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**WRITTEN REPLIES BY THE GOVERNMENT OF SIERRA LEONE
CONCERNING THE LIST OF ISSUES (CRC/C/SLE/Q/2) TO BE
TAKEN UP IN CONNECTION WITH THE CONSIDERATION
OF THE SECOND PERIODIC REPORT OF SIERRA LEONE
(CRC/C/SLE/2)***

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* In accordance with the information transmitted to States parties regarding the processing of their reports, the present document was not edited before being sent to the United Nations translation services.

Introduction

1. After emerging from a decade - long war, the problem of collecting and storing reliable statistical information, particularly on children, has been a huge challenge in Sierra Leone. By and large, data collection and storage, particularly in the public sector, has been difficult because of institutional weaknesses in that sector.
2. United Nation Children's Fund (UNICEF), the UN system agency that focuses on children's wellbeing, was supportive of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs (MSWGCA) to establish a Child Welfare Secretariat. The Secretariat had created a database on Separated Children during the war in 1998, in response to the urgent tracing needs arising from the large numbers of children separated from their parents and guardians.
3. The data and statistics provided in this update are derived mainly from the following sources:
 - (a) Statistics Sierra Leone;
 - (b) UNICEF - Sierra Leone;
 - (c) Ministry of Education, Science and Technology;
 - (d) Ministry of Health and Sanitation;
 - (e) Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs;
 - (f) Ministry of Development and Economic Planning;
 - (g) Sierra Leone Police/Family Support Unit.

PART 1

A. Data and statistics

Disaggregated data on the number and proportion of children in Sierra Leone, covering the period 2004, 2005 and 2006

4. A comprehensive National Population Census was undertaken in Sierra Leone in 2004, after a decade-long horrendous war which ended in 2002. The 2004 census gave a national population of 4.9 million. Table one below provides actual population figures for 2004, and estimated figures for 2005 and 2006, based on an average population growth rate of 2.4 per cent.

Table 1

Disaggregated data on the number and proportion of children living in Sierra Leone

Age	2004				2005				2006			
	Male	Female	Total	% of total population	Male	Female	Total	% of total population	Male	Female	Total	% of total population
Total	2 391 998	2 538 534	4 930 532	100.00	2 449 406	2 599 459	5 048 865	100.00	2 508 192	2 661 846	5 170 038	100.00
0	78 102	77 922	156 024	3.16	79 976	79 792	159 768	3.16	81 895	81 707	163 602	3.16
1	47 861	47 212	95 073	1.93	49 010	48 345	97 355	1.93	50 186	49 505	99 691	1.93
2	77 622	77 922	155 544	2.15	79 485	79 792	159 277	3.15	81 393	81 707	163 100	3.15
3	86 302	90 167	176 469	3.58	88 373	92 331	180 704	3.58	90 494	94 547	185 041	3.58
4	84 615	85 082	169 697	3.44	86 646	87 124	173 770	3.44	88 726	89 215	177 941	3.44
5	82 113	81 683	163 796	3.32	84 084	83 643	167 727	3.32	86 102	85 650	171 752	3.32
6	75 630	77 078	152 708	3.10	77 445	78 928	156 373	3.10	79 304	80 822	160 126	3.10
7	73 773	73 795	147 568	2.99	75 544	75 566	151 110	2.99	77 357	77 380	154 737	2.99
8	74 736	78 051	152 787	3.10	76 530	79 924	156 454	3.10	78 367	81 842	160 209	3.10
9	60 172	61 045	121 217	2.46	61 616	62 510	124 126	2.46	63 095	64 010	127 105	2.46
10	81 736	76 447	158 183	3.21	83 698	78 282	161 980	3.21	85 707	80 161	165 868	3.21
11	42 146	39 676	81 822	1.66	43 158	40 628	83 786	1.66	44 194	41 603	85 797	1.66
12	68 265	62 315	130 580	2.65	69 903	63 811	133 714	2.65	71 581	65 342	136 923	2.65
13	49 223	48 420	97 643	1.98	50 404	49 582	99 986	1.98	51 614	50 772	102 386	1.98
14	49 970	47 965	97 935	1.99	51 169	49 116	100 285	1.99	52 397	50 295	102 692	1.99
15	79 890	75 503	155 393	3.15	81 807	77 315	159 122	3.15	83 770	79 171	162 941	3.15
16	42 928	46 855	89 783	1.82	43 958	47 980	91 938	1.82	45 013	49 132	94 145	1.82
17	37 962	39 029	76 991	1.56	38 873	39 966	78 839	1.56	39 806	40 925	80 731	1.56
18	62 055	70 803	132 858	2.69	63 544	72 502	136 046	2.69	65 069	74 242	139 311	2.69

Source: Statistics Sierra Leone - National Population Housing Census 2004.

Budget allocation of the Government of Sierra Leone**Table 2****Education**

Year	Pre-primary and primary schools		Secondary education	
	Amount (leones)	% of non-interest/salary recurrent expenditure	Amount (leones)	% of non-interest/salary recurrent expenditure
2005	x	x	x	x
2006	14 295 400 000	4.63	4 953 100 000	1.60
2007	17 769 000 000	4.82	5 993 300 000	1.63

Source: Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST).

X: There was no budgetary distribution between categories of schools.

5. There is a dearth of reliable and consistent data on several aspects of Sierra Leone's development, particularly in the sphere of budgetary allocations and actual disbursements in the public sector. The figures provided in table 11 were obtained from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and reflect the governments budgetary allocation to that sector.

6. A new system of Integrated Financial Information Management System (IFMIS) has been introduced by the Ministry of Finance, which will eventually lead a coherent financial information system on local and donor financial expenditures in all Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs). However, there is growing awareness in official Government circles about the need for priority to be given in the areas of children's education and health. Considerable progress has been made in the rehabilitation of war-destroyed schools and construction of new ones. Similar efforts have been made in the health sector. In all these, significant funding support has been received by the Government from the World Bank, African Development Bank, Islamic Development Bank, UNICEF, WHO, among others.

Table 3**Health**

Year	Amount (leones)	% of total non-interest/salary recurrent expenditure
2005		
2006	6 275 600 000	2.03
2007	7 800 500 000	2.12

Source: Ministry of Health and Sanitation.

Support to children with disabilities

7. There are various windows of support to children with disabilities. These are generally provided by NGOs. However, the Government of Sierra Leone has provided grants to schools for Handicapped Children, as shown in the table below.

Table 4
Grants to schools for handicapped children

Year	Amount (leones)	% of total non interest/salary recurrent expenditure
2005		
2006	514 400	0.17
2007		

Other programmes

8. Budgetary allocation, particularly by the Government to the following programmes, as stand-alone interventions per se, is non-existent at the moment (2007):

- Support programmes for families
- Support for children below the poverty line
- Protection of children who are in need of alternative care, including support of care institutions
- Programmes and activities for the prevention of, and protection from sexual violence against children, child abuse and economic exploitation, including child labour
- Programmes and services for separated children, orphans and vulnerable children
- Juvenile justice, juvenile crime prevention and social reintegration
- Recovery and reintegration of former child ex-combatants

This notwithstanding, there have been considerable expenditures on these activities, principally by the NGO sector, UNICEF and the British Government.

Table 5
Separated - unaccompanied children

Year	Age group	Categories														
		Separated			Institutionalized			Fostered			Adoption domestic			Adoption intercountry		
		M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
2004	0-6	170	237	407	120	170	290	30	40	70	10	15	25	10	12	22
	6-12	263	195	458	200	120	320	25	35	60	20	25	45	18	15	33
	12-18	199	180	379	180	150	330	10	20	30	5	5	10	4	5	9
2005	0-6	171	243	414	100	150	250	35	45	80	20	30	50	16	18	34
	6-12	260	253	513	180	160	340	36	40	76	25	28	53	19	25	44
	12-18	161	138	299	140	110	250	10	14	24	7	10	17	4	4	8
2006	0-6	170	195	365	120	130	250	25	32	57	15	20	35	10	13	23
	6-12	200	240	440	130	150	280	18	30	48	40	45	85	12	15	27
	12-18	134	124	258	100	98	198	7	8	15	25	15	40	2	3	5

Source: Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs.

9. It is worthy of note, however, that considerable progress is being made on the issue of juvenile justice and social reintegration, through funding under the Justice Sector Development Program, a window of support to Sierra Leone by the Department for International Development (DFID) of the United Kingdom. Similarly, UNICEF provides financial and other technical support to the orphans and other vulnerable children's (OVC) programme, which is coordinated by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs.

10. Private Sector expenses on children's issues, though not easily quantifiable, appear to be growing but are mainly in response to emergency situations. In some cases, Sierra Leoneans in the diaspora make donations for school construction, medical supplies for children, and so on. Also, a philanthropic organization, "Pikin Bizness", occasionally sponsors overseas medical treatment for children, particularly those with life-threatening cardiological ailments.

11. The issue of numbers of child protection institutions in Sierra Leone is a dicey one. During and after the war there was an upsurge in the number of institutions that were immediately purported to have been established country-wide to take care of separated, unaccompanied and orphaned children. Both religious and secular agencies were involved in this exercise. MSWGCA, in collaboration with UNICEF and the established Child Protection Network (CPN) developed professional guidelines for the establishment of child welfare institutions. This notwithstanding, there still exists a number of unregistered institutions/homes.

12. This situation has resulted in difficulties in obtaining reliable data and statistics on child care institutions. Bail homes, have been introduced which are intended to ease the present constraints in the limited number of care - giving institutions for juvenile offenders.

13. As shown in table IV, data on children separated from their families are not categorised into urban and rural. The majority of children in these categories are in the urban areas but with rural origin. Even before the war, Freetown was the centre of gravity for very many Sierra Leoneans. The war aggravated rural - urban migration, even by children. Many children were also brought to Freetown by their parents, guardians and other relatives, only to be abandoned during and even after the war.

14. Institutions for the care of separated and orphaned children can be found only in Freetown and the provincial headquarter towns of Bo, Kenema, Makeni, Kenema, and the city of Koidu - New Sembuhun.

Children with disabilities

15. Disaggregated data on children with disabilities has not yet been obtained by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, which is the Government Ministry mandated to coordinate children's disability issues in Sierra Leone.

Table 6**Infant and under-five mortality rates by background and demographic characteristics (based on North), Sierra Leone, 2005**

		Infant mortality rate	Under-five mortality rate
Sex	Male	172	283
	Female	143	249
Region	East	166	280
	North	149	252
	South	189	317
	West	79	126
Area	Rural	165	279
	Urban	123	207

Source: Statistics Sierra Leone and UNICEF - Sierra Leone 2007.
Sierra Leone Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2005 (MICS 3).
Final Report, Freetown, Sierra Leone.

16. As of date, the most reliable source of data and statistics on infant and child mortality in Sierra Leone is MICS 3, which was finalised in 2005. One of the main objectives of the survey is to 'contribute to the improvement of data and monitoring systems in Sierra Leone'. This is essentially from the point of view of women and children.

17. It should be noted that the survey provides a retrospective estimate of the infant mortality rate (IMR) and under-five mortality rate (UFMR), with IMR being 158 per 1000 and UFMR being 267 per 1000, using the year 2005 as the reference year.

18. There is no reliable disaggregated data in the area of adolescent health, particularly on:

- Rates of early pregnancies
- Sexually transmitted infections
- Drug, alcohol, tobacco and other substance abuse
- Suicides and other mental health problems

The public sector health system is striving to obtain data on these adolescent health problems, but whatever data that may be available will not easily reflect the true situation on-the-ground because of numerous traditional methods of treatment of children involved in substance abuse and other mental health problems, including treatment at hospital and clinic for sexually transmitted infections and early pregnancies.

Table 7

Rate of immunization: percentage of children aged 12-23 months currently vaccinated against child diseases. Sierra Leone, 2005

		BCG	DPT 1	DPT 2	DPT 3	Polio 0	Polio 1	Polio 2	Polio 3	MMR	Yellow fever	All	None	% with health care	Number of children aged 12-23 months
Sex	Male	85.7	82.3	76.9	62.9	68.0	86.0	79.8	65.9	77.3	75.4	55.4	10.8	54.1	534
	Female	86.2	81.8	76.3	62.5	64.8	88.1	80.0	62.4	74.6	73.8	51.9	10.9	51.5	542
Region	East	82.4	78.3	71.0	58.8	65.0	81.2	73.6	60.2	72.0	72.0	49.5	16.3	52.9	271
	North	84	78.4	72.3	60.4	60.2	87.8	81.8	64.7	72.5	70.2	53.6	9.9	52.8	432
	South	90.2	89.2	85.2	68.9	75.1	89.8	85.2	68.5	82.0	80.3	57.7	8.9	56.1	297
	West	92.9	88.2	87.1	65.9	72.9	92.9	70.6	57.7	85.9	85.9	52.9	4.7	40.0	76
Area	Rural	84.6	80.3	75.1	61.8	64.8	86.2	80.0	63.7	74.1	72.4	53.3	11.9	53.5	852
	Urban	91.0	88.5	82.3	66.1	72.5	90.5	79.4	65.5	82.9	82.9	55.2	6.9	50.0	224

Source: Statistics Sierra Leone and UNICEF - Sierra Leone 2007 - Sierra Leone Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2005 (MICS 3).

Final Report, Freetown, Sierra Leone.

Table 8
Child malnourishment: percentage of under-five children who are severely or moderately undernourished, Sierra Leone, 2005

		Weight for age: % below 25 D	Weight for age: % below 35 D	Height for age: % below 25 D	Height for age: % below 35 D	Weight for height: % below 25 D	Weight for height: % below 35 D	Weight for height: % above + 25 D	Number of children
Sex	Male	31.8	8.6	41.5	21.3	10.0	2.2	2.9	2 043
	Female	29.2	8.2	38.7	19.1	7.6	1.7	2.9	2 092
Region	East	33.5	7.9	38.7	22	11.3	1.8	2.4	1 030
	North	33.7	10.5	45.4	23	7.8	2.2	2.5	1 458
	South	27.5	7.2	39.2	17.3	8.8	2	2.9	1 219
	West	20.5	5.7	28.1	14.5	5.9	1.5	5.5	428
Area	Rural	32.7	8.9	42.5	22.1	9.2	2.1	2.7	3 161
	Urban	23.3	6.5	32.2	14	7.3	1.7	3.7	974
Age	<6 months	3.6	0.5	9.9	2.4	3.2	0.7	11.1	417
	6-11 months	30.8	10.9	22.1	7.8	15	2.6	2.7	439
	12-23 months	45.8	14	46.3	21.7	16	3.6	2.5	898
	24-35 months	35.0	10.0	45.8	24.4	7.5	1.3	1.7	859
	36-47 months	28.8	7.1	51.2	28.5	5.3	1.9	1.0	892
	48-59 months	22.1	3.3	40.3	20.8	4.3	1.1	2.6	631

Source: MICS (3), 2005.

Table 9
Child abuse - 2004

Nature of abuse	Number of cases recorded (by victim)			Number and percentage of cases charged to court	Number and percentage of cases withdrawn/resolved	Number and percentage of cases kept in view pending investigation	Number and percentage of cases discharged for lack of evidence	Number and percentage of cases of convictions made on
	Male	Female	Total					
Sexual assault	3	1 992	1 995	1 390 (69.7%)	5 (0.2%)	600 (30.1%)	0	0
Cruelty	20	64	84	17 (20.2%)	44 (52.4%)	23 (27.4%)	0	0

Child abuse - 2005

Nature of abuse	Number of cases recorded (by victim)			Number and percentage of cases charged to court	Number and percentage of cases withdrawn/resolved	Number and percentage of cases kept in view pending investigation	Number and percentage of cases discharged for lack of evidence	Number and percentage of cases of convictions made on
	Male	Female	Total					
Sexual assault	3	745	748	558 (74.6%)	54 (7.2%)	136 (18.21%)	0	0
Cruelty	12	191	203	79 (38.9%)	63 (31.0%)	61 (30.0%)	0	0

Child abuse - 2006

Nature of abuse	Number of cases recorded (by victim)			Number and percentage of cases charged to court	Number and percentage of cases withdrawn/resolved	Number and percentage of cases kept in view pending investigation	Number and percentage of cases discharged for lack of evidence	Number and percentage of cases of convictions made on
	Male	Female	Total					
Sexual assault	2	758	760	288 (37.9%)	74 (9.7%)	361 (47.5%)	32 (4.3%)	5 (0.6%)
Cruelty	59	112	171	42 (24.6%)	90 (52.5%)	38 (52.5%)	1 (0.6%)	0

Source: Family support of the Sierra Leone Police (FSU (SLP)).

Notes:

1. No data on 2004 and 2005, reliable.
2. No statistical information on child victims that have received counselling and assistance in recovery.

The poverty line

19. During the preparation of Sierra Leone's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), two main data types and sources were used for the analysis of poverty:

(a) Quantitative data from the 2003/2004 Sierra Leone Integrated Household Survey (SLIHS); and

(b) Qualitative data from the Participatory Poverty Assessments (PPAs), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Participatory Learning Forms, supplemented by sector reviews.

20. Quantitatively, the PRSP defines poverty with respect to the poverty line, and the data obtained from the SLIHS was used to compute two poverty lines:

(a) Food/Extreme;

(b) Full Poverty.

The Food/Extreme line was defined as the level of expenditures required to obtain the minimum daily nutritional requirement of 2,700 calories per equivalent adult. In monetary terms, this translates into a dollar (\$1 US) per day. Persons who live below this line are classified to be in extreme poverty.

21. Full poverty line is the combination of food and basic needs (non-food expenditures). Thus, the National Poverty Line corresponds to the Full Poverty Line, which is calculated in monetary terms to be two (\$2 US) dollars per day.

22. The Sierra Leone PRSP, which is at the moment the main comprehensive source of data on poverty in the country, does not provide specific statistical information on children living in poverty.

Table 10
Education (school attended)

		Enrolment rate			Completion		Dropouts & repetitions		Teacher/pupil ratio	Number of children in class
		Pre-primary	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary	Number	Per cent		
Sex	Male	12.9	47	14.0	11.6	80.0	Not Available	-	-	75
	Female	13.0	48	14.0	9.8	65.0	-	-	-	55
Region	East	18.0	48.2	17.2	9.0	68.5	-	-	1/75	75
	North	6.0	41.3	12.8	6.5	65.2	-	-	1/75	75
	South	11.9	50	14.6	9.3	72.0	-	-	1/60	60
	West	29.7	66.7	56.9	27.9	90.3	-	-	1/50	50
Area	Rural	9.9	14.2	9.0	5.5	80.3	-	-	1/75	75
	Urban	24.4	60.5	44.4	20.8	95.0	-	-	1/50	50
	Muslim	11.2	47.3	19.3	9.9	75.0	-	-	-	-

Sources: MICS 3 and Ministry of Education, Science and Technology.

Table 11
Crimes/offences reported to the police

Year	Age group	Type of crime/offence																	
		Stealing or larceny			Loitering			Wounding or fighting			Unlawful carnal knowledge Rape			Murder			Felony		
		M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
2004	0-6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	6-12	10	5	15	5	3	8	3	0	3	0	0	10	0	0	0	0	0	26
	12-18	50	15	65	20	7	27	9	3	12	10	0	0	5	2	7	10	10	131
2005	0-6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	6-12	15	3	18	6	1	7	8	2	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	35
	12-18	120	7	127	29	3	26	22	2	24	5	0	5	5	0	5	12	3	208
2006	0-6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	6-12	15	2	17	11	0	11	4	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	33
	12-18	57	3	60	20	0	20	20	3	23	10	0	10	3	0	3	0	0	116

Source: Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs.

Detention facilities for persons under the age of 18 and their capacity

23. There are two pre-trial facilities, (Remand Homes), for Juvenile Offenders in Sierra Leone, one in Freetown and another in Bo. These facilities have only recently received some facelift, with financial support from UNICEF and Justice Sector Development Program (JSDP).

Usually, offenders stay at the Homes for at least six months, principally due to congestion and delays within the general justice system. Each of these Homes can accommodate 20 children at a time.

24. There is only one post trial facility in the country. This is the Approved School in Freetown, which was established in the 1940s. The school is the sole custodian institution for juvenile offenders who have been sentenced for various periods, depending upon the gravity of the offences committed. However, the average maximum period of stay at the school is three years. The Approved School, has now been rehabilitated with funding by the Justice Sector Program. This centre now can accommodate 25 children at a time.

25. Statistical information on children under 18 years detained with adults is hard to come by, as this phenomenon largely prevails in distant parts of the country where Remand and/or Bail Homes are non-existent and, in most cases, their stay in these conditions tend to be very transient. Serious offences/crimes committed by under- 18s tend to be transferred to superior court without undue delay. Diversion methods have been put in place to reduce the number of child offenders sentenced for minor misdemeanours and going into Approved School.

26. In 2004, a serious case of maltreatment of a Juvenile offender at the Remand Home, Freetown, was reported where in the victim died. The perpetrator had since fled. No information exists on persons under the age of 18 who have been tried and sentenced as adults, noting however that age determination is, even now, complicated by the large number of persons whose dates of birth were not recorded.

Special protection measures

27. Aside from data provided in MICS3 on Child Labour, there is no consistent and reliable disaggregated data and information on children involved in sexual exploitation, pornography and trafficking, substance abuse, living and/or working in the street (only rough estimates), refugees, IDPs or migrants (estimates by UNHCR, IRC etc.).

Child labour**Table 12****Percentage of children aged 5-14 years who are involved in child labour activities by type of work, Sierra Leone, 2005**

		Working outside household		Household chores for 28+ hours/week	Working for family business	Total child labour	Number of children aged 5-14 years
		Paid work	Unpaid work				
Sex	Male	2.4	16.1	1.6	41.0	48.8	6 407
	Female	2.4	14.9	2.0	40.3	47.7	6 369
Region	East	1.6	14.7	0.8	36.1	42.3	2 644
	North	4.3	9.2	2.5	53.3	56.8	5 691
	South	0.7	26.7	1.1	39.3	49.6	2 646
	West	0.3	20.3	1.9	9.1	27.7	1 795
Area	Rural	2.8	15.7	2.0	51.4	56.7	9 054
	Urban	1.4	15.1	1.2	14.4	27.7	3 722
School participation	Yes	2.0	16.3	1.4	36.7	45.3	8 658
	No	3.2	13.8	2.8	48.9	54.5	4 118

Source: MICS 3, 2005.

B. General measures of implementation

28. After the completion of data collection in the FTR process, an all inclusive data base has been established which entails the development of formats for data collection on all categories of child by the National Child Protection Network. In this process the line ministry received technical and logistical support from UNICEF. It is envisaged that a robust and dynamic data base on all categories of children will shortly be established that will be updated periodically.

29. With the passage of the Children's Policy (2006) and the Child Rights Act in 2007 into law the issues of the best interest and respect for the views of the child have been taken care of.

Current status of the Child Rights Bill

30. After extensive deliberations on the Child Rights Bill by Parliament and other stakeholders, the Bill was passed into an Act by the outgoing Parliament in its last sitting in June 2007. The Bill is now known as the CHILD RIGHTS ACT 2007, and has been approved by the President of the Republic of Sierra Leone.

31. Prior to Parliamentary consideration of the Bill, nationwide sensitization was undertaken, and spearheaded by MSWGCA in collaboration with the National Commission for War Affected Children (NaCWAC), and UNICEF. Currently, information dissemination strategy is being designed and an Implementation Plan is being prepared, which will be completed shortly.

Coordination of child protection activities

32. The Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs is the Government agency that is mandated to coordinate all child protection activities, programmers and polices in Sierra Leone. In the performance of this task, the Ministry is supported by UNICEF (provision of logistics and technical backstopping, and other registered child protection agencies, (information sharing, implementation of activities on-the-ground etc.). A National Child Protection Network (CPN) exists, which is chaired by MSWGCA. Monthly meetings are usually held at both regional and national levels.

National Children's Policy

33. This was passed by Parliament in 2006. The National Children's Policy is founded upon the concept that child wellbeing is wellbeing for the nation. Among other commitments for the promotion of child wellbeing, is that Sierra Leone must ensure that all duty bearers at all societal levels should be accountable and, where necessary, held responsible for the performance of duties correlative to child rights.

34. Overall, the goal of the Policy centers on 'maximum contribution to the realization of vision 2025 for Sierra Leone through a focus on child wellbeing within the country'. The object is 'to have a country where the best interests of the child are paramount in the progressive and maximum attainment of the survival, development, participation and protection of every child within the country'.

Role of the Human Rights Commission

35. The Act establishing this Commission was passed in 2004, but it became operational in 2006. The commission is mandated to deal with all cases of Human Rights Violations and Abuses, including torture and cruel treatment of children. The Commission is now developing its strategic work plan that will create the necessary linkages with child protection agencies.

Special fund for children

36. No special fund has yet been established for children.

MSWGCA's database on children

37. MSWGCA, in collaboration with UNICEF and CPN established a national Data Base in 1996 when the war was still raging. Strategically, the process was done in phases, designed to be responsive to the changing dynamic of child protection in the country. Thus, the first issue of concern was the generation of data on children directly affected by the war, such as:

- (a) Family Tracing and reunification (FTR);
- (b) Community-based reintegration (CBR).

38. Following the end of the war in 2002 attempts were made to establish a more inclusive data base covering:

- (a) Sexual abuse;
- (b) Juvenile Justice;
- (c) Street Children;
- (d) Child Ex-combatants.

The database was unfortunately lost as a result of a robbery of computers and other accessories at the child welfare, secretariat 2005.

39. MSWGCA has over the years established a national network of its key service delivery functionaries whose primary task is to work alongside Civil Society Organizations and groupings at various levels (village, town, district, regional and national levels). The Ministry collaborates with child welfare committees at village and town levels through its social development workers.

40. Similarly, it operates at district level through its Social Development Officers and at regional level through Principal Social Development Officers. At each of these levels, there are child Protection Committees whose membership comprises of Child Protection Agencies and the wider civil society in their respective areas.

41. At national level, there is a National Child Protection Committee (CPC), which has a cross-section of representatives of both national and international Child Protection Organisations/Agencies.

42. It should be noted that there are other key players who partner with MSWGCA at civil society level. These include Religious Leaders, Chiefs, Secret Society Heads, Children's Forum Network and Youth organizations. Essentially, the role of this category of partners lies in information dissemination and ensuring that child rights violations are prosecuted and eliminated.

43. Following the decade long ferocious war, there are critical child protection areas which are of priority and urgent concern. These include:

- (a) War orphans;
- (b) HIV/AIDS orphans;
- (c) Street Children;
- (d) Child victims of both external and local trafficking;
- (e) Juvenile Justice.

PART II

44. Copy of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is not available in any other local language except English which is the official language of Sierra Leone. However plans are underway to translate the Child Rights Act as soon as possible. It is worthy of note to state that MSWGCA and CPN with the support of UNICEF have produced a simplified child-friendly version of the UNCRC which has been disseminated nation-wide.

PART III

45. Since the submission of the country report on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (2005) the following legislations have been enacted which have a direct bearing on the well-being of children:

(a) Trafficking in Persons Act 2005

This piece of legislation is fundamentally intended to prevent and respond to all forms of trafficking in persons, particularly women and children, who have increasingly become exposed to this malaise.

(b) Child Rights Act 2007

This legislation was enacted in June 2007 as mean of domesticating the UNCRC and its optional protocols and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. It calls for the establishment of new structures, such as National Commission for Children, the Ombudsman for children, and other community-based child protection structures including strengthening of child Welfare Committees.

A comprehensive implementation plan is being developed that will ensure that Child Protection measures that are contained in the Act are enforced at all levels, and are linked to other aspects of child well-being such as education and health.

(c) Inheritance Act 2007

This Act is designed to ensure gender parity in property inheritance. Prior to the enactment of this legislation, property inheritance was skewed against the welfare of women and under-aged children. This phenomenon is generally pervasive in tradition-bound communities which form the greater part of the population of the country. By this Act, it is intended that the welfare of women and children of deceased men, particularly those who die intestate, will be protected.

(d) Customary Marriage Act 2007

This Act is designed to ensure, among other things, that nobody below the age of 18 years should go into any form of marriage whether by volition or compulsion. The Act also ensures that customary marriages are fully registered and thus, bestows greater legitimacy on children.

(e) Domestic Violence Act 2007

Domestic violence in Sierra Leone usually takes also the forms of sexual, physical and mental torture including and discrimination against the girl child with respect to their rights to family resources. This Act is therefore designed to eradicate physical and mental torture of spouses (both male and female) and children in the home.

New institutions

46. Since the submission of the UNCRC country report in 2005, no new institution has been established. However the recently passed Child Rights Acts stipulates the formation of a National Commission for Children.

Newly implemented policies

47. Apart from the National Children's Policy which was enacted in 2006, and which became the cornerstone of the Child Rights Act 2007, no new policy has yet been implemented.

Newly implemented programmes and projects

48. In spite of various types of constraints, some new programs and projects have been undertaken from 2005 to date, some of which have been closed.

(a) Justice Sector Development Programme (JSDP)

This program is largely funded by the British Government's Department for International Development with collaborative support of UNICEF and other partners. Government of Sierra Leone, is an important stakeholder in the program. With regard to child protection, JSDP is involved in the review of and support to Juvenile Justice Policies. In addition, the program provides support to bail homes all over the country and are involved in monitoring Remand and other detention facilities for minors. Also, the program supports diversion measures that are designed to ensure that very minor offences are settled out of the usual judicial system, so that juvenile offenders are screened on the basis of gravity of offence. In this way, undue delays are curtailed. The programme started in 2005 and is still on-going.

(b) Orphans and other vulnerable children's programmes

This country-wide program started in 2004 with a preliminary needs assessment survey. The program is mainly funded by UNICEF and is designed to create the necessary sustainable protective environment for orphans, street children, disabled and others in extremely difficult circumstances.

While the requisite coordinating mechanism is being put in place at all levels, a mapping-out exercise is in progress which basically entails the identification of areas of concentration of orphans and other vulnerable children and the responsibilities of various stakeholders. A National Taskforce has been established with the relevant terms of reference developed by the national CPC. This program is still in progress and will hopefully be in existence for many more years to come.

(c) Child friendly centre programme

Under the auspices of the National Commission for War Affected Children (NaCWAC), which is an arm of MSWGCA, (4) four centres have been established, one each in Bo, Makeni, Pujehun and Kailahun. These centres provide facilities and opportunities to disadvantaged children for psychosocial recovery and capacity building.

As permanent structures, the centres are designed to outlive NaCWAC, when that Commission would have been phased out.

(d) Family support programme of the Sierra Leone Police

In collaboration with MSWGCA, the Sierra Leone Police has established Family Support Units (FSU-SLP) at all Police stations and posts nationwide. The main objective here is to investigate and address cases reported to them, which border on child abuse, juvenile delinquency, domestic violence, and to ensure that only cases of severe gravity are prosecuted in court. Police personnel that are assigned to these units are usually given special training in social work and work with assigned social development workers on MSWGCA.

The Police and MSWGCA have established a Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU) which was reviewed in 2006. In essence, it is intended that this formal instrument of cooperation will ensure delineation of responsibilities and a harmonious working relationship, against the backdrop of the best interest of the child.

(e) Cross border family tracing and reunification program

During the war years in both Sierra Leone and Liberia, a number of children were separated from their families and usual caregivers. In collaboration with UNHCR, UNICEF, MSWGCA and various Child Protection Agencies the governments of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone signed a tripartite agreement, which facilitated the repatriation of many Sierra Leonean unaccompanied minor and separated children from Guinea between 2005 and 2006, and from Sierra Leone between 2006 and June 2007. In all, over 300 Sierra Leonean children have been repatriated from Guinea and Liberia. Both the Sierra Leone and Liberia repatriation programs have now been closed.
