, including through the deployment of gender specialists within the human rights team of United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone at the time.”**

At the Lome peace negotiations, the government delegation of 10 members included only two women, and the rebel delegation of 10 members included one woman. Two civil society observer groups also present in Lome – the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone and a 13-member cross-section of secular CSOs – comprised some women. The civil society groups held several meetings with both the Government and RUF delegations and with the international delegates and observers during the talks. These groups also succeeded in holding a “one family” meeting of all Sierra Leonean at the peace talks to discuss the issues frankly in facing the country and to chart the way forward.

However, women were excluded from key meetings drafting the Peace Agreement itself; negotiators fell far short of integrating gender perspectives sufficiently into the text, despite earlier efforts at both the national and international levels to this end and to gender balance in the negotiations themselves. The Agreement, signed in July 1991, was promoted to Sierra Leoneans at large by CSOs and generally accepted.

### **The Lome Agreement**

To identify a gender perspective in the documents that emerged, I reviewed the composition of the institutions/post conflict structures, their mandates, and selection procedures or consultation processes using as my base the Beijing Platform for Action, CEDAW (to which Sierra Leone is a signatory), and the Constitution of Sierra Leone.

The Peace Agreement is written largely in general terms; its few specifics relate to the composition of institutions/structures and their mandates. Of the 37 Articles and provisions, the word “women” occurs only twice. Only one Article – XXVIII -- concerns women. It provides that “women participate in the national implementation of the rehabilitation, reconstruction and development programs to enable them play a central role in the moral, social and physical reconstruction of Sierra Leone. However, all the other provisions are gender-blind.

In the Agreement’s Preamble, the parties commit to “the promotion of and full respect for all human rights and humanitarian law, popular participation in governance democracy and socio-political framework free of inequality” However it does not refer specifically to gender inequalities or to the application of CEDAW. While one could infer from the text of the Preamble, intent not to discriminate on the basis of gender, evidence to date has shown that practice tends to follow traditional patterns of bias against women.

Similarly, while the body of the Agreement calls for establishing several post-conflict structures, its stipulations for their composition and their mandates express virtually no gender consciousness. Again, though one can argue that the inclusion of civil society representation in these post-conflict structures envisages the inclusion of women and anticipates women’s participation in the post-conflict peacebuilding, experience has also furnished little evidence in this regard.

### **Political Structures and Electoral Systems**

No gender perspective informed the establishment of the post-conflict political structures or electoral systems. One might argue that their composition could support women’s participation in the formal peace-building processes – but only to the extent that the Commission of the Consolidation of the Peace comprises **two** representatives of civil society, and the Commission for the management of Strategic Resources, National Reconstruction and Development includes **three** CSO members and thereby provides opportunities for the election of women. However, this thesis cannot embrace the Council of Elders, which not only has no provision for gender balance, but given the cultural and traditional practices inimical to women’s leadership, it is unlikely that this group will appoint women to its membership. Let me note, though, that in some areas of Sierra

Leone, women leaders known as “Mamie Queen” wield significant power and influence decision-making on vital issues. To what extent the Council will reach out to such women remains anyone’s guess. Nonetheless, point 7 of this Article offers an opportunity to recommend to the President “improvement to and modifications to the commission” and thereby room for addressing gender questions.

Other political areas include setting the date of the next elections and appointing the National Electoral Commission. The importance of this Commission in facilitating the participation of women in governance and decision-making cannot be over emphasized. Yet it is not mandated even to consult with women’s groups or, indeed, any CSOs whatever “to determine the membership of the electoral commission and the terms of reference” to ensure a level playing field for men and women in the electoral process. The words HE or SHE referring to employees of the Commission envisages the hiring of women as well as men. But nothing suggests that women will occupy posts high enough to influence decision-making and policy.

### **Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration**

Again, no gender perspectives are evident in this section of the Agreement. If one can interpret the guarantee of security to *all ex-combatants* as including women, one could say that this provision supports women’s participation in the post-conflict efforts. However, there is no provision in the text concerning the restructuring of the army to encourage a gender-sensitive recruitment process that would support women’s activities in peacebuilding.

Other post-conflict military and security issues include the transformation of the mandate of ECOMOG; the new mandate of UNOMSIL; security guarantees for peace monitors; DDRRR; the restructuring and training of Sierra Leone’s armed forces; the withdrawal of mercenaries; the notification of the joint Monitoring Commission; and notification to military commands. All these texts are gender- blind. The government manual on the DDR process contains little information on how women will feature in this programme. Indeed, it makes no mention of the security of refugee camps, women prisoners and abductees, let alone those who are teenage or pre-teen girls.

Although the Preamble states that the parties **recognized the imperative that children of Sierra Leone especially those affected by the war in view of their vulnerability should have special care and attention in accordance with the Convention on the rights of the child**, it fails to mention the particular vulnerability of girls children and in particular girl combatants. This is followed by the operative paragraph on child combatants in which the Agreement addresses the special needs of child soldiers in the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes, but does not underline the special needs of girl soldiers. Only 506 girls went through the DDR program

### **Judicial and Legal Systems: Constitutions and Access to Justice**

Although the parties agreed to recognize the importance of promoting and protecting the human rights of all Sierra Leoneans and to follow formulas to achieve these objectives, the text puts forward no such formulas or mentions examples of the kind of formulas that

would ensure gender perspectives. Instead, the Agreement gives “absolute and free pardon to Foday Sankoh “ the rebel leader and “ absolute and free pardon and reprieve to all combatants and collaborators in respect of anything done in pursuit of their objectives from 1991 up to the signing of this agreement.”

The agreement also creates a National Human Rights Commission whose mandate is “to protect Human Rights violations, guarantee the promotion of human rights”, is derived from the rights enshrined in the legal system of Sierra Leone, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the African Charter of Human and Peoples’ Rights. One could argue general protection, but without a reference to CEDAW, one cannot hope to instill a gender perspective, especially because many existing laws of Sierra Leone discriminate against women significantly

As indicated earlier, Sierra Leone has signed CEDAW but has not harmonized national laws with the Convention’s requirements and standards. The requirement that “ [a] consortium of local human rights and civil society groups in Sierra Leone shall be encouraged to help monitor human rights observance” provides opportunities for the involvement of women’s human rights groups and advocates in the implementation of the peace Agreement and in peace building. However, the Constitutional Review Committee and its review of the country’s Constitution are mandated only to facilitate implementation of the political settlement, not to provide an opportunity to strengthen gender perspectives in the Constitution.

The extent to which the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) includes gender perspectives is implicit in the text stipulating a “membership drawn from a cross-section of the Sierra Leonean society.” One would therefore expect the appointment of women to this body.

### **Rebuilding Social Structures, Civil Society and Economic Systems**

From a distance, the Agreement’s provisions for reconstruction appear to support women’s participation in peace-building processes. The National Commission for Resettlement, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction is charged with recognizing the special needs of women and girls: **“Given that women have been particularly victimized during the war, special attention shall be accorded to their needs and potentials in formulating and implementing national rehabilitation, reconstruction and development programs, to enable them to play a central role in the moral, social and physical reconstruction of Sierra Leone.”**

However, this stipulation reflects a view of women as victims rather than as individuals with rights, or as potential agents for change and economic development. Such a view cannot support gender equality in peace processes. Further, if this is an omnibus provision, it trivializes women’s concerns in reconstruction.

The humanitarian and socioeconomic issues of the reconstruction process include: release of prisoners and abductees; refugees and displaced persons; guarantees of security; and

humanitarian relief for displaced persons. None of these problems is treated so as to incorporate women or women's concerns in their resolution.

Part six of the agreement deals with implementation of the agreement, Joint implementation committee for international involvement, and Part Seven deals with moral guarantors and international support all of which do not integrate a gender perspective or support the participation of women.

Some key **obstacles** that have affected women's participation are the following:

- “The lack of a framework of ideas to guide women's peace-building efforts blunted the movement's long term effectiveness and its participation in the Abidjan negotiations. Afterwards, women activists were left struggling to implement an Agreement that they had no hand in drawing up.
- The Women's Forum after the 1997 coup was fragmented and faced with struggling to reorganize as the war intensified.
- Women did not recognize the sub-regional nature of the conflict early enough to forge links with their counterparts in neighbouring countries and thereby approach the peace process from a sub-regional perspective.<sup>1</sup>
- Women were not sufficiently represented at the National Consultative Conference prior to Lome and therefore had inadequate opportunities to express their views. This arose primarily from the fact that the women who had been involved in the earlier democratic process were no longer present. Many fell victim to the January 1999 invasion and had sought refuge outside the country. The result was brain drain and capacity deficiencies for the Women's Movement as a whole; their earlier gains had been overturned by the invasion.
- Adding the portfolio of Social Welfare and Children's Affairs to the Gender Ministry not only overburdened the Ministry, but subsumed gender concerns in those of social welfare and children's affairs, ignoring women as political and economic agents and, by implication, reducing their legal status to that of children.
- The Ministry's weaknesses in leadership and technical capacity, together with its lack of Cabinet rank, has rendered it unable to influence policy at the highest levels, especially in finance.
- As the peace Agreement itself was weak on gender -- and on women in particular -- it gave the women's movement no leverage point. Women used this

deficiency as an opportunity – and began taking action outside the Agreement so as to achieve equality.

### **Lessons learned**

- At its highest point, the role of women changed the course of events and, at its lowest, worked against women's own overall benefit.
- Despite, their overwhelming contributions and international support, women were not invited to the negotiations as members in their own right nor were they able to influence structures to include their representation.
- Given the weak benefit relative to the energy invested, one could conclude that women still lack the essential skills to influence formal negotiation processes.
- Women's visibility and participation in informal peace processes left them vulnerable to targeted attacks from rebel groups committed to a military settlement of the conflict.
- Given that more has been done in terms women's participation in the peace process than was ever envisaged in the Lome Accord, women have worked much harder at its implementation wherever possible, but also outside the terms of the Agreement.
- Many women have identified their work for peace as a unique opportunity to become organized, an experience that can prove useful in other post conflict activities. One of the leaders of the Women's Movement was motivated to run for President in the 2002 general elections.
- Though important, the contributions of women in the international community did not change the position of women in the negotiations. To take only two examples, the Manifesto did not encourage the parties to include the implementation of CEDAW in post-conflict efforts and the parties issued a blanket amnesty, thereby abrogating any notion of responsibility for the atrocities committed during the hostilities, whether by women, children, or men.

### **Best Practices**

-Generally, then, the prior mobilization and explicit demand for inclusion in the process will help determine the structure of future political and social institutions. Although political activities do not immediately improve women's position, they generate or reinforce women's awareness of the political dimension of conflicts and of their own political position, be it as victims of political violence or as a muted political group.

-Drawing on the strength of women in the neighboring country in the formation of the Manor River union Initiative gave new impetus to the push for implementation and participation of women. The emergence of a sub-regional women's peace initiative, has

been the largest single break through by the women since Lome. This advocacy initiative has revived the visibility and strengthened the focus of the Women's Movement and earned them international recognition for the capacity to encourage dialogue at the highest level and obtain commitment to the peace process. The active involvement of women in the Lome peace process enhanced the participation of civil society and contributed to the success of the peace process.

-The holding of consultative conferences was an important rallying point for civil society groups to harmonize their views and for women to integrate their perspectives on all the issues.

- The solidarity of women peace activists world wide and the support of the role of women in peace building within the OAU mechanism provided support to the women of Sierra Leone and in the implementation process.

### **Implementation of the Lome Agreement Post-1999**

One of the major developments since the Lome Agreement for addressing gender equality was the workshop entitled "Women and men in partnership for post conflict reconstruction. This national consultation, held in May 2001, involving all stakeholders sought, among other things:

- To map out the key programmes being carried out all stakeholders
- To identify gaps -- and which agencies are best placed to address them
- To identify capacity-building required to integrate gender into all aspect of the reconstruction process, including ways in which the Gender Ministry could be strengthened to play a lead role in integrating gender into post- conflict reconstruction.

The workshop produced a vision for the women of Sierra Leone, together with a national plan of action to implement the vision. Some of its key recommendations and actions throw light on activities that support and advance women's participation in post-conflict activities:

### **Political structures and electoral system**

- The Government should take steps to implement the 30% target of women in Parliament and local government, consistent with UN, commonwealth and African commitments, by allocating 30% of all seats to women in Parliament and local government by 2005;
- The Electoral Commission should mandate political parties to integrate gender perspective into their manifestos, setting targets for next five years based on international standards;

- Government and civil society bodies should undertake sensitization programmes on the electoral process that assert women rights and political participation and representation through combining the best aspects of proportional representation and constituency-based elections

Since the Conference, several non-governmental organizations have been formed to implement the recommendations. For example the 50/50 group a non governmental organization is involved in training potential women candidates for elections, another organization, the Network of women Ministers and Parliamentarians is involved in awareness raising of the electoral process. A women's pressure group by women NGOs including sisters unite, has been formed to ensure implementation of the workshop's commitments

Joe Pemagbi the Director of the National Commission for Democracy and Human Rights in a paper entitled "getting the electoral process right for women" argued that "free and fair elections" should mean "equal chance" for women. He proposed that this equal chance would be achieved the by the district block proportional representation." However, if the first passed the post election system was to be adopted then affirmative action that allocates an agreed number of seats to women is imperative. The district block proportional representation was adopted for the 2002 elections. Despite the fact that women account for more than 51 per cent of the population of Sierra Leone even after the 2002 elections, women held only 10 per cent of the seats in Parliament and only two women serve at the Cabinet level.

### **Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR)**

The Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration programme is not supportive of the participation of women in the reconstruction process. For example, The procedures Manual for disarmament and demobilization of combatants dated September 1999 makes little mention of women, except in the "tagging" system by which disarmament centres identified who had turned in which kinds of weapons. Demobilization and reintegration procedures made no special allowances for the particular needs of either women or children. The report by Dyan Mazurana and Susan Mackay, "Girls in Fighting Forces in Uganda, Sierra Leone and Mozambique" found that in Sierra Leone, the presence and roles of girls in fighting forces were under-represented and therefore were underrepresented in the design and implementation of the DDR programme. The study recommends examining the multifaceted roles of girls within fighting forces; recognizing wives of rebel soldiers as having significant command control within rebel compounds; reevaluating DDR programmes; and developing supplemental programmes to address the majority of girls and young women currently excluded from the benefits of reintegration efforts.

Although security sector reform has been a priority of the Government and the international community, it does not support women's participation. An International Peace Academy report in June 2002 that reviewed the reform of the police and the army found that it focused on producing the requisite staff numbers in terms of tribal and geographic balance, but paid no attention to gender balance. The report also noted that

the police needed to improve their relationship with the population at large, especially with women and girls. While the police are now developing an integrated approach to dealing with violence against women, the army lacks any such programme. Both the police and the army also need to make greater efforts at recruiting women into their ranks.

### **Judicial and Legal Systems: Constitutions and Access to Justice**

- The Government should within three years review and reform the laws which are weighted against women, such as inheritance, divorce, and violence against women, through the newly reactivated Law Reform Commission.
- Governmental and non-governmental bodies – e.g., a combination of line ministries, including the police; the Sierra Leone Bar Association, a broad spectrum of professional and grassroots NGOs, and traditional leaders should undertake concerted action to broaden access to education on women's rights, using the mass media and presenting programmes in traditional languages. Research should also be undertaken to identify and eliminate traditional beliefs and practices that discriminate against women or otherwise harm them.

The conferences also recommended that public sensitization through the media should be undertaken by the National Commission for Democracy and Human Rights, The police, the Sierra Leone Bar Association, United Nations Mission Sierra Leone and Campaign for Good Governance. Two transitional justice mechanisms have been set up The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2001 and the Special Court in 2002. The TRC Act gives special attention “to the subject of “sexual abuse.” The Commission is also empowered to implement special procedures to address the needs of particular victims, such as children or those “who have suffered sexual abuse”

The administrative provisions in the Act allow the Commission to “appoint committees and, in so doing, may take account of gender representation”. They also provide for broad consultation with cross-section of civil society groups. Moreover, of the seven Commissioners appointed, two are women – and at the hearing phase of the Commission, three days were allocated to hearing evidence from women. In addition, a witness protection programme is in place to support women as witnesses. The Commission is instructed to treat the cases of women and children in a manner “that respects their dignity and does not further traumatize them.” All these efforts point to supporting women's participation in peacebuilding through legal action. The Special court created by the United Nations and the government of Sierra Leone will indict crimes against humanity including rape, sexual slavery forced prostitution and any other sexual violence. In particular it will offences relating to abuse of girls and abduction of girls for immoral purpose. Article 15 further goes on to say that it will employ staff experienced in gender related crimes and juvenile justice. All of these requirement support women's involvement in the peace building and enhances their participation in the reconstruction process.

### **Rebuilding Social Structures Civil Society and Economic Systems**

In terms of the resettlement , rehabilitation and rehabilitation of ex-combatants the 2001 National conference recommended that the government and non governmental organizations provide support services for nutrition, health and child care for women, productive skills and enterprises as well as resource centers for the disabled, with provision for their representation at the community and district levels. The Government has since set up and coordinates the commissions of RRR in partnership with NGOs and UNAMSIL providing agricultural activities, such as micro credit schemes, health, medical and sanitation education, training, voluntary resettlement, community development programs, CBO activities include recreation. Let me note that a paper by Binta Mansaray entitled “Sexual Violence and gender based Violence” in October 2000 found that the repatriation of refugees and displace Sierra Leoneans was inconsistent with the right to voluntary repatriation and the protection of the physical safety of women and girls. A report by *Médecins Sans Frontières* in May 2002, entitled “ Population Affected by War in the Manor River Union States” pointed to extensive corruption in the camp system, along with food deficiencies. As a result, in a number of households, women and children are forced to exchange sexual favours for food. The report also charges that the current repatriation process “more closely resembles eviction than resettlement” because it does not provide supplies that are either appropriate or sufficient to reintegration.

In terms of gender issues in poverty, economic recovery and empowerment the conference also recommended that the Government and the world bank should enhanced investment opportunities for women through low interest credit, agricultural inputs processing, marketing, transportation, as well as training for income generation and more expertise. The Government should grant concession to companies that employ the disabled

The Commission on Children Affected by the War has also been set up

The President’s statement at the second session of the second Parliament of the Republic of Sierra Leone in June 2003 pledges continued support for women with financial commitment.

### **Proposed recommendations on the content of peace agreements in terms of women’s participation and promotion of gender equality**

If the peace agreement is to be a legal starting point for the transformation of conflict society based on the principles of democracy, equality and peace then such an agreement must contain:

- 1 Explicit terms about and for women must always be used. Gender- neutral terms must be specifically avoided in the preamble, operative paragraphs and the remaining text of the agreement.
- 2 Gender perspectives in peace agreements must be derived from a rights-based framework, taking into consideration regional and national commitments,

cultural sensitivities and good traditional practices that favour women's participation.

- 3 Peace agreements must state in their preamble and operative paragraphs all international conventions and standards on women, along with regional commitments and policies, as the basis for the negotiations to enable women to negotiate from a position of strength.
- 4 In particular, the composition of post conflict institutions and transitional justice mechanisms, selection panels and committees must state the proportion women representatives, along with those of tribal and ethnic groups, as well as other criteria such as capacity and know how.
- 5 Selection processes, consultations and national conferences must be open and transparent and must specify number of women's groups, at a place and time that enables the participation of as many women as possible.
- 6 Every Agreement must contain strong moral and political authority to ensure its compliance with terms of its guarantors, e.g. the UN Security Council, a contact group of governments supporting the negotiations, etc., if women are to benefit from the transformation agreed upon.
- 7 Targeted sensitization and inclusion of stated number and/or proportion of women mediators, donor representatives, international community representative and others engaged in the peace process at the decision-making levels. These women must also be aware of the political priority of gender perspectives in peace agreements and their impact on ending the conflict.
- 8 Redefine the negotiation process and reset its table using different criteria for taking a seat, e.g., victims rather than perpetrators, civil society representatives of women and youth.
- 9 Financial support for participation of all participants to the negotiations throughout the negotiation processes.
- 10 Assessment and evaluation mechanism(s) to supervise implementation and ensure compliance to human rights provisions through dialogue, agreed strategies and methodologies

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WEB LINKS:

<http://www.sierra-leone.org>

<http://www.undp.org/governance/gender.htm>

[http://www.afrol.com/news2002/sil005\\_sex\\_violence.htm](http://www.afrol.com/news2002/sil005_sex_violence.htm)

[http://www.alienated.dk/unifem/sierra\\_leone.htm](http://www.alienated.dk/unifem/sierra_leone.htm)

<http://thecommonwealth.org/gender>

UNICEF girls education

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/news/articles/jan24-01>

<http://www.styluspub.com/books/book6231.html>

<http://www.womenscommission.org/archives/00/statements/mansaray.html>

<http://www.wsp-international.org/op3/op3-04html>

[http://www.afrol.com/news2002/siloo5\\_sex\\_violence](http://www.afrol.com/news2002/siloo5_sex_violence)

[http://www.c-r.org/pub/occ\\_papers/briefings3.shtml](http://www.c-r.org/pub/occ_papers/briefings3.shtml)

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