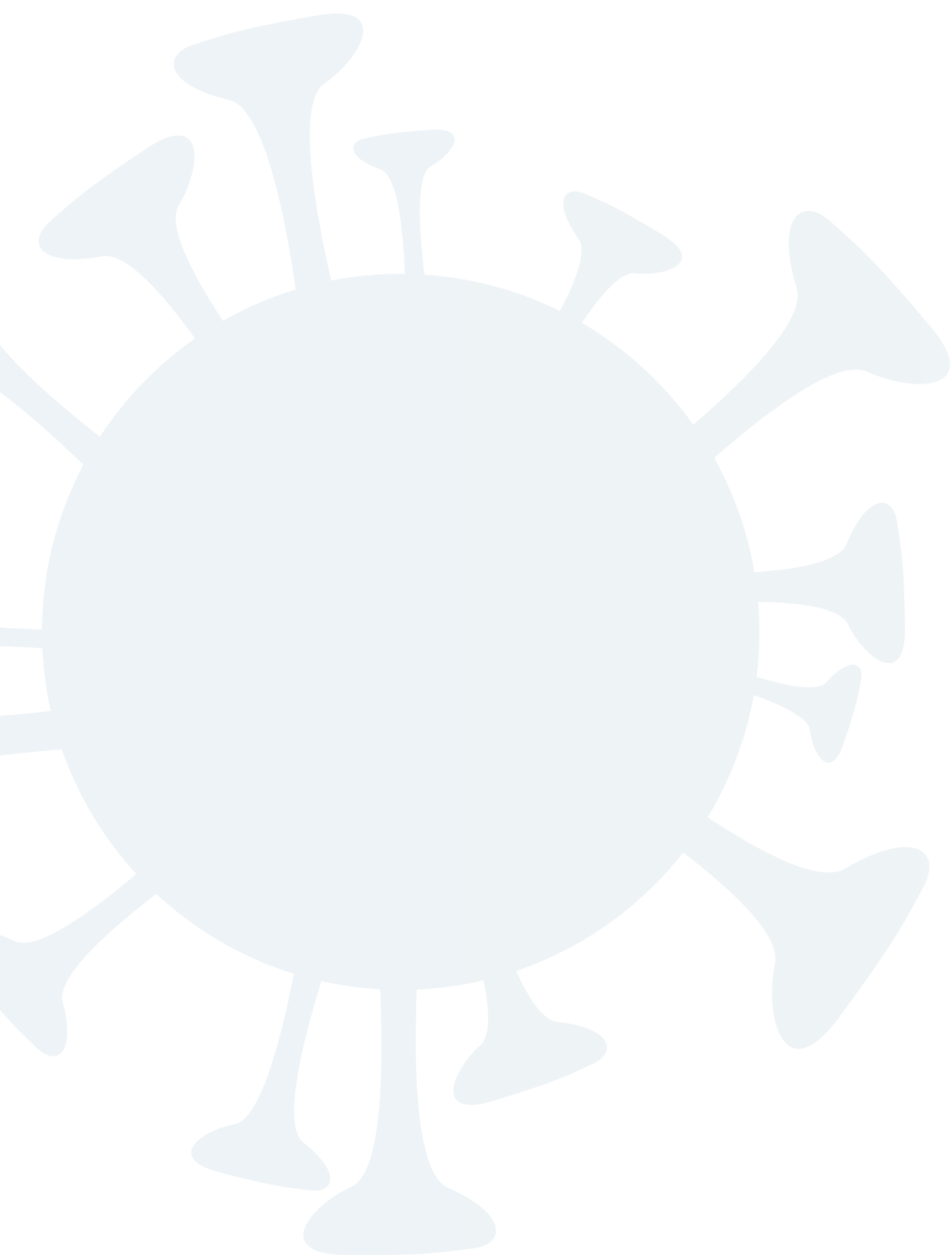




SIERRA LEONE'S RESPONSE TO COVID19:

IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, LIVELIHOOD AND
GOVERNANCE





The Centre for Accountability and the Rule of Law (CARL-SL) is an independent, not-for-profit organization that seeks to promote a just society for all persons in Sierra Leone, through monitoring institutions of accountability, outreach and advocacy for institutional transparency, capacity building and empowerment of citizens.

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Executive Summary

The “Sierra Leone’s Response to COVID-19” report, produced by the Centre for Accountability and Rule of Law (CARL) and funded by Irish Aid, examines the government’s response to the COVID-19 public health crisis and its implications for human rights, livelihood and governance in Sierra Leone. It provides an overview of human rights, livelihood and other governance concerns posed by the coronavirus outbreak preventative measures. It also highlights how those measures impacted society and individuals, and discusses the broad State powers instituted under the State of Emergency.

Respect for human rights, including economic and social rights, and civil and political rights, are fundamental to the success of any public health response. Emergency situations, however, may demand certain extraordinary measures to protect the public, including restrictions on fundamental political and civil rights. Even in such dire situations, however, restrictions on rights must be narrowly construed so as not to unduly impede the fundamental human rights outlined by numerous declarations, charters and conventions.

The Sierra Leonean government’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic, especially since the State of Emergency was declared, was characterised by broad instances of rights violations. These violations included examples of individuals whose economic rights, protection from abuse, freedom of movement, etc. were violated. The COVID-19 preventative measures were necessary but the implementation of those measures did raise significant rights abuses by authorities including the Police, NaCOVERC and security forces.

The COVID-19 prevention measures had significant implications for livelihood issues, including the impact of lockdowns on jobs, access to health care, food, water, education and other social services. To add to the hardships, enforcement of curfews and lockdowns were sometimes harshly imposed. The Police were seen beating people with canes – at least on one occasion – whilst citizens searched for, queued for and tried to drag water back to their residences during a lockdown. There were instances of police brutality due to residents of Freetown needing to search for water in their communities.

The most common public health measure taken by States against COVID-19 has been restricting freedom of movement. These restrictions were necessary to decrease the transmission of COVID-19 from the epicentre in Freetown to rural districts but the imposition of travel restrictions forced undue hardship on individuals and families.

The UN has said that in response to serious public health threats to the “life of a nation,” human rights law allows for restrictions on some rights. Those restrictions, however, must be justified on a legal basis as strictly as necessary. Putting COVID-19 prevention

measures in place from the worldwide medical communities’ recommendations to stop the spread of a global pandemic seems to be exactly this type of situation, but the implementation is not without its own set of problems.

Traders and importers were perhaps the most negatively economically affected by travel and movement restrictions. Borders were closed between Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia, which severely limited goods and food coming into Sierra Leone. A large number of importers, traders and sellers were affected by the lack of supplies or spoiled product from delays or travel restrictions.

There were also concerns that NaCOVERC initially resisted attempts to audit their accounts, although the audit was ultimately carried out. The Auditor General’s report showed that significant resources had not been accounted for.

Access to justice within the criminal justice system was a huge challenge as many cases were delayed when the courts were closed, as part of the coronavirus transmission prevention measures. Prisoners remained incarcerated on remand, court cases were suspended and prisons restricted visitation and prison activities.

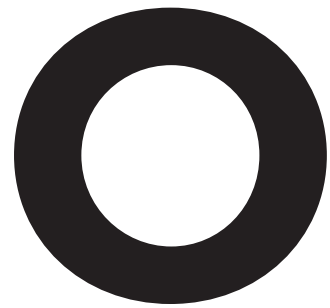
Whilst respect for human rights in general, and police handling of the crisis generally improved later on, there has been no accountability for those early violations or violence. The government and its international partners eventually took steps to cushion the negative economic effects of the preventative measures on the poor by providing cash handouts, among others.

In this Report, recommendations are proffered to the Government, security sector, judiciary and civil society groups. A common sense approach, based on available scientific and medical information needs to precede any policy or regulation development. A people-centred and rights-based approach should have been adopted during the implementation of any regulation or decree, even under a State of Emergency.

It is recommended, however, that the government of Sierra Leone ensure that any restriction on rights are proportionate to preventing and containing the spread of the virus and strong efforts are made to address livelihood challenges necessitated by COVID-19. The government should be slow in curtailing the right to education, assembly and religion as well as the socio-economic rights to work unless it is extremely necessary.

Such rights as the right to privacy, physical security, liberty, freedoms of movement, education, assembly and religion as well as the socio-economic rights to work and education could be seriously affected due to the travel restrictions, physical distancing, medical testing, lockdowns and quarantine measures. These restrictions should be temporary and should expire upon the achievement of the objectives of prevention and containment of the spread of the virus.

The restrictions on rights should not have a disproportionate impact on vulnerable groups including petty traders, people with disabilities, small businesses, the homeless, or women and children.



In March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared that an outbreak of the viral disease COVID-19 had reached the level of a global pandemic. Citing concerns with “the alarming levels of spread and severity,” the WHO called for governments to take urgent and aggressive action to stop the spread of the virus.

International human rights law guarantees everyone the right to the highest attainable standard of health and obligates governments to take steps to prevent threats to public health and to provide medical care to those who need it. Human rights law also recognizes that in the context of serious public health threats and public emergencies threatening the life of the nation, restrictions on some rights can be justified when they:

- have a legal basis,
- are strictly necessary,
- are based on scientific evidence
- are neither arbitrary nor discriminatory in application,
- are of limited duration,
- are respectful of human dignity,
- are subject to review, and
- proportionate to achieve the objective.

The scale and severity of the COVID-19 pandemic clearly rises to the level of a public health threat that could justify restrictions on certain rights, such as those that result from the imposition of quarantine or isolation limiting freedom of movement. At the same time, careful attention to human rights such as non-discrimination and human rights principles such as transparency and respect for human dignity can foster an effective response amidst the turmoil and disruption that inevitably results in times of crisis and limits the harm that can come from the imposition of overly broad measures that do not meet the above criteria.

In view of the exceptional situation and to preserve life, countries have had no choice but to adopt extraordinary measures. Extensive lockdowns and limitations were adopted to slow transmission of the virus. Restrictions on freedom of movement and limitations on freedoms to enjoy many other human rights were imposed by many States. Such measures inadvertently affected people’s livelihoods and security, their access to health care (not only for COVID-19), to food, water and sanitation, work, education – as well as to leisure. Measures need to be taken to mitigate any such unintended consequences.

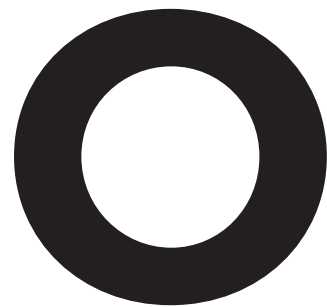
The U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted in 1948 in “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal inalienable rights of all members of the human family.” Some of the implications of limiting rights under the preventative COVID-19

measures affect the rights to: liberty, freedom of movement, freedom of religion in community with others, freedom of peaceful assembly and association, work and protection against unemployment, education, and to freely participate in community.

However, the UN has said that in response to serious public health threats to the “life of a nation,” human rights law allows for restrictions on some rights. Those restrictions, however, must be justified on a legal basis as strictly necessary. Putting COVID-19 prevention measures in place from the worldwide medical communities’ recommendations to stop the spread of a global pandemic seems to be exactly this type of situation, but the implementation is not without its own set of problems.

In combating COVID-19, states are obliged to protect the lives of all human beings. Invoking the right to life reminds us that all states have a duty to protect human life, including by addressing the general conditions in society that give rise to direct threats to life.

The right to health is inherent to the right to life. COVID-19 is testing States’ ability to protect the right to health to the limit. Every human being is entitled to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health conducive to living a life in dignity. Everyone, regardless of their social or economic status, should have access to the health care they need.



Outbreaks of disease often have an impact on gender issues. Human Rights Watch found that the 2014 Ebola virus disease outbreak in Sierra Leone had particularly harmful impacts on women and girls and reinforced longstanding gender inequity. Past epidemics, such as the Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone, impacted the availability of routine prenatal and maternity care, leaving women more at risk to preventable maternal deaths or morbidities.

Reports and news stories suggest the COVID-19 pandemic is disproportionately affecting women and girls in a number of adverse ways.

The COVID-19 outbreak has negatively affected sexual and reproductive health and rights. Overloaded health systems, reallocation of resources, shortages of medical supplies, and disruptions of global supply chains could harm women's access to contraception and pre- and post-natal care.

A nurse at the Aberdeen Women's Centre noted the drop in admissions, infant and mother check-ups, prenatal visits and births during the latter months of 2020. She attributed the drop in hospital attendance to the fears that many had of contracting COVID-19.

The economic lifeblood of many homes in Sierra Leone relies on women's ability to contribute to household income. The COVID-19 prevention measures, including lockdowns, curfews, reduced business hours, physical distancing, have negatively affected the ability of women to earn an income to sustain their families.

For women, entrenched gender discrimination, higher socio-economic vulnerability, increased domestic violence during lock downs, and frontline roles as caregivers and medical workers have all meant higher exposure and more risk.

Children are disproportionately affected by blanket responses to COVID-19 that do not sufficiently take into account how they impact children's rights, particularly children from the groups that are most marginalised and deprived.

Across every sphere, from health to the economy, security to social protection, the impacts of COVID-19 are exacerbated for women and girls simply by virtue of their sex. Economic impacts are felt especially by women and girls who are generally earning less, saving less, holding insecure jobs or living in poverty. Unpaid care work has increased, with children out-of-school, heightened care needs of older persons and overwhelmed health services.



Social stress and economic hardship coupled with restricted movement and social isolation measures, means an increase in gender-based violence.

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus.

On 31 December 2019, the WHO China Country Office was informed of cases of pneumonia of unknown etiology (unknown cause) detected in Wuhan City, Hubei Province of China. According to media reports, the concerned market in Wuhan was closed on 1 January 2020 for environmental sanitation and disinfection.

On 4 January 2020, WHO reports on social media that there is a cluster of pneumonia cases – with no deaths – in Wuhan, Hubei province. The next day, China reports 59 confirmed cases of viral pneumonia of unknown causes. Just a few days later, China CDC succeeds in isolating the first novel coronavirus strain, named SARS-CoV-2.

By the end of January 2020, the Corona Virus has spread to Europe and the United States and WHO declares the novel coronavirus outbreak (2019-nCoV) a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC). This is the 6th time WHO has declared a PHEIC since 2005.

By the first week of March 2020, there were over 100,000 corona virus cases and almost 3,000 confirmed deaths due to COVID-19, globally. And by 16 March 2020, both Guinea and Liberia had recorded cases of COVID-19.

On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organisation declared the Coronavirus (COVID-19) had reached the level of a global pandemic. The COVID-19 virus has affected every continent in the world including Asia, Africa, Europe, North and South America, Australia, etc.

The relatively rapid spread of COVID-19, which has not spared any ECOWAS member state, has had negative effects on all aspects concerning sustainable development goals, according to a report by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Commission, with the World Food Programme (WFP), United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) in West Africa, in July 2020.

The rate of economic growth has been revised downwards to an average of -1.4 percent against an initial growth forecast of 3.4 percent. The fall in economic activity is reflected in lower household incomes and increasing poverty, which affects more than 50 percent of households at the regional level.

These negative trends will also affect the education sector. As of May 2020, children and youth in West Africa had already lost an average of eight weeks of schooling and nearly two million of them were out of school due to the closure measures related to COVID 19. Slums and informal settlements suffered job loss and a severe impact on income due to the closure of workplaces. This situation is similar for all the slums and informal settlements in the region.

The social life, community development, recreation, entertainment and family cohesion are affected by prevention measures associated with COVID-19.

Sierra Leone recorded an increase in prices, lower stocks of goods compared to 2019, difficulties in carrying out activities due to measures restricting public events and the closure of schools, all of which contributed to social tensions and an increase in the crime rate.

Sierra Leone initiated its first directive in preventing the influx of COVID-19 on 27 January 2020, following the WHO declaration of a global pandemic. Travellers from China entering Sierra Leone would undergo a mandatory 14-day quarantine. By mid-March 2020, Sierra Leone imposed restrictions on arriving travelers from countries with more than 50 confirmed cases.

Meetings of the National Public Health Emergency Management Committee (NPHEMC), under the leadership of the Chief Medical Officer, began discussions on the outbreak and subsequently directed activation of the Public Health National Emergency Operations Centre (PHNEOC) to Level 2 incidence response, with the Director of Health Security and Emergency charged as Incident Manager.

At the same time, the Sierra Leonean government banned gatherings of more than 200 people and prohibited international travel for all government officials until further notice. During the last week of March 2020, the government declared a 12-month State of Emergency and closed land borders with Guinea and Liberia.

President Bio confirmed Sierra Leone's first COVID-19 case on 31 March 2020 and closed schools, banned worship services, and appointed Brigadier (Rtd.) Kellie Hassan Conteh, Minister of Defence, as the Interim National Coordinator for the National COVID-19 Emergency Response Centre (NaCovERC).

There were one million cases of COVID-19 globally recorded by 1 April 2020 and one case in Sierra Leone.

One year later, by 24 March 2021, in Sierra Leone, there have been 79 deaths due to COVID-19 complications, with 3,953 confirmed recorded cases and 2,796 COVID-19 recoveries.

The Sierra Leone Context

The rate of transmission of COVID-19 and the restrictive measures instituted by the Government and the National COVID-19 Emergency Response Centre (NaCOVERC) have strained the economic and social life of every Sierra Leonean.

Several factors of vulnerability and socio-economic fragility exacerbate the effects of any health crisis, from Ebola (EVD) to COVID-19. Underlying vulnerabilities, ailing structures and the very social fabric of Sierra Leoneans hinder the people's and Government's response to a crisis. There are underlying and structural problems that constrain the country's development progress. These and other pre-existing conditions compound the effects of measures to control the spread of the disease.

There is a deeply rooted distrust of authority among most Sierra Leoneans. The distrust of government extends from the early days of Independence. Through coups, wars, disease, natural disasters and elections, many Sierra Leoneans have developed a jaded, cynical and somewhat disrespectful attitude towards Government, the political elite and institutions such as the Police and military forces. As a result, Government messages, dictates, speeches and regulations are often viewed with skepticism and distrust. Adding to the generally negative perception of Government and authorities is the political divide that plagues the nation. The All People's Congress (APC) and the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) have traded power since Independence and have become increasingly tribal and geographically isolated. The two political parties hold a large monopoly on the citizenry and voters that is familial, historic, geographic and ethnic. This political divide infects most people, sectors, communities and national activities. Although there are more than 30 political parties registered in Sierra Leone, the APC and SLPP are the oldest and most dominant. A governance system has emerged where an election winner takes all and runs the country like their own personal fiefdom. This dominance of one-over-the-other results in a political division where distrust, jealousy, anger, violence, subterfuge and deceit permeate discussions and activities. Therefore, whichever political party is in power, the other approximately half the population are aggrieved, feel abused, mistreated and generally dislike anything the party in power has to offer. This political division influences compliance with Government regulations and emergency measure responses.

Sierra Leone's infrastructure remains a challenge to emergency responses. The health care sector is debilitated by years of neglect. By all international standards, Sierra Leone's health care system is amongst the worst in the world, from maternal and infant mortality to medical equipment and personnel capacity. When a health emergency such as COVID-19 or EVD emerges, people blame, mistrust and shun hospitals, clinics, health units, doctors and nurses. For many people, a health emergency means stay away from health facilities.

Piped water is available in less than 20% of the country with more than 80% of the country relying on water wells or rivers. In Freetown, water is supplied by one 22-inch pipe, which is sub-divided into a network of "spaghetti" pipe connections to communities and some homes. Many homes do not have individual water connections or supplies. Water shortages are common. Some urban areas rely on intermittently supplied and sparsely located community taps. These taps sometimes accommodate large areas and thousands of people.

There are 12 slum areas in the Freetown area where thousands of people live without adequate infrastructure facilities such as water and sanitation. These areas are crowded and dirty. Across the over-populated Western Urban Area, there is a lack of housing, which creates a population density that necessitates shared living arrangements. Compounds and houses often accommodate up to 20 people, living in very close quarters, sharing rooms, beds, latrines and living spaces.

The economy of Sierra Leone is characterized by a large informal sector, making some of the restriction measures adopted against COVID-19 difficult to enforce and ineffective. This sector is marked by very precarious working conditions and most informal workers do not have any safety nets.

This sector encompasses millions of workers, often marginal, many being women, who are often not employees in the usual sense of the term. They are mainly involved in subsistence farming or are often self-employed (making clothing, food, crafts, etc.), street vendors or in unregulated markets and are micro service providers (cleaning, transport, etc.) or domestic workers, etc. The majority of people in this sector survive on daily hand to mouth earnings and are therefore in a highly vulnerable situation.

Based on ILO estimates, the average share of vulnerable jobs in total employment in the ECOWAS region is 75.7%. Therefore, the restrictions are expected to harm the informal sector severely. At the household level, increasing income inequality and food insecurity are imposing greater burdens on women and women headed households.

Women and children make up the majority of these petty traders who earn their income from daily sales. The traders rely on the money they make during the day to eat, buy their commodities and sustain their families. If the traders don't work or sell during the day, they often go without food. For many of these traders, they earn less than Le20,000 (\$2) per day. Sierra Leone is ranked one of the poorest nations in the world according to most international standards. The largely informal economy, relying on daily sales for sustenance and the level of poverty makes lockdowns and reduced hours of operations very difficult for many to survive.

The State of Emergency

Electricity supply is a perennial problem for most of Sierra Leone, especially in the rural areas where most homes do not have a reliable power supply. Freetown and the District headquarter towns have sporadic electricity despite years of attempts to regulate and supply power. These power problems plague hospitals, health care facilities, businesses and government buildings. The lack of adequate power further affects people during any stay-at-home orders or lockdowns.

Sierra Leone is a very social and friendly country with a long tradition of large extended families including brothers and sisters from “home villages”, long time school colleagues, etc. Handshaking and tightly knit social gatherings are common. These traditional and social interactions are deeply rooted and can make following regulations for physical distance very difficult to adhere to. The experience with Ebola, however, sensitized most of the nation to the notion of “no touching” but the deeply engrained sociality of Sierra Leonean culture persists to make distancing regulations difficult to enforce.

Sierra Leone is a religious country with most people practicing Christianity or following the Muslim faith. Many people rely on their churches or mosques for spiritual and emotional support. Most Sierra Leoneans gather on a daily or weekly basis for worship services. These gatherings can be large and can be hotspots for disease transmission. **Under government regulations, large gatherings were banned and many people, including pastors and Imams, were upset about not being able to attend or offer worship services.

The rate of illiteracy among adults is approximately 70%. Reading skills are often inadequate to comprehend government or emergency regulations, although skills are higher in urban settings. Getting appropriate and accurate emergency messages and decrees to every citizen requires a variety of approaches including radio, town speakers and visual depictions of appropriate behaviours.

Rumours thrive in areas where there are low literacy levels and Sierra Leone is no exception. Because much of the emergency information is passed by word of mouth, the potential for misinformation to exist is large. Access to accurate, adequate information is still lagging way behind and one of the reasons is access to the internet and smart phones that can be good for sending messages, although the cost of telecommunications is high.

A

cting under the powers conferred by Section 29 of the Constitution of Sierra Leone (public emergency), the President proclaimed a 12-month State of Emergency (SOE) on 24 March 2020, prior to the first confirmed case.

“By the authority vested in me under Subsection (1) of Section (29) of the Constitution of Sierra Leone 1991, Act No 6 of 1991, regarding the declaration of a State of Public Emergency Now, therefore, I, Julius Maada Bio, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone...

having regard to the threat that the Coronavirus disease poses to the lives of the people and the economy of Sierra Leone, and the need to take effective measures to prevent, protect, and curtail the spread of the disease throughout Sierra Leone, do hereby, by this Proclamation, declare that a State of Public Emergency exists in the whole of the Republic of Sierra Leone with effect from today, 24 March 2020, for a period of twelve months,” he said.

The President added, “This is not a lockdown and nobody must use this as an excuse to hoard goods, hike prices, or engage in acts of lawlessness. This public emergency is not meant to make the lives of Sierra Leoneans difficult or unbearable. We will continue to deploy the armed forces and Police, as necessary, to enforce compliance with all public health directives.”

On 26 March 2020, after two days of discussions in Parliament, the Parliament of Sierra Leone unanimously approved the President’s proclamation. The Parliamentary Resolution affirmed the extraordinary length of the State of Emergency, which would otherwise have lapsed after 21-days.

During a State of Emergency, the Constitution of Sierra Leone confers wide-ranging powers on the President to make regulations and take measures that appear to him to be necessary or expedient for the purpose of maintaining and securing peace, order, and good government. Unless they are approved by a resolution of Parliament, such emergency regulations lapse after 90-days. However, a Parliamentary Resolution passed in terms of Section 29 remained in force for a period of 12-months, and could have been extended by a two-thirds majority vote.

Emergency situations may demand certain extraordinary measures to protect public health, including restrictions on fundamental political and civil rights. Even in such dire situations, however, restrictions on freedom of expression, freedom of movement, freedom from arbitrary detention, and others, must be narrowly construed so as not to unduly impede the fundamental human rights outlined by numerous declarations, charters and conventions.

Sierra Leone's Index Case

On 16 March 2020, a group of UN human rights experts said that “emergency declarations based on the COVID-19 outbreak should not be used as a basis to target particular groups, minorities, or individuals. It should not function as a cover for repressive action under the guise of protecting health... and should not be used simply to quash dissent.”

Sierra Leone's restrictions due to COVID-19 preventative measures really began on 18 March 2020. One week before the declaration of a State of Emergency, President Maada Bio addressed Sierra Leoneans on TV and radio. The military was immediately deployed to the airport and some land border crossings to support security and border closures. He said citizens should postpone all overseas travel especially to locations with reported cases of the Coronavirus.

Sierra Leoneans were advised to avoid physical contact and practice social distancing at all social and public gatherings. This applied to public events including but not limited to football matches, public concerts, social events, religious congregations, weddings, funerals, and other such large gatherings.

Private businesses, public institutions, event organisers, stores, supermarkets, and market women were required to provide enhanced hygiene facilities, including handwashing stations with clean water, liquid soap and hand sanitisers at all entrances. They were also to ensure that all toilets and common areas were regularly cleaned and disinfected. The transportation sector, including minibuses, taxis, and kekehs were to minimise congestion and provide hand sanitisers to passengers.

President Bio confirmed Sierra Leone's first COVID-19 case on 31 March 2020. In a press conference on 31 March 2020, on the lawns of State House, President Maada Bio announced the appointment of a COVID-19 response team with an interim national coordinator and the activation of the Emergency Operations Centre. The President stressed that Sierra Leone is not in lock down. All educational institutions were closed on 31 March 2020. The President also announced that tracking and surveillance of primary and secondary contacts [of affected individuals] would be undertaken, and those persons would be placed into mandatory quarantine and tested. A number of additional measures would be put into effect, relating to the transportation sector, traditional practices, religious practices, trading, and entertainment. Details were to be provided by the National COVID-19 Response Secretariat and the interim national coordinator said that they would further announce other measures to reinforce already existing actions, including the use of law enforcement agencies, in due course.

Under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which Sierra Leone has adopted, everyone has the right to “the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.” Governments are obligated to take effective steps for the “prevention, treatment and control of epidemic, endemic, occupational and other diseases.”

The United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which monitors state compliance with the covenant, stated:

The right to health is closely related to and dependent upon the realization of other human rights, as contained in the International Bill of Rights, including the rights to food, housing, work, education, human dignity, life, non-discrimination, equality, the prohibition against torture, privacy, access to information, and the freedoms of association, assembly and movement. These and other rights and freedoms address integral components of the right to health.

The right to health provides that health facilities, goods, and services should be:

- available in sufficient quantity,
- accessible to everyone without discrimination, and affordable for all, even marginalized groups;
- acceptable, meaning respectful of medical ethics and culturally appropriate; and
- scientifically and medically appropriate and of good quality.

NaCOVERC

The National COVID-19 Emergency Response Centre (NaCOVERC) was established by a committee of health, security and political representatives of the government of Sierra Leone, immediately following the pronouncement of the State of Emergency in March 2020. NaCOVERC consists of five response pillars including social mobilization, admin and finance, security, etc. The Government appointed a national coordinator from the military to specifically lead the COVID-19 response.

NaCOVERC regulations under the COVID-19 Response Government Gazettes

Government Gazettes

Two resolutions passed through Parliament dealing with COVID-19 regulations. These regulations were passed almost four months after the declaration of a State of Emergency.

On 22 June 2020, Parliament Gazetted the COVID-19 Public Emergency Response Coordination Regulations. Under Section 29 of the Constitution, by proclamation of the President the following regulations were enacted as of 1 April 2020.

Part 2, Section 3(1) reads, "The coordinator shall for the purpose of dealing with reported or suspected cases of the corona virus disease, (a) establish a COVID-19 Emergency Response Coordination Centre; (b) establish a COVID-19 Emergency Response Coordination Unit in each District comprising isolation facilities, quarantine facilities or community care centres; (c) designate an area in a residence or house to be used for the purpose of self-isolation or self-quarantine."

Section 3 states a person committed to a unit, quarantine facility, isolation facility, community care centre or designated area in a residence or house shall not leave that unit or facility care centre unless on the authority of an authorized medical practitioner that that person is free from the infection of the corona virus disease.

Section 4(1) states an authorized person may order that a person who is confirmed to be infected with the corona virus disease be taken to an isolation facility. Section 5(1) says an authorized person may order that a person who is suspected to be infected with the corona virus disease be taken to a quarantine facility, community care centre, etc.

On 16 July 2020, the Parliament of Sierra Leone Gazetted more regulations that were backdated to effective date, 1 April 2020. These regulations, in Section 3(1) stated, A

person who convenes or causes to be convened an assembly of persons in a place of worship including a church mosque or temple for the purpose of conducting observing or participating in a religious or other ceremony shall ensure...

(a) the place of worship is clean and disinfected;

(b) worshippers wear facemasks throughout the ceremony even when speaking or singing;

(c) a distance of 2 metres is maintained in between persons including persons conducting or officiating the ceremony.

In Section 4, the regulations ban assemblies in sporting facilities and nightclubs, cinemas or entertainment venues. Section 5 dictates that weddings, funerals or other ceremonies are restricted to 50% of the venue's capacity. Section 6 outlines restrictions to public spaces including parks, roads, beaches, etc. where people should wear facemasks, stay apart and wash hands or use hand sanitizers. Section 7 outlines the responsibilities of commercial drivers, who must ensure passengers wear facemasks.

Restrictions on Movement

The most common public health measure taken by States against COVID-19 has been restricting freedom of movement: lockdowns or stay-at-home instructions, border restrictions, etc. These measures are a practical and necessary method to stop virus transmission, prevent health-care services becoming overwhelmed, and thus save lives. However, the impact of lockdowns on jobs, livelihoods, access to services, including health care, food, water, education and social services, safety at home, adequate standards of living and family life can be severe.

Freedom of movement is a crucial right that facilitates the enjoyment of many other rights. While international law permits certain restrictions on freedom of movement, including for reasons of security and national emergency like health emergencies, restrictions on free movement should be strictly necessary for that purpose, proportionate and non-discriminatory.

Article 12 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, states:

1. Everyone lawfully within the territory of a State shall, within that territory, have the right to liberty of movement and freedom to choose his residence.
2. Everyone shall be free to leave any country, including his own.
3. The above-mentioned rights shall not be subject to any restrictions except those which are provided by law, are necessary to protect national security, public order, public health or morals or the rights and freedoms of others, and are consistent with the other rights recognized in the present Covenant.
4. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of the right to enter his own country.

Section 18 (1) of the Sierra Leone Constitution states: No person shall be deprived of his freedom of movement, and for the purpose of this section the said freedom means the right to move freely throughout Sierra Leone, the right to reside in any part of Sierra Leone, the right to enter or leave Sierra Leone, and immunity from expulsion from Sierra Leone.

(2) Any restriction on a person's freedom of movement which is involved in his lawful detention shall not be held to be inconsistent with or in contravention of this section.

(3) Nothing contained in or done under authority of any law shall be held to be inconsistent with or in contravention of this section to the extent that the law in question makes provision—

a. which is reasonably required in the interests of defence, public safety, public order, public morality, public health or the conservation of the natural resources, such as mineral, marine, forest and other resources of Sierra Leone, except in so far as that provision or, as the case may be, the thing done under the authority thereof is shown not to be reasonably justifiable in a democratic society; or

b. for the imposition of restrictions on the movement or residence within Sierra Leone of any person who is not a citizen thereof or the exclusion or expulsion from Sierra Leone of any such persons.

From the UN Declaration on Human Rights, in Article 13(1): Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state.

(2) Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.

Land Border Closures

In an announcement on 27 March 2020, the government of Sierra Leone announced the closure of the country's land borders with neighbouring Guinea and Liberia for a period of 30-days. Guinea had announced their border closure with Sierra Leone on 26 March 2020, one day prior to Sierra Leone's announcement. Following the 30-day period, the government eventually closed the country's land borders with its neighbours, Guinea and Liberia, indefinitely.

According to the National Revenue Authority, there are 29 chiefdoms that share borders with either Guinea or Liberia. In Koinadugu there are 51 functional crossing points.

Kambia has 52 communities with at least one crossing point to Guinea. Kailahun has 49 official crossing points. Pujehun district has 22 functional crossing points and 21 inland points. Kono has 35 functional crossing points, Bombali has 11, Bonthe and Moyamba districts have 7 and 4 boat landing points, respectively.

At the official border crossing points in Kambia District (for Guinea), and Pujehun District (for Liberia), the ban on cross-border travel was largely observed through the initial 30-day period. In a survey conducted by AdvocAid in September 2020, 87% of respondents in Kambia; and 89% of respondents in Pujehun said the border closure was observed. However, after the initial 30-day border closures, people in the border communities began to regularly flout the government ban on land travel between Sierra Leone and its neighbours. According to residents in Kambia, near the Guinea border, and Gendema, at the Liberian border, people, commercial vehicles and motorbike taxis increasingly travelled between the countries and over international borders. There is still no large-scale violation of the border restrictions but compliance with the government decree is waning.

Freedom of movement under international human rights law protects, in principle, the right of everyone to leave any country, to enter their own country of nationality, and the right of everyone lawfully in a country to move freely in the whole territory of the country. Restrictions on these rights can only be imposed when lawful, for a legitimate purpose, and when the restrictions are proportionate, including in considering their impact. Travel bans and restrictions on freedom of movement may not be discriminatory nor have the effect of denying people the right to seek asylum or of violating the absolute ban on being returned to where they face persecution or torture.

Mohamed Konneh is a miner from the far east of Sierra Leone. He regularly crosses the Sierra Leone/Liberian border to work and oversee an artisanal mining operation he's worked for five years. He said, "Before the border closure, I would cross over and take transport to the mining site. When the government announced the border would close, I couldn't get to the mine. I was in Sierra Leone and unable to work." In April 2020, Konneh tried numerous times to cross the border but was barred from entering Liberia. He said, "I get my small income from working that mine and I was unable to provide for my family."

Governments have broad authority under international law to ban visitors and migrants from other countries. However, domestic and international travel bans historically have often had limited effectiveness in preventing transmission, and may in fact accelerate disease spread if people flee from quarantine zones prior to their imposition.

Ban on International Air Travel

One of the first policy responses to COVID-19 in Sierra Leone was a general ban on international travel from and to Sierra Leone. There were three dimensions to the ban. First, on 13 March 2020, the Ministry of Health and Sanitation (MoHS) issued an advisory, which took effect on 16 March 2020, discouraging individuals from countries with 200 or more confirmed cases of COVID-19 from travelling to Sierra Leone.

On 16 March 2020, a ban was placed on overseas travel for all government officials; and quarantine of travelers from any country with more than 50 cases. On 19 March 2020, the government through the Civil Aviation Authority closed the country's airspace.

On 22 July 2020, the Ministry of Transport and Aviation and the Civil Aviation Authority announced that Lungi International Airport was to re-open.

Among the core COVID-19 measures announced that are currently in place are that, authorisation to travel to Sierra Leone should include a "negative Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) COVID-19 result". All arriving and departing passengers are strictly advised to observe proper and constant use of facemasks, hand washing, and sanitizing; and observance of social distancing as directed by the MoHS or NaCOVERC. Health officials record temperature, basic health screening data, and seat number on arrival.

All arrival passengers are to be subjected to mandatory Rapid Diagnostic Test (RDT) test and PCR swab COVID-19 tests upon arrival. If the RDT screening is negative, the passenger is allowed to enter the country. If the RDT screening is positive, the passenger will be isolated at a hotel in Lungi while awaiting his/her PCR test result. Passengers with a positive PRC result will not be permitted to travel, and must follow public health protocols for isolation and contact tracing. They will be re-tested after seven days. Passengers who have entered Sierra Leone within five days will be exempted from mandatory additional test on departure.

The initial ban on international travel took effect on 16 March 2020. Lungi International airport re-opened in July 2020, but not without challenges. There were administrative problems in the first week of the airport's reopening. The key rules and protocols including requirements for inbound and outbound passengers to have proof of negative COVID-19 status were generally observed.

Monitoring exercises have not revealed evidence of violations of observance and enforcement of the rules and protocols for safe air travel.

Generally, interviewees said they feel comfortable that the airport's operation is COVID-19 responsive. However, passengers have expressed grave concern about the high cost of COVID-19 tests. Furthermore, while the requirements for all passengers to have proof of negative COVID-19 status are being observed, it is emerging that there have been instances where some outbound passengers have had to wait for up to 5-hours or more at the airport for their PCR test results. Long waiting hours at the airport for post-test negative COVID-19 status certificate has affected every passenger that takes his/her test outside Freetown.

Internal Inter-District Travel Restrictions

Government's first announcement of restrictions of travel within Sierra Leone was a national lockdown that ran from 5 to 7 April 2020. Its main features were a ban on travel between districts, a night curfew from 9pm to 6am, a requirement to have a pass for conveying goods, and adjustment of working hours from 9am-4pm.

On 27 April 2020, President Julius Maada Bio addressed the nation, declaring a further 3-day nation-wide lockdown from 3-5 May 2020. During the lockdowns, government instituted a system that allowed only vehicles with electronic pass to ply the roads; with the exception of vehicles conveying essential market goods and produces. In an announcement on 23 July 2020, the President lifted the inter-district lockdown for an initial period of two weeks; while adjusting curfew from 11pm to 6am. Following the two weeks, the inter-district lockdown was removed altogether.

Consequently, the following regulations were made to apply to all inter-district travel. All vehicles, ferries, boats travelling out of a district are required to enter all the names of passengers in the vehicle manifest that shall include each individual's name, address in the originating district and address in the district the person is going to, as well as the person's telephone number. The manifest is to be completed in duplicate; and one copy will be deposited at the checkpoint at the departure point in a district and the second copy at the arrival checkpoint. Carrying passengers in a vehicle, ferry, or boat engaged in inter-district travel without the passengers' names on the manifest is an offence and will result in the driver being fined and the vehicle being detained.

The passenger manifest policy was largely ignored by commercial drivers and passengers. The checkpoints became a cash-exchange centre as commercial drivers bribed officials to allow passage, with or without passenger manifests.

The public generally complied with the periodic lockdowns between March and May and most people stayed in their areas. However, there were two disturbing patterns of attempts to disregard restrictions in the cities and by people of influence.

First, the number of people who flouted the lockdown rules was "somewhat high", according to a monitoring report released by the Centre for Accountability and Rule of Law. The second disturbing pattern of disregard for the travel restrictions was committed by public officials because of their privileged access to travel.

Compliance with the measures for safe internal travel was weak; in the majority opinion of the respondents in a survey across the country. An average of 83% of the respondents in the survey said compliance with the measures for safe internal travel was not working well. Among the issues confirmed was that the requirement that passenger vehicles travelling between districts should have passenger manifest was not well observed. Travel is an important part of household life in both urban and rural settings. Before COVID-19, about 56% of households reported having to travel regularly beyond their

city limits to work. Casual workers are the most mobile, with a total of 63% of them travelling regularly to carry out their economic activities. As a result of the pandemic, 86% of households reported having members who had to change their trips - either by cancelling or reducing them.

Commercial driver restrictions

Commercial drivers include those who operate delivery vehicles for produce, wood or supplies and those drivers who operate busses, public taxis or small mini-vans used for public transportation. There were a number of restrictions placed on drivers, including the passenger manifests, regulation passes, sanitizers, facemasks, etc. As a result, many commercial drivers were not eligible to ply their normal routes, which disrupted the flow of goods, food and people between districts and especially into Freetown. As a result, there was increased fear of lack of food, particularly among female-headed households.

Kadie Kamara used to import goods from Guinea. She would travel through Districts from Freetown to Guinea and purchase large quantities of food and produce. She said, "Once the travel restrictions were announced, I knew my business would suffer. It was very hard to get a driver with a government pass to bring anything over the border, through the districts and into Freetown." In one of her shipments, the vehicle was arrested and she was detained at the Ross Road Police Station. While detained, her imported market was stolen and much of the produce started to rot. She said, "My market got spoiled and I had to go out of business and relocate to Lungi to try to start over again."

Lockdowns

Fear of running out of food was reported by the majority of households in Freetown. In fact, more than half of the households (52%) surveyed by Sanusi Research reported worrying about not having enough food in the 30-days prior to the survey.

Rural households felt the negative effects of the restrictive measures taken in urban areas through loss of earnings spilling over to rural settings. In addition, the restriction of travel and movement has prevented some rural households from being able to sell their products in urban centres or in border areas, resulting in lower incomes for rural households.

Concerns about household access to food were felt more by female-headed households. In this category, further analysis highlights a greater vulnerability of households headed by non-working women (74%) than working women (47%).

In addition, households depending on unstable and precarious sources of income - such as day laborers, petty traders and those dependent on remittances or family support as well as those who are active in agriculture - also reported greater fears about access to food compared to other household categories.

Around 45% of households believed they do not have sufficient resources to cope with an extension of restrictive travel measures, according to a Think Africa survey. The daily life of households in Sierra Leone has been significantly affected by COVID-19 and the measures put in place to reduce its transmission.

In April 2020, immediately following the announcement of the lockdown, commercial taxi drivers and “keke” drivers were told to limit the passengers in their vehicles, as was ordered during the Ebola crisis. In taxis, drivers were limited to two passengers in the backseat vs the three passengers they were used to transporting. Essentially, that cut the taxi drivers income by 25%. “Keke” drivers were ordered to carry only two passengers in their vehicles essentially cutting their income by 33%.

Hawanatu Sesay, a trader around the Eastern Police Station, was also importing provisions from Conakry, Guinea. She said she and the vehicle she was in were arrested for violating the inter-district travel restrictions. The vehicle she was in was stopped at the Masiaka Highway Police checkpoint. She said the driver didn't have a pass because he couldn't read and didn't understand the online application process. Sesay said during her detention much of her market was stolen. “I was trying to borrow money to buy goods through a micro-credit group. I've lost my investment and now I have to re-pay the financial agency.”

April 2020

Within three-days of the President announcing Sierra Leone's index case of COVID-19, the government declared a three-day national, stay-at-home lockdown from 5-7 April 2020. According to health officials, this first lockdown was “a necessary public health intervention a. To scale up surveillance, contact tracing, and testing for all known cases; b. for possible new cases, to detect, isolate, and quarantine those persons; c. to map out the possible spread of COVID-19 in Sierra Leone; d. to re-assess and strengthen COVID-19 pillars and institutions; e. to re-align agenda and goal-setting across government and with development partners; and, f. to deploy additional expertise and resources to fight COVID-19.”

Following the first three-day lockdown, the President held a press conference on 8 April 2020. He said a. 100% of primary contacts for the six known cases were identified, isolated, and are now being monitored; b. Nearly 78% of secondary contacts of the six cases were identified and are being monitored; c. 205 persons under quarantine were visited by security, psychosocial, and surveillance personnel; d. The Ministry of Information engaged all national television and radio stations and 61 community radio stations throughout the lockdown.

He added, there was; a. Increased the surge capacity of our response staff – case investigators, contact tracers, and quarantine officers. b. Expanded testing laboratories to five testing laboratories and the activation of a regional laboratory in Kenema c. Conducted case management and Infection Prevention and Control training for 174 healthcare professionals; d. Supplied food to all quarantine homes; e. NACSA also provided Le4 billion worth of food and other essential support to our most vulnerable populations including persons living with disabilities; f. Our security forces worked hard to enforce the lockdown. In addition to other duties they were deployed to quarantine sites, and also apprehended five transport boats and 36 crew. g. The Ministry of Water Resources worked with Guma Valley and SALWACO to supply water across Freetown and the Western area.

During the first lockdown, 5-7 April 2020, there were a number of instances of police brutality due to residents of Freetown needing to search for water in their communities. Some residents, particularly in the east of Freetown, ventured out from their homes in search of food and water. When authorities learned of the people on the street, they mobilized police and military patrols who demanded people return to their homes. The rights to water and to sanitation are part of the right to an adequate standard of living. The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has reaffirmed that the rights to water and sanitation are an essential component of the right to an

adequate standard of living, and “integrally related, among other Covenant rights, to the right to health.”

Billions of people around the world do not have access to safe drinking water. Yet, as the WHO has noted the provision of safe water, sanitation, and hygienic conditions is essential to protecting human health during the COVID-19 outbreak.

May 2020

Less than a month after the first national lockdown, on 30 April 2020, the President declared another three-day lockdown scheduled for Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday (3 May, 4 May, and 5 May 2020) to “carry out contact tracing of the infected persons and as a preventive measure to stop the spread of the disease”, according to NaCOVERC and the President.

The President said, “Epidemiological data and other evidence indicate that there is community transmission of COVID-19 in Sierra Leone. The Government has decided to intensify contact tracing and detection; scale up testing and isolation; expand treatment, and undertake all other measures necessary to break COVID-19 transmission in the country.” He added, “Other existing measures, including the curfew and restrictions on inter-district travel, shall remain in full force. Recognising the challenges citizens may face as a consequence of the three-day lockdown, Government will continue to cushion the effects associated with these enhanced measures.”

The NGO, AdvocAid, reported on human rights abuses during this second lockdown using their network of paralegals, social workers and staff.

AdvocAid’s report noted, “The repercussions of lockdowns and other containment measures were felt more severely by the country’s most marginalised populations, including women and children. Limited mobility interferes with access to health care, employment opportunities, and access to basic needs such as food and water.” Human rights abuses were committed during arrests and detentions of persons accused of violating curfews or the lockdown guidelines.

At least 183 people were detained across the regions of Kenema, Makeni and Freetown during this second lockdown. Of these, five were juveniles under 18-years (2.7%). 77% of women (24 out of 31 arrests) detained during the lockdown were arrested for COVID-19 related offences, compared to only 31% of men (47 out of 152 arrests). Of the total 183 individuals arrested, 152 (83.1%) were male and 31 (16.9%) were female.

In Freetown, at the Eastern police station, there was one female and 25 male suspects. The female suspect violated COVID-19 restrictions and the male suspects were arrested

on 5 May 2020, by the police for disobeying the curfew orders. All suspects were cautioned by the police and then released upon intervention by AdvocAid. “Two women, one with a 4-month-old child, were arrested for breaching the lockdown rules. They went to collect an ice block from a neighbour. They were held for over 3 hours at the Central Police Station in open detention.

At the Wellington Police Station, there was one female suspect who violated COVID-19 restrictions by breaking the curfew rules. There were four male suspects with cases unrelated to COVID-19 prevention measures. She was cautioned and then released. At the Harbour Police Station on Ross Road, there were two female and fourteen male suspects including three juvenile boys arrested for riotous conduct related to COVID-19 offences.

Twelve women at Lumley Police Station were arrested for disobeying the curfew rules. However, according to the testimonies of some of the women, they were unable to find vehicles to take them home by the start of the curfew time. Other women who were driving cars and were stuck in heavy traffic were unable to make it before the start of the curfew hour. After engaging with the police, the twelve women were cautioned by the police and then released.

The New England Police Station had three female suspects arrested for breaking the COVID-19 lockdown rules. They explained that there was no water in their community water points and so they went in search of water and were arrested. They were cautioned by the police and then released.

In line with human rights obligations the Government should set up effective and efficient systems to monitor the measures adopted and to take corrective measures and undertake investigation in cases of allegations of violations of human rights during the enforcement of emergency measures put in place to prevent and stop the outbreak of COVID-19.

Restrictions on Association

Article 20 of the UN Declaration on Human Rights reads: 1. Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association. Article 11 protects your right to protest by holding meetings and demonstrations with other people.

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and to freedom of association with others, including the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.

2. No restrictions shall be placed on the exercise of these rights other than such as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others. This article shall not prevent the imposition of lawful restrictions on the exercise of these rights by members of the armed forces, of the police or of the administration of the state.

There are some situations where a public authority can restrict your rights to freedom of assembly and association. This is only the case where the authority can show that its action is lawful, necessary and proportionate in order to:

- protect national security or public safety
- prevent disorder or crime
- protect health or morals, or
- protect the rights and freedoms of other people.

Action is 'proportionate' when it is appropriate and no more than necessary to address the issue concerned.

Limits on Public Gatherings

Article 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, states: The right of peaceful assembly shall be recognized. No restrictions may be placed on the exercise of this right other than those imposed in conformity with the law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order, the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

On 16 March 2020, two weeks before Sierra Leone's Index Case, a Press Release from the Office of the President placed a ban on all gatherings of more than 100 people. NaCOVERC made additional announcements, covering traditional practices, such as traditional engagements, funerals, weddings and worship services, etc. Crowds at funerals or weddings must be limited to not more than 35 people. All secret society

activities were banned until further notice.

In June 2020, government announced additional measures in respect of public gatherings and safe public spaces. An announcement by NaCOVERC on Wednesday 24 June 2020, limits the number of people at traditional engagements such as weddings and naming ceremonies at no more than 35 people; while social distancing and use of facemasks are mandatory.

All banks and supermarkets should ensure they comply with the applicable regulations. Local Councils should ensure that local markets have hand washing stations placed at strategic locations in the market; and hand washing by customers should be strictly enforced. Both sellers and buyers are required to have facemasks while interacting with each other.

All beaches remain closed for mass events (groups exceeding 10 people) until further notice.

All mass sporting activities remain banned until further notice. Mass congregation at sports/video centres remain banned until further notice.

While the ban on gatherings was largely respected in rural areas; according to survey findings, overall, the ban on all gatherings of more than 100 people is not well respected. In Freetown, peri-urban townships in Western Area (Rural), Bo, Kenema, and Kambia, the ban on gatherings of more than 100 people is flouted every day at the markets. In these places, people daily visit markets in their hundreds, if not thousands. The ban on gatherings of more than 100 people is most flouted in Freetown; where in addition to crowds at markets, bars, pubs, and other entertainment activities remained open along the beachfront.

In Freetown, bars and restaurants largely adhere to the rule to operate between the hours of 7am and 10pm; but physical distancing is totally ignored; and hand washing measures not stringently adhered to. At every bar that has been operating, customers and most staff do not properly have masks on at all times. Officially, the beaches remain closed for mass events; but along Lumley beach it is easy to see people clustered together for private "chilling" in groups exceeding 10 people.

During the period under the State of Emergency, large political gatherings were held by the President, First Lady and many political personalities. Some events were billed as town hall discussions or "sensitizations" and some events were to facilitate donations of masks or food supplies to communities.

President Maada Bio and many other government officials held numerous events as he toured the country. When schools reopened, the First Lady was seen giving out sanitary pads to large crowds of school-going girls. The Inspector General of Police was married in Bo where hundreds of people gathered.

The Police were given the mandate to enforce the COVID-19 preventative measures along with the Sierra Leone Armed Forces. The Sierra Leone Police (SLP), under the Police Act No. 7 of 1964, is the national police force of the Republic of Sierra Leone. The SLP is primarily responsible for law enforcement and crime investigations throughout Sierra Leone. The Sierra Leone Police is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, a cabinet ministry in the Government of Sierra Leone. This Ministry is responsible for the internal safety and security of the State.

Facemasks

On 18 April 2020, the Government, through NaCOVERC, announced wearing of facemasks was going to be mandatory in all public spaces. On 21 April 2020, the Government issued a directive that masks were to be “worn in all public spaces”, including markets, public transportation, private vehicles carrying one or more passengers, shops, public buildings, offices and on crowded streets.

The mandatory use of facemasks in all office buildings, public and private by both staff and visitors did not work well. The evidence shows from Freetown, Port Loko, Kenema, and Kambia, the vast majority of visitors to both public and private buildings do not wear facemasks. Equally, occupants in rooms in office buildings are commonly seen without a facemask, even when there are more than four people in the office. Most private business offices have workers without facemasks.

Despite large donations of facemasks and a high-profile public awareness campaign, most visitors to markets and market sellers do not use facemasks or do not wear them properly. Markets attract large numbers and are considered “super-spreaders” of the virus. On the streets of Freetown, some people were seen with facemasks but very few were wearing the masks correctly.

Kadiatu Sesay walks around downtown Freetown carrying a tray of vegetables for sale. She said she was stopped by military and police officers who were observing traffic around the Cotton Tree. She said she wasn't wearing her facemask and had forgotten it at home that day. “I was told I should be wearing a facemask and I knew that. But, on that day I forgot.” She was arrested and taken to Central Police Station where her tray of vegetables vanished and she had to pay a Le250,000 fine. Sesay said she had to call an auntie to come with money, go to the bank and deposit the money. Her auntie eventually returned to the Police Station with the deposit slip and Sesay was released – without her market.

The mandatory use of facemask dictate was not followed by the vast majority of people in Freetown and even fewer wore masks in the provinces. The vast majority of citizens have facemasks. Overall, 78% of survey respondents said they had facemasks. The vast majority of people or 94% bought their masks locally. In every community where the monitoring survey took place, an average of 77% of the respondents surveyed had facemasks. The Western Area recorded the highest percentage of people with facemasks, at 87%. Beyond owning facemask however, people are mostly ignoring the rule to wear them in public spaces. Overall, 89% of respondents in the monitoring survey say that the rule to wear masks in public spaces was “poorly” respected.

Ninety people were arrested in Bo for not wearing facemasks. They were charged to magistrate court by the Police. The Magistrate discharged everyone and said there was no applicable law under which to charge the accused.

In the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Article 11(1), states:

The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions. The States Parties will take appropriate steps to ensure the realization of this right, recognizing to this effect the essential importance of international co-operation based on free consent.

2. The States Parties to the present Covenant, recognizing the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger, shall take, individually and through international co-operation, the measures, including specific programmes, which are needed.

Restrictions on Civil Liberties and Civic Space

The civil liberties of freedom of expression and freedom of association and assembly are constitutionally protected in Sierra Leone. Section 26 protects the freedom of assembly and association. These rights are enforceable in a court of law.

These freedoms may however be limited by interests relating to defense, public security, public morality, and protection of the reputation, rights, and freedoms of other persons, amongst others.

During the State of Emergency, many civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) faced increased difficulties working in their operational areas. Travel restrictions impeded Freetown-based organizations from doing site visits and from holding evaluation meetings. The travel pass system established by NaCOVERC was cumbersome, time-consuming and inefficient. Many organizations were denied travel passes or simply did not apply for passes because of the inefficiencies of the system.

From the beginning of the pandemic, much like the Ebola epidemic, international funders reallocated and redirected funds to local organizations. The UN system renewed their funding calls to the pandemic and reallocated direction and money towards fighting COVID-19. DFID funding was channelled into COVID-19 programs as was funding from the European Union, World Bank and others. This greatly impacted local CSO work as projects were delayed or repurposed towards the pandemic. Local CSOs had to readjust their staff, projects and resources according to funding reallocations. Many CSO projects were delayed or cancelled, according to one CSO.

In January 2020, before the pandemic reached Sierra Leone, several international agencies recalled international staff. This also affected the work of some international NGOs and local partner groups.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are subject to new NGO Policy Regulations and a Development Cooperation Framework, both of which impose a variety of restrictions and barriers on NGO operations and allow for extensive government intervention in operational matters.

These restrictions and interventions are justified on the basis that NGOs bring considerable resources into Sierra Leone, and that the government has an interest in coordinating the effective use of such resources in a manner that avoids duplication. The new NGO policy in Sierra Leone had and will have a significant impact on the civil society space.

States need to be respecting and protecting, among other rights, freedom of expression and of the press, freedom of information, freedom of association and of assembly. In many countries, in the context of COVID-19 and in Sierra Leone, this is not necessarily the case. For example:

- Measures to control the flow of information and crackdown on freedom of expression and press freedom against an existing background of shrinking civic space.
- Arrests, detention, prosecution or persecution of political opponents, journalists, doctors, and healthcare workers, activists and others for allegedly spreading “fake news”.
- Aggressive cyber-policing and increased online surveillance.

The crisis raises the question how best to counter harmful speech while protecting freedom of expression. Sweeping efforts to eliminate misinformation or disinformation can result in purposeful or unintentional censorship, which undermines trust. The most effective response is accurate, clear and evidence-based information from sources people trust.

Under international human rights law, governments have an obligation to protect the right to freedom of expression, including the right to seek, receive, and impart information of all kinds, regardless of frontiers. Permissible restrictions on freedom of expression for reasons of public health may not put in jeopardy the right itself.

The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights regards as a “core obligation” providing “education and access to information concerning the main health problems in the community, including methods of preventing and controlling them.”

Restrictions on education

Closure of Schools and Colleges

From the UN Declaration on Human Rights, in Article 26(1), it states: Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, states: 1. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to education. They agree that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. They further agree that education shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups, and further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

In the Sierra Leone Constitution, it states in Section 9(1), The Government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal rights and adequate educational opportunities for all citizens at all levels by — a. ensuring that every citizen is given the opportunity to be educated to the best of his ability, aptitude and inclination by providing educational facilities at all levels and aspects of education such as primary, secondary, vocational, technical, college and university; b. safeguarding the rights of vulnerable groups, such as children, women and the disabled in security educational facilities; and c. providing the necessary structures, finance and supportive facilities for education as and when practicable.

On 19 March 2020, the Government announced that all schools and colleges would close on 31 March 2020. All educational institutions were henceforth closed on 31 March 2020. The closure was re-iterated by the President at a press conference at State House following confirmation of the country's Index Case on 31 March 2020.

Education has been the most affected with the closure of educational establishments generating short- and medium-term effects. Unequal access and in some cases, no access at all, to online courses and radio broadcasts left children and students one semester short of services according to location and poverty levels. It's important to note, as during the Ebola epidemic, girls suffer in many ways, more than boys either through sexual violence or through teenage pregnancy.

Fatmata (an underage girl - last name withheld), who was in SS3 at Freetown Senior Secondary School for Girls (FSSG) attended a private education camp where a teacher offered extra classes during the school closures. In July 2020, she was raped by the teacher and got pregnant. She dropped out of school and did not return to FSSG when schools were reopened.

On 26 June 2020, the Teaching Service Commission announced measures to keep schools safe after re-opening, which the Ministry of Basic and Secondary School decided would be September 2020. Critical measures to prevent COVID-19 included requiring pupils to wear facemasks on the school premises, schools to have proper water, and sanitation hygiene (WASH) facilities, including toilets, Veronica buckets and soap; and schools to have a diary of health and safety incidents in and around the school. Schools remained closed, save for a brief re-opening in June and September to allow students to sit for their public exams. Schools fully re-opened later in September 2020. Across the country, the rules and protocols on safe schooling in the environment of COVID-19 were only haphazardly applied.

Research indicated very few schools enforced or observed all the rules on safe schooling in the environment of COVID-19. Across the country, the requirements for all students to always wear facemasks, the availability of WASH facilities, and the requirement that students and teachers always wash their hands were highly flouted.

Regarding WASH facilities, schools in the Western Area, and in the district headquarter towns fared reasonably well in terms of availability of Veronica buckets and soap, and toilets. Private schools mostly have Veronica buckets and soap, and the rule to wash hands was regularly enforced.

Outside Freetown, and in the rural areas outside the district headquarter towns, the majority of the schools have no WASH facilities. In the constituencies outside Port Loko, for instance, out of 15 schools monitored, only 3 had Veronica buckets and soap. In the constituencies outside Kailahun, only 5 of the 15 schools monitored had Veronica buckets and soap. In the constituencies outside Pujehun, only 4 of the of 15 schools monitored

had Veronica buckets and soap. In the constituencies outside Kambia town, only 6 of the 15 schools monitored had Veronica buckets and soap. Overall, the requirement that students and teachers always wash their hands is highly flouted.

Many countries have closed schools since the COVID-19 outbreak, disrupting the learning and education of hundreds of millions of students. Schools provide important spaces for children and their families to learn about hygiene, appropriate hand washing techniques, and coping with situations that will break routines. Without access to schools, this prime responsibility falls on parents, guardians, and caregivers.

The right to education is articulated in several international human rights documents, most prominently the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, Article 26, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) articles 28 and 29, and the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) articles 13 and 14.

UNESCO recommended that states “adopt a variety of hi-tech, low-tech and no tech solutions to assure the continuity of learning.” In Sierra Leone, internet access, costs of internet connectivity, technical capacity and unfamiliarity impeded the call for teachers and tertiary education instructors to use online learning platforms.

These issues prevented a great many students from accessing lessons and instructors during the school closures. The lack of capacity of most instructors, availability of internet platforms, etc. resulted in a failed attempt to host online learning at all levels of education.

In May 2020, Veronica (last name not revealed because of an ongoing court case) hired a private teacher for her 12-year old daughter, who had been out of school since the end of March 2020 when schools were closed under COVID-19 prevention measures. In July 2020, Veronica found out the teacher had raped the small girl. Veronica said, “I was shocked at this man’s behaviour. I didn’t want my daughter to be idle and sitting around without learning during the shut down. If it weren’t for the schools being closed, I would have never met and hired this teacher, who turned out to be so bad.” After Veronica found out about the rape, she made a report to the Police and the matter is before the courts while the accused remains in prison without bail.

COVID-19 and children

Children have inalienable rights outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and domesticated under the Child Rights Act.

In a Save the Children global survey from September 2020, they found:

Right to information and to be heard: Slightly less than half (46%) the children said they were listened to when talking to their family about COVID-19, only one-third (34%) said their opinion was asked, and only 2 in 3 (65%) were able to ask questions about COVID-19. **Freedom of association:** More than half (54%) the children reported not keeping in touch with friends.

Right to play and leisure: More than one-third (35%) of the parents and caregivers reported that their child does not have access to outside space to play. 2 in 5 (42%) children reported playing less than before the pandemic. Half (51%) the children reported doing more chores than before and just under half (48%) reported caring for siblings more than before COVID-19.

Right to life, survival and development: One-third of the children reported eating food less than before (35%). Only 1 in 5 (19%) parents and caregivers reported no barriers to accessing food/medicine, and food was too expensive for half (52%) the households. More than half (55%) the households reported they had no sanitiser/soap and 1 in 5 (20%) had no water.

Well-being: Almost three quarters (74%) of the children reported feeling more worried than before the pandemic, almost 2 in 3 (62%) children felt less happy and almost 1 in 2 (47%) felt less hopeful than before. More than half felt more bored (60%) and more sad (59%) than before the pandemic. Half (51%) the children surveyed reported being deprived of social interaction with their friends and peers- they reported not getting to speak to or meet their friends in person or virtually, during the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus.

Right to adequate standard of living: 2 in 3 (65%) households reported needing money or vouchers, while almost 1 in 5 (19%) needed financial advice/support and 38% needed job/employment support.

Right to education: A quarter (26%) of the parents and caregivers reported not having any learning materials for their children. Children of parents or caregivers with a disability (70%) were more likely to report a lack of learning materials, than children of caregivers or parents without any disability (48%).

Right to protection from violence: A fifth (21%) of parents and caregivers reported using negative or violent parenting with their children. A third (33%) of parents/caregivers with a disability reported that there was violence in the home.

Right to non-discrimination: Analysis between different minority groups found that households with refugee or internally displaced person (IDP) status reported greater risk of school dropout, violence and income loss.

There are three main channels through which children are affected by this crisis: infection with the virus itself; the immediate socioeconomic impacts of measures to stop transmission of the virus; and the potential longer-term effects of delayed implementation of development projects.

Restrictions on justice

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rticle 10 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, states: 1. All persons deprived of their liberty shall be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person.

Articles 17 to 22 of the Sierra Leone Constitution outline citizens rights under the law and within the judicial system.

Court and Judiciary Closures

A remand inmate of the Freetown Correctional Centre was diagnosed with COVID-19 on 26 April 2020. He had appeared before a Magistrate on 17 April 2020, and was sent to the Correctional Centre on 20 April 2020. The inmate said he had escaped from a quarantine centre along Guard Street in Freetown prior to his arrest and appearances in Court. He was Case 90 of COVID-19.

The Chief Justice, on 28 April 2020, announced a raft of COVID-19 preventative measures that included the cessation of all court activities in the Magistrates Courts nationwide for one month effective Tuesday 28 April 2020, to prevent movement of possibly infected persons from police stations to court and court to prisons.

The public notice from the judiciary also stated, "All other civil or criminal cases in magistrates courts are likewise postponed for a month effective 28 April 2020. The police are ready to give police bail as far as possible for new offenders and to hold serious offenders without bail where necessary."

The judiciary announced further measures to contain the spread of COVID-19:

1. The civil high court, which was scheduled to commence work from the 11 May 2020, is hereby postponed to Monday 10 June 2020.
2. The January 2020 criminal session comes to an end with immediate effect.
3. The special criminal sessions, which was scheduled to start on 8 May 2020, is hereby postponed to Thursday 28 May 2020.
4. The May 2020 criminal sessions commencing 18 May 2020 is also postponed to Monday 10 June 2020.

People in prisons, jails, and immigration detention centres frequently do not receive adequate health care under normal circumstances, even in economically developed countries.

Many people in Sierra Leone's jails have not been convicted of a crime but are locked up awaiting trial or simply because they cannot afford to pay the bail set in their case. Prison officials already have difficulty providing inmates appropriate medical care.

Joseph Bangura's brother, Ibrahim, was arrested in February 2020 for allegedly breaking into a house, where he was a security guard. The Police charged the matter to court in early March 2020 and Ibrahim was remanded into custody at the Pademba Road Correctional Centre in Freetown. He made several court appearances but his case was adjourned. By the middle of April 2020, Ibrahim Bangura had been in detention, held without bail, for almost two months. Joseph Bangura, the accused's brother, said, "The court sessions were cancelled for Ibrahim and he stayed in prison. We wanted a court date to arrange bail. He served extra time because the courts were closed." Ibrahim Bangura was granted bail in July 2020, after spending five months in detention.

Protect people in custody

COVID-19, like other infectious diseases, poses a higher risk to populations that live in close proximity to each other. This risk is particularly acute in places of detention, such as prisons, jails, as well as residential institutions for people with disabilities and nursing facilities for older people, where the virus can spread rapidly, especially if access to health care is already poor.

States have an obligation to ensure medical care for those in their custody at least equivalent to that available to the general population, and must not deny detainees equal access to preventive, curative or palliative health care.

In nursing facilities and other settings with large numbers of older people, visitor policies should balance the protection of older and at-risk residents with their need for family and connection.

The diminished functioning or closure of courts and related criminal justice services

had a direct negative impact on the provision of timely, open and fair hearings, and contributed to case backlogs and further delays in adjudicating charges. The court closures and reduced court operations also resulted in the prolonged detention of pre-trial detainees or of prisoners eligible for early release, for example if bail or parole hearings were postponed. Persons detained while emergency measures are in place to contain the virus may not be brought before a judge in a timely manner.

Prison riot

The Sierra Leone Correctional Service (SLCS) came into being following the passing into law of the Sierra Leone Correctional Service Act 2014, which repealed the Ordinance of 1960 and put into extinction the Sierra Leone Prisons Service. Previous prison service had a punitive focus in its approach to dealing with inmates. The current structure was designed to institutionalize the process of Reformation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration of inmates, although the Act of 2014 only made provision “to establish the Sierra Leone Correctional Service, to introduce provisions for the organization and management of correctional centres and for other related matters.”

The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare the inherent challenges associated with maintaining public health behind bars, where social distancing is severely curtailed. It also exposed the additional risks posed not only to detainees and their custodians but to surrounding communities—their families, case workers, and criminal justice service providers in and outside the courtroom or jail cell.

Inmates at the Correctional Centre on Pademba Road in Freetown set fire to walls. Security guards shot live ammunition in response. According to information received by Amnesty International, a prison officer was hit by a stray bullet, resulting in his death. Freetown’s prison was originally built for a capacity of less than 300 prisoners but today it houses more than 1,500 inmates.

Amnesty International reported, “Even in times of emergency, law enforcement officials may only use force that is necessary and proportionate to achieve a legitimate objective, and must minimize harm and damage. International standards on the use of force require that intentional lethal force is only used where it is strictly unavoidable to protect another life from an imminent threat.”

Marta Colomer, Amnesty International West and Central Africa Deputy Director, said, “The riot shows that prisoners are becoming increasingly desperate at the government’s inaction to protect their right to health. There must be a prompt, thorough, impartial and effective investigation into the reasons that led to the riot and the heavy-handed response from prison guards who used live ammunition. The use of force even resulted in the death of at least one prison officer who was reportedly hit by a stray bullet.

The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoner, dubbed the “Nelson Mandela Rules”, states in rule one of its basic principles that: “... no prisoner shall be subjected to, and all prisoners shall be protected from, torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, for which no circumstances whatsoever may be invoked as a justification ...”.

Quarantine and Isolation Centres

International human rights law, notably the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), requires that restrictions on rights for reasons of public health or national emergency be lawful, necessary, and proportionate. Restrictions such as mandatory quarantine or isolation of symptomatic people must, at a minimum, be carried out in accordance with the law. They must be strictly necessary to achieve a legitimate objective, based on scientific evidence, proportionate to achieve that objective, neither arbitrary nor discriminatory in application, of limited duration, respectful of human dignity, and subject to review.

Broad quarantines and lockdowns of indeterminate length rarely meet these criteria and are often imposed precipitously, without ensuring the protection of those under quarantine – especially at-risk populations. Because such quarantines and lockdowns are difficult to impose and enforce uniformly, they are often arbitrary or discriminatory in application.

Public health and legal experts indicate, “Voluntary self-isolation measures [combined with education, widespread screening, and universal access to treatment] are more likely to induce cooperation and protect public trust than coercive measures and are more likely to prevent attempts to avoid contact with the healthcare system.”

In Makeni, 24 people were detained and moved to treatment centres from two adjacent compounds when a 90-year old man died. The mostly women and children ranged in age from 3-months to 80-years. The old man was not tested for COVID-19 and only one of the persons moved to the treatment centre tested positive. The 24 people spent 17-days in a holding facility.

Restrictions on religion

Ban on Congregational Worship

Article 18 of the UN Declaration on Human Rights states: Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance. Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, notes: 1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.

On 20 March 2020, before the State of Emergency was enacted, the Ministry of Social Welfare closed all places of worship until further notice.

Just prior to the announcement of the COVID-19 index case, the Inter-Religious Council and the Council of Churches in Sierra Leone (CCSL) announced their support for the government's directives to prevent COVID-19.

The directives included:

- No worship services in all churches and mosques till further notice
- No weddings and funerals in religious places of worship
- Safe and dignified funeral services must be limited to 25 people and should be held at funeral homes or a mortuary.
- Avoid handshakes. Greet others by placing your right hand on your chest.
- Avoid crowded places.
- Wash our hands regularly (as often as possible) for not less than 20 (twenty) seconds.
- All religious places to use Veronica buckets and soap at all entrances.
- Use sanitizers at all times
- Cover up our mouth and nostrils when sneezing and coughing

On 13 July 2020, the President announced that places of worship would re-open. On 26 July 2020, Government lifted further aspects of the ban on church and mosque services, including holding funeral services.

The worship centres should also be cleaned and disinfected in between services. Every worshipper must either use soap to wash his/her hands or apply sanitizers before being allowed to enter the church or mosque. Veronica buckets, soap and water or hand

sanitizers should be provided at the entrance of every church or mosque. Mosques authorities are to ensure that footwear are well kept within the premises of the mosques. The temperature of every worshipper must be taken before admission into the church or mosque.

Anybody with a high temperature (37.5C/99.5F) should not be allowed into the church or mosque; but advised to go and seek medical attention. Everyone in the place of worship must properly wear a facemask during worship. Masks should not be removed or lowered when speaking or singing.

There must be the use of sanitizers in Mosques/Churches as appropriate. All places of worship must not exceed 50% of the original capacity. Churches and mosques should map out the seating arrangements in the place of worship to ensure this. For Mosques in public market locations with huge turnout of worshippers, congregational prayers should be done in batches holding at most 50% of the capacity of the mosques to ensure effective adherence to social distancing.

There should be a gap of 30 minutes between one Church service and another where there are multiple services to avoid crowding. Handshaking and hugging are to be avoided before, during and after the worship. Social distancing should be maintained during counselling. Communion will be served row after row, and in individual cups or by intinction. Strict physical distancing of at least six feet must always be maintained by choristers. Offering bags/plates will be taken from row to row to avoid movement of people. Standing or individual microphones should be used at all times to avoid cross infection. Social distancing should be observed in the sitting arrangement with 2 metres gap between worshippers. A seating arrangement should be marked and guided by the Church or Mosque. A church service must not exceed one and a half hours. In the case of the Muslims each daily prayer time should not exceed fifteen minutes while the Juma prayer must not exceed thirty minutes.

Since congregational worship resumed at churches and mosques, compliance with the mandated COVID-19 measures has been "poorly" observed; according to a large majority of respondents surveyed. An average of 79% of the respondents surveyed across the country say the measures on safe congregational worship in churches and mosques is "poorly" observed. Our monitors who visited churches and mosques as participant observers observed that the majority of churches and mosques have the essential COVID-19 WASH facility; and many people endeavour to use it. However, our monitors note, that hardly any church or mosque is taking the temperature of worshippers before admission into the church or mosque, as required by NaCOVERC. Our monitors note that churches and mosques are not being cleaned and disinfected in between services, as required. In the rural areas, most churches and mosques do not have the essential COVID-19 WASH facility.

Restrictions on social and economic services

Public Spaces, Bars and Restaurants, Markets

Article 27(1) of the UNDHR states: Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits. In the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Article 3, it states: The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to ensure the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights set forth in the present Covenant.

And, Article 6(1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, states: The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right to work, which includes the right of everyone to the opportunity to gain his living by work which he freely chooses or accepts, and will take appropriate steps to safeguard this right. In an announcement by NaCOVERC on Wednesday 24 June 2020, more restrictive measures were announced related mostly to the operations of bars, restaurants, banks, shops, supermarkets; and public and private offices. All bars and restaurants are required to operate between the hours of 7am and 10pm and apply social distancing and hand washing measures. Customers were not allowed to sit at the bar in such establishments. All staff in bars and restaurants must have masks on properly at all times while attending to customers. Social distancing in bars and restaurants will require a distance of at least 3 feet (1 metre) between individuals while sitting or standing and 6 feet (2 metres) between tables.

Compliance with the measures for safe public spaces was generally poor across the country. The vast majority of people were not adhering to the rules regarding hand washing, wearing masks and keeping social distance in such public spaces as markets, public and private offices, bars, and restaurants.

An average of 97% of the respondents in a survey by ThinkAfrica said the vast majority of people were not adhering to the rules on safe public spaces.

Freetown recorded the lowest percentage of people who said the rules regarding safe public spaces were been respected at 63% of the respondents.

At bars and restaurants, the required distance of at least 3 feet (1 metre) between individuals, while sitting or standing is not adhered to. Similarly, the required distance of 6 feet (2 metres) between tables is not adhered to.

Supermarkets in Freetown generally enforced the rules on hand washing and wearing facemasks. Apart from supermarkets, the measures on safe public spaces are generally

being ignored. Supermarkets were also targets of police enforcement, which often involved questionable charges and under-the-table payments.

The COVID-19 outbreak has negatively impacted the financial sector and business activities. According to the COVID-19 Quick Action Economic Response Programme (QAERP) of the government, the Government expected to lose Le583 billion, representing 9% of projected domestic revenues in 2020. Under Scenario 2, the Government is expected to lose Le965 billion or 15% of projected domestic revenues for 2020. In Scenario 3, the extreme case, when the outbreak is widespread, the revenue loss will increase further.

Businesses restricted

Article 23 of the UN Declaration on Human Rights notes:

- (1) Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.
- (2) Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.
- (3) Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.
- (4) Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.

And, Article 25 of the UNDHR states: (1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

Article 1(1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, states: All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

Section 8(2-3) of the Sierra Leone Constitution states: (2) In furtherance of the Social Order— a. every citizen shall have equality of rights, obligations, and opportunities before the law, and the State shall ensure that every citizen has an equal right and access to all opportunities and benefits based on merit; (3) The State shall direct its policy towards ensuring that— a. every citizen, without discrimination on any

grounds whatsoever, shall have the opportunity for securing adequate means of livelihood as well as adequate opportunities to secure suitable employment; b. conditions of service and work are fair, just and humane and that there are adequate facilities for leisure and for social, religious and cultural life; c. the health, safety and welfare of all persons in employment are safeguarded and not endangered or abused, and in particular that special provisions be made for working women with children, having due regard to the resources of the State;

According to a report by Sanusi Research conducted for The Infinity Crew Project, "The cost and impact of COVID-19 in Sierra Leone", conducted among 1,102 adults in Sierra Leone from 1-15 September 2020, a large majority of Sierra Leoneans report they have lost income due to the Coronavirus outbreak and nearly four-in-ten report they have lost their jobs to the global pandemic.

Eight in 10 Sierra Leoneans say they have lost income to the Coronavirus outbreak. People in Kailahun, Karene, Bombali, Falaba, Koinadugu, and Western Urban are more likely to report loss of income. Forty-two percent of Sierra Leoneans described themselves as extremely affected by the crisis caused by the Coronavirus outbreak.

When asked if they have lost income to the global pandemic, 84% among men and 82% among women answered "Yes". People 60+ (86%) are the most likely group to answer "Yes" compared to those aged 45-59 (84%), 30-44 (84%) and 18-29 (83%). Among the districts, almost everyone in Kailahun (99%) has lost income because of the disease, followed by Karene (98%), Bombali (93%), Falaba (93%), Koinadugu (92%), Western Urban (91%), Western Rural (86%), Kambia (85%), Bo (82%), Kenema (80%), Port Loko (74%), Tonkolili (74%), Kono (74%), Moyamba (71%), Bonthe (67%) and Pujehun (47%). Moreover, men and people above sixty years old are the most likely groups to describe themselves as extremely affected.

Seven in 10 Sierra Leoneans say they have not received assistance from government, organizations or individuals to help them deal with the impact of the Coronavirus outbreak. As we heard in the interviews, basic necessities such as food and medicine have not been supplied to communities across the country amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

Coronavirus impact on the formal economy has not been severe as the informal economy. It seems that jobs lost so far to the Coronavirus outbreak have been concentrated in the private sector, especially travelling, hotels, restaurants, entertainment and mining sectors. The public sector, the biggest employer in the formal economy, has not experienced the kind of job losses that take place in the hospitality and mining industries. Nearly four in 10 Sierra Leoneans report they have lost their jobs to the

Isatu Kamara manages a beachfront restaurant along the Lumley Beach Road in Freetown. She said, "Nothing could be worse for this business than the closures and COVID-19 prevention regulations. We lost business. People couldn't come to eat and drink. We will probably have to close. We can't pay staff and I've gone without salary for months." There are countless beach bars, restaurants and hotels along the Beach Road and they all suffered financial losses under the COVID-19 prevention measures. Restaurants sat empty. Hotels laid off staff. Associated businesses, street sellers, drinks suppliers, food retailers were all affected by the regulations.

Coronavirus outbreak. The impact on income is more severe for those who depend on unstable and insecure sources of income, including small traders, street vendors and casual workers. People who depend on remittances are also strongly affected.

According to an ECOWAS statement, there has been a huge disruption to sources of income in the informal sector and for women. Daily income-generating activities, particularly in the informal sector, have been severely disrupted in most ECOWAS countries. In more than 90% of cases, households reported that the restriction measures have had a negative impact on household incomes. For 44% of them, the impact has been significant or even severe.

Female-headed households appear to be more affected. In fact, 42% of households in ECOWAS countries reported having lost their jobs following the introduction of restrictive measures, compared to 37% in male-headed households.

Informal work (casual workers, daily workers, trade, own business) and producers of fresh agricultural products (market gardening) are the most affected by the loss of employment and reduction in salary following the restrictive measures put in place by the Governments. In addition, about a quarter of households have developed a number of strategies to cope with this situation, including recourse to a secondary source of income.

Widespread job and income loss and economic insecurity are likely to increase rates of child labour, sexual exploitation, teenage pregnancy, and child marriage. Stresses on families, particularly those living under quarantines, lockdowns and other restrictions on freedom of movement, may increase the incidence of violence in the home.

Growth of the trade and tourism industries in Sierra Leone was projected at 5.0% in 2020 and over the medium term. As travel restrictions take effect and major global airlines stop flights, there has been a vast reduction in tourist numbers and even a complete halt as several countries have introduced severe 'lock downs'.

Sierra Leone's tourism industry is lackluster at best and accounts for very little in the overall GDP. A further collapse in tourism will negatively affect occupancy rates, turnover and income of hotels, restaurants, tour operators, small businesses and other sectors that are linked to the hospitality sector. The consequence would include redundancies of staff and reduced demand in other sectors.

It will also reduce the volume of foreign exchange earned in the sector, and that could have a negative effect on currency and tax revenue from the sector, according to a Government fiscal plan. The timing of the outbreak could not be worse for the tourism sector in Sierra Leone, with flows usually peaking close to the Easter, Independence and Christmas periods.

Thus, the initial projection of 5.0% growth for trade and tourism in 2020 is now revised downwards to 2.5% and 2.0% over the medium-term.

Curfews

Since the institution of the State of Emergency, the government ordered a nightly curfew, which changed slightly over the course of the year. The curfew began with restrictions from 9pm to 5am.

One of the measures instituted very early on by the Government of Sierra Leone was a nightly curfew on 14 April 2020, to restrict peoples' movement after dark. Harold Thomas, the Communications lead for the National COVID-19 Emergency Response Centre (NaCOVERC) said they instituted a curfew between 9pm and 6am. The time of the curfew eventually was adjusted to 10pm to 5am. It was again adjusted on 17 February 2021 to 11pm to 5am. In Freetown, market opening hours were limited to between 7am and 7pm. Banks could only open between 9am and 3pm and civil servants could work between 9 and 4pm. Public transport vehicles were allowed to operate at limited times of the day. The curfew was later extended to midnight and finally lifted on 24 March 2021. The curfews negatively impacted a large sector of local businesses who rely on late and early commerce including market women, delivery personnel, commercial sex workers, street traders and newspaper printers/vendors. Their incomes and freedom to movement suffered under the curfew.

Aminata Sannoh operates a cookery/eatery at night near the Youyi Building in downtown Freetown. She was arrested on a Monday night for violating the curfew. She was detained at Central Police Station. Aminata's family had to pay Le150,000 in the morning to the police, according to Aminata, to gain her release from custody. Sannoh said she lost her market to the police, who ate her food. She was not able to sell for over a month because she lost money and had to start again.

Tombo fishing riots

On Wednesday 6 May 2020, following a nationwide three-day lockdown, hundreds of angry fishermen and youths from the fishing town of Tombo set fire to the Family Support Unit (FSU) of the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) and community hospital. The main police station was vandalized and sporadic gunfire erupted after a gang of youths attacked security personnel and government property.

Sources indicate the riot started after the authorities instructed that only 15 boats out of over 400 were permitted to go fishing because of the COVID19 restrictions. The restriction was supposedly introduced to curb the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, limiting the number of vessels permitted to go out to sea to 15, with hundreds waiting to set sail. This measure, which had previously not been announced to the public, angered the fishermen, who proceeded to attack a police station, health centre, and the house of the local community chief.

Amnesty International, on 8 May 2020, noted, the violence in Tombo, a usually quiet fishing village, was as a result of a pronouncement of the Emergency Operation Centre personnel who told the fishermen that their number of fishing boats will be regulated to observe social distancing. The fishermen defied the pronouncement and attacked the police station and hospital including destruction of lives and other properties.

Recommendations:

Many countries have adopted, within their available resources, fiscal, financial and economic measures to mitigate the negative impact of COVID-19 on their populations. Examples include:

- Provision of emergency water supplies to slum areas and communities;
- Preserving jobs and wages through targeted economic measures, in some cases close to providing universal income, and support to employers and businesses;
- Providing or extending paid sick leave to workers;
- Ensuring workers have adequate resources and infrastructure to work remotely;
- Providing educational facilities to students and ensuring online capacity of institutions;
- Securing emergency shelter for the homeless.
- Expanding domestic violence responses for victims of abuse.

But not all States have the resources to provide sufficient protection to everyone.

Recommendations to the Government of Sierra Leone

Respect for human rights during the public health emergency

While applying the public health prevention and containment measures, the government of Sierra Leone should ensure that any restriction of rights are in proportion to preventing and containing the spread of the virus. Such rights as the right to privacy, physical security, liberty, freedoms of movement, assembly and religion as well as the socio-economic rights to work and education could be seriously affected due to the travel restrictions, physical distancing, medical testing, lockdowns and quarantine measures. These restrictions should be temporary and should expire upon the achievement of the objectives of prevention and containment of the spread of the virus. The restrictions on rights should not have a disproportionate impact on vulnerable groups including petty traders, people with disabilities, small businesses, the homeless, or women and children.

Ensure humanitarian aid continues

The government of Sierra Leone should ensure that support for vital humanitarian operations carried out by local and international non-governmental organizations and other aid agencies does not suffer as a result of COVID-19 preventive measures. The Government should not exploit the coronavirus pandemic to criminalize or obstruct the work of civil society organizations.

Target economic relief to low-wage workers and the informal sector

The government of Sierra Leone should develop policies to buffer the economic impacts of COVID-19, which will affect lower-wage workers and the informal sector first and hardest. Government's financial support to the hospitality sector is commendable, and we recommend that other sectors be targeted in the future. Social distancing, quarantine, and the closure of businesses may have enormous economic consequences. Governments should create mechanisms so that women affected by COVID-19 do not suffer loss of income.

Where there is evidence of economic loss, the Government should consider a method of compensation to those severely affected such as market traders, importers, etc.

Respect freedom of expression and the right to information

Governments should fully respect the rights to freedom of expression and access to credible, accurate and trusted information.

The government of Sierra Leone should ensure that the information they provide through response centres, MDAs, etc. to the public regarding COVID-19 is accurate, timely, and consistent with human rights principles. The government should adequately address false and misleading information in a timely fashion.

All information about COVID-19 should be accessible and available in multiple languages, including for those with low or no literacy. This could include qualified sign language interpretation for televised announcements; websites that are accessible to people with vision, hearing, learning, and other disabilities; and telephone-based services. Communications should utilize plain language to maximize understanding. Age appropriate information should be provided to children.

Health data is particularly sensitive and privacy rights should be respected at all times. The publication of information online can pose a significant risk. Rights-based legal safeguards should govern the appropriate use and handling of personal health data. Reliable and cost effective access to the internet should be maintained and the government of Sierra Leone should take steps to ensure internet access be available to people with low incomes from across the country.

Restrictions on the right to movement

The government of Sierra Leone should avoid sweeping and overly broad restrictions on movement and personal liberty. Any mandatory restrictions should only be employed when scientifically warranted and necessary. There should be mechanisms for support for

those affected including economic support, psycho-social resources and infrastructural facilities.

When quarantines or lockdowns are imposed, the government should ensure access to food, water, health care, and care-giving support.

The government of Sierra Leone should provide adequate infrastructure or policy support during any mandatory lockdowns or stay-at-home orders.

Government strategies should minimize disruption in services to the elderly and people with disabilities.

Ensuring the healthcare sector

The government of Sierra Leone should ensure health care is available to all, accessible without discrimination, affordable, respectful of medical ethics, culturally appropriate, and of good quality, at all times but especially during a health crisis.

The Government should ensure that health workers have access to appropriate protective equipment and that social protection programs are in place for the families of workers who die or become ill as a result of their work, and ensure such programs include informal workers.

Respecting the right to education

The government of Sierra Leone should ensure children are not overly negatively impacted by a State of Emergency or health crisis.

Online learning should be used to mitigate the closures of schools at higher and tertiary institutions. The government should ensure equal and reliable access to online learning platforms and ensure the capacity of teachers and lecturers.

The Government should require schools to attempt to recover or make up for missed in-person class time, missed curriculum, etc. once schools reopen.

Governments should adopt measures to mitigate the disproportionate effects on children who already experience barriers to education, or who are marginalized for various reasons – including girls, those with disabilities, children in rural areas and other inequalities.

The Government should focus on adopting strategies that support all students through closures – for example, monitoring students most at risk and ensuring students receive

printed or online materials.

Education officials should focus attention on incidents of child labour or child marriage and ensure all children return to school.

School closures may also leave low-income families struggling to make ends meet and provide necessities. Governments should guarantee continued meal provision during school closures for children in low-income families who will miss subsidized meals.

Recommendations for the Judiciary

Recommendations on detention

Persons in any form of detention have the same right to health as the non-incarcerated population and are entitled to the same standards of prevention and treatment.

Government agencies with authority over inmates in prisons, jails, and detention centres should consider reducing their populations through appropriate supervised or early release of low-risk category of detainees including for example, those whose scheduled release may be soon, those who are in pre-trial detention for non-violent and lesser offenses, or whose continued detention is similarly unnecessary or not justified. Detained individuals at high risk of suffering serious effects from the virus, such as older people and people with underlying health conditions, should also be considered for similar release.

Correctional Services should publicly disclose their plans of action to reduce the risk of coronavirus infection in their facilities and the steps they will take to contain the infection and protect prisoners, prison staff, and visitors.

Correctional Services should provide appropriate hygiene training and supplies and ensure all areas are disinfected regularly. They should develop plans for housing people exposed to or infected with the virus. Detention centres should consider alternative strategies such as video conferencing for individuals to be able to connect with family or legal counsel.

The judiciary should resort to non-custodial sanctions and release of selected categories of prisoners as necessary. Reducing numbers in pre-trial detention, those detained for minor or political offences, near the end of their sentences, or detained unlawfully should be expedited. Those who cannot be released must have adequate health care.

Recommendations for the Police

Lockdown orders and curfew restrictions should not be enforced through arrests; instead, police should give oral or written warnings whenever possible, and the police role should focus on public education.

While citations and fines may at times be appropriate, the government should be cognizant of the hardship posed by fines during a period of economic crisis, and should consider suspending payment requirements during the crisis.

The government and Police management should make every effort to protect police from becoming infected with the coronavirus. This involves police education, supplies and increased support.

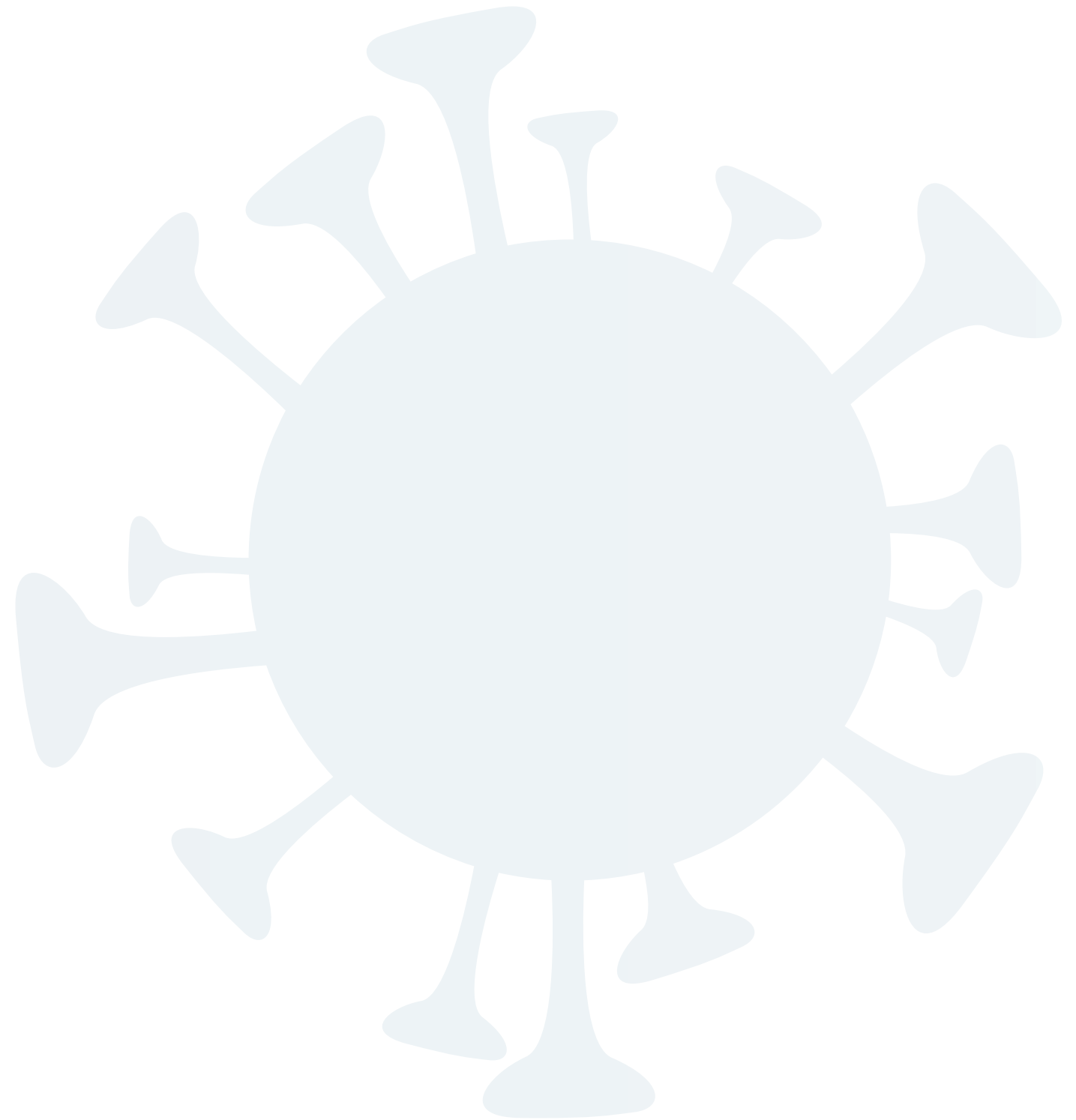
Police measures requiring close proximity or physical contact between police personnel and members of the public should be suspended, except in cases where the failure to stop, search, or arrest a person creates an imminent danger to society.

The Police should ensure a consistent, appropriate and safe response across all departments of personnel in the response to restrictions.

Recommendations to civil society

CSO's must be strategic about the actions that they take based on their resources, capacity, relationships, and function. If an organization chooses to act, they should do so in a way that will make a positive contribution that complements or intensifies the work of others, including the actions taken by public officials.

An organization should create a crisis management team tasked with monitoring the crisis, protecting staff, adjust operations, and engage in response and recovery efforts.





2021

JULY

MITIGATING THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON SIERRA LEONE'S 2023 ELECTIONS:

A SELF SCORING REPORT BY ELECTIONS MANAGEMENT BODIES

IGR



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1. Background

This report presents the results of a self-assessment conducted by Sierra Leone's Elections Management Bodies (EMBs) on the implications of COVID-19 on the upcoming general elections. The report also assesses progress on the implementation of some of the recommendations made by International Observer Missions (IOM) of the 2018 election and ask whether EMBs are on track for the upcoming elections.

As of May 2021, there were 4,100 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 79 deaths in Sierra Leone. In a number of countries, the negative implications arising from adjustments to governance processes during COVID have led to increased social anxieties, restive tensions and/or riots. Sierra Leone's experience mirrors a similar trends in other countries. Following the announcement of the country's COVID Index case on 31st March, 2020, the country's first governance adjustment move was a declaration of a State-of-Emergency by Government. The breadth of governance processes and norms affected by the State-of-Emergency declaration raised fears for the implications for the limits of executive authority, protection of fundamental human rights, service delivery contestations between central and local government, Parliament's law making and oversight roles, and social accountability. In the course of preparing this scorecard there were already squabbles over some of these issues; including opposition parties' contestation of the State-of-Emergency powers as well as Civil Society organisations' criticism of proposed regulations on the management of COVID-19 response funds.

Additionally, the measures to contain the spread of COVID-19, and treatment services entail protocols that restrict the movement and gathering of people, and forcible quarantine; clearly at variance with enshrined constitutional rights. Where these restrictions are seen as overly burdensome, they can have implications for uptake of government response policies as well as implications for peace and security. There were fears that Covid-19 will affect the implementation of key 2018 EOM recommendations before the next election as well as potentially upend electoral processes (including delays in electoral timelines and activities, limited electoral resources due to prioritization of the Covid-19, etc.). More alarm signals were raised after the announcement of the conduct of a mid-term population and housing census. The census data will be crucial for delineating constituencies and defining the new electoral map for the 2023 elections.

For a fledgling democracy with state institutions and governance processes still pursuing maturity and consolidation, it is critical that governance adjustments created by the pandemic are purposively tracked, so that their implications and ramifications are better managed. Funded by Irish Aid, this self-Scoring by EMBs is intended to support the government of Sierra Leone to work with civil society to mitigate possible overreach of the COVID-19 State of Emergency measures and

ensure that conditions for free, fair, peaceful and timely elections in 2023 are not derailed by the COVID response.

Moreover, following the 2018 general and parliamentary elections in Sierra Leone, International Election Observers Mission (EOM) released their final reports with recommendations for improving future elections in the country. The recommendations were comprehensive: addressing issues ranging from existing gaps in the regulatory framework, the electoral administration, voter registration, and candidate nomination, to electoral disputes, campaign environment and financing, media, participation of women, counting and tabulation, and issues of human rights.

Most EMBs have been working on these recommendations, which are largely seen as the gold standard for making the 2023 elections more credible, peaceful, transparent, and participatory. As such, the extent in which progress is being made on these recommendations provides an important marker in Sierra Leone's efforts to further deepen and consolidate democracy. Six EMBs engaged in self and shadow scoring to assess the response they have made to these recommendations as well as steps they are taking to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 on preparedness to conduct the 2023 elections. This scorecard details the state of preparedness of EMBs for the elections, notes the gaps and provides target recommendations on areas of focus for the next assessment to ensure that the next elections turn out well.

2. Summary

Overall, Elections Management Bodies (EMBs) say that COVID-19 will have little to no effect on the 2023 elections; the elections will go on as planned and they have made nearly 70 percent progress in meeting the 50 indicators assessed by this scorecard. While they receive high marks on key EOM requirements for readiness for transparency, acceptance of results and professionalism, they acknowledged that much more needs to be done to ensure women's effective participation, both as voters and contestants in the 2023 elections.

Overall preparedness to conduct the 2023 elections in the COVID context stands at 67%, pointing to a minimal effect of the pandemic and a general willingness among the six EMBs assessed to conduct timely elections. Below are other key Results and areas for improvement:

- Overall, Sierra Leone is 67% ready to go ahead with the 2023 elections. Experts' assessment were a little lower (61%) than inter-institutional scores (73%) and self-assessments (70%).

- Significant progress has been made in ensuring acceptance (81%), transparency (81%), professionalism (75%) and security (73%) of elections. These gains should be maintained.
- Participation of women and marginalised groups was ranked lowest (49%). Meaning, unless there is a deliberate action for an inclusive electoral process, all hopes for greater inclusion of women, youths and persons with disability in elections could not be realised by 2023. EMBs reported low progress (29%) in the realisation of women's 30% quota representation and there are no elections outreach programme in the school curricular.
- There are strong concerns about the professionalism of security officers in responding for elections related tensions and violence.
- Provision of timely and adequate resources to the EMBs was rated low, at 50%.
- Professionalism and fairness of ad-hoc electoral staff employed by EMBs and CSO monitors were flagged as a potential source of risk.
- EMBs reported that implementation of most of the recommendations of International Election Observer Missions will require legislative action by parliament which is slow at the moment.

Women's low participation in the electoral space has long been a cause for concern, with the numbers of women elected into public office declining over the last three electoral cycles. From a high of 15% in 2002, the numbers have dropped by one percentage point each subsequent election– 14% in 2007, 13% in 2012, to the current 12% in 2018. Without deliberate steps taken to safeguard and enhance women's participation, there is a strong chance that this trend will continue in the next election as well.

3.The Scorecard Methodology

The 50 scorecard indicators were drawn from two sources: a) from the EUOM recommendations relating to: Integrity, Participation, Lawfulness (rule of law) Impartiality and Fairness, Independence, Professionalism, Transparency, Timeliness and Regularity, Acceptance and Security; and b) from key conditions EMBs think should be in place to make 2023 elections timely and credible. We noted that most of the EOM recommendations were already integrated into strategic plans on EMBs; some will require legal reforms that may not be achieved in this electoral term. Each of the indicator had associated sub-indicators, for a total of fifty sub-indicators with progress assigned on a scale of one to ten, with one, being no action, and ten, indicating completion (table 1).

Table 1: Indicator Rating

Rating	Meaning/implications
1	No Action
2	Very weak progress
3	Weak progress
4	Below average
5	Average
6	Above average
7	Good progress
8	Very good progress
9	Almost completed
10	Completed

The indicators for the score-card were jointly designed and validated by the EMBs to ensure full ownership. A three-step process was followed: two meetings were held to discuss, develop and validate the score card with high-level representation of all EMBs, and a final meeting held to validate the scoring. Representation included the Chief Electoral Commissioner, Commissioners and the NEC Executive Secretary, the PPRC Chair and Executive Secretary as well as senior level staff from the Office of National Security (ONS), and National Elections Watch (NEW).

Similarly, scoring was a three-pronged process consisting of institutional self-assessments, scoring of colleague EMBs and independent assessments by election

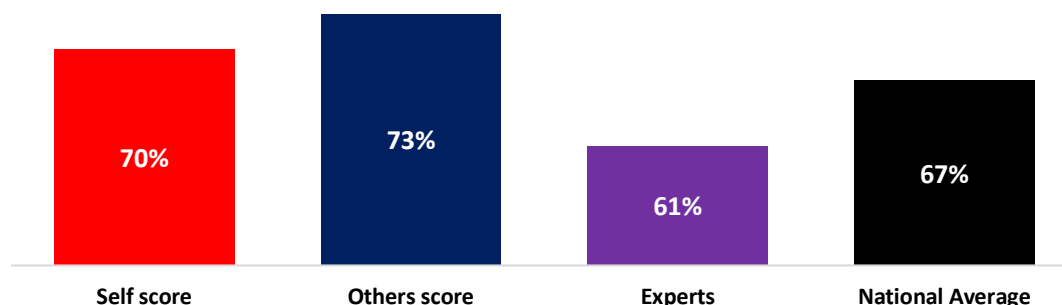
experts. Reported results are an average of these three scores. Scorers also had an opportunity to write comments explaining their ranking and detailing specific recommendations for improvement as well as the bodies responsible. The national average was computed as the average of the self-assessments, institutional scores and the expert ratings.

Another scoring session will be held in xx months, to assess progress made against identified weaknesses in this report.

4. Specific Findings

The EMBs reported an overall average score of 67% across all ten indicators, suggesting some level of preparedness for the elections. In the sections below, we discuss in more detail the various components that make up this aggregate score.

2023 Elections Readiness



4.1. Electoral Integrity

Integrity ahead of the 2023 elections is rated 6.83 or 68.3%. This means that nationally, EMBs have made 'good progress' to ensure the integrity of the 2023 elections. Sierra Leone has developed a legal framework which prevents the EMBs that organise and manage the electoral process from being captured, controlled and manipulated by government, whilst allowing them to operate in a manner that gains public confidence. Electoral integrity for this assessment covered five broad areas including the existence of ethical standards for NEC officials, whether EMB officials conduct themselves professionally, whether a credible system for cross checking results exists and whether there is a transparent and secure process for preventing, detecting, reporting and handling fraud during elections. EMBs were rated highest in terms of neutrality and systems in place for cross checking results; systems to handle electoral fraud and malpractices as well as around ethical requirements were lower (Table 2).

Table 2: Electoral Integrity Indicators

Sub-indicators	Score
3. Do EMB officials apply nomination guidelines and procedures to all political parties and candidates?	8.27
2. Do EMB officials conduct themselves in a professional manner to uphold neutrality in the processes?	7.36
4. Is there an open, reliable and transparent system put in place for cross-checking of results by stakeholders and the public?	6.81
1. Does the legal framework have ethical requirements for NEC officials on electoral processes?	6.19
5. transparent and secure process to handle fraud and malpractices	5.50

4.2. Independence of Elections Management Bodies

To assess the independence of EMBs in the processes leading up to the 2023 elections, we examined four sub-indicators. Independence of Elections Management Bodies received an average national rating of 6, indicating an 'above average' progress. The greatest challenges with the independence of EMBs relate to the timely and adequate provision of resources (rated 5 out of 10), and the lack or non-enforcement of prohibitions against government interference, also rated 5 out of 10.

Table 3: Independence of EMBs

Sub-indicators	Score
24. Is the Procedure for the recruitment of ad hoc electoral staff free from bias?	8.22
27. Is the independence of the EMBs guaranteed and work without political influence?	6.03
25. Clear prohibitions against governance interference	5.49
26. Provision of resources to EMBs timely and adequate?	4.83

4.3. Acceptance of Results

Overall, elections acceptance was measured by the five questions below. The average score for acceptance is 80% which is interpreted as Very Good progress. The basis for public acceptance of the election outcome is shaped by the wider political context in which elections take place; it is not just a function of the quality of the electoral process itself. It is not only election administrators who play a role in facilitating the acceptance of credible election results. According to the constitution, NEC is the principal body charged with running elections.

Table 4: Acceptance

Sub-indicator	Score
43. Do CSOs promptly report their findings on the electoral process?	8.22
44. Is there a clear acceptance of the role of NEC in electoral processes?	8.17
42. Are Codes of conduct subscribed to by contestants?	7.94
45. Are electoral guidelines applied evenly to political parties and candidates?	7.93

4.4. Transparency of the Electoral Process

Overall, EMBs have made a very good progress (8.1 which is 81%) on transparency, although website updates could be improved. Political parties have not complained about lack of transparency in the electoral process.

Table 5: Transparency

Sub-indicator	Score
33. Is the election process transparent & open to public participation?	9.28
34. Are Pre-electoral activities open to independent observers (domestic and international)?	8.82
37. Are the processes for accreditation of elections support agencies such as monitors and international institutions transparent?	8.07
35. Is the Recruitment of ad hoc staff open, transparent and impartial?	7.89
36. Is the Website updated regularly with decisions, procedures, planned measures?	6.24

4.5. Professionalism of Elections Management Bodies

EMBs scored high on engagement with party officials on electoral processes and decisions. However, on questions around recruitment of temporary staff (67.9%) and stakeholders understanding of the election and campaign guidelines (64.2%), they performed less well. More also needs to be done around efficiency of elections funding. For example, some experts believed that funds are not used efficiently. A case in point was on the issue of voter ID cards, which they felt should not be done every five years. Rather a single investment in a card meeting international standards would be preferable.

Table 6: Professionalism

Sub-indicator	Score
28. Do EMBs regularly brief party officials on electoral processes and decisions?	8.91
30. Do EMBs regularly engage party officials/candidates?	8.06
29. Are Funds provided for elections and election-related activities used efficiently and cost effectively?	7.18
32. Has the EMB institutionalised the criteria for recruitment of temporary staff?	6.79
31. Are the election and campaign guidelines understood by electoral stakeholders (political parties and observers)?	6.42

4.6. Security

Elections remain a main trigger of violence and insecurity, and security forces do play a key role in electoral processes in the region. There have been concerns above the conduct of security personnel in responding to political tensions and incidences of violence.

EMBs self-scoring and experts assessments shows a good progress (72%) in the readiness of security for the 2023 elections. Although there are regular consultations and collaboration among EMBs on (88%) on security issues, neutrality of security outfit (55%) and the absence of a strong conflict prevention mechanism (68%) are the greatest areas of concerns. NEC has established an election conflict prevention and mediation network, but the work of this outfit was not assessed in this scoring period. The EMBs together made a strong call for security personnel to show neutrality in providing security to all interest groups.

Table 7: Security

Sub-indicator	Score
47. Is there a Regular consultation and collaboration of EMBs on election security?	8.80
46. Has an election threat assessment been conducted and action plans agreed on to ensure a non-partisan response?	7.88
50. Is the Security provided adequate and suitable for NEC's electoral activities?	7.38
49. Is Conflict prevention and management mainstreamed into electoral activities?	6.76
48. Security outfits neutral in providing election security?	5.48

4.7. Impartiality and Fairness

Overall, EMBs have made 67% (above average) progress in ensuring impartiality and fairness in the 2023 elections. Sierra Leone has a good legal framework provides for the equal treatment of all participants in the electoral process, and includes specific institutional mechanisms to protect electoral integrity. The weakest areas on ensuring fairness and impartiality are the role of ad-hoc election staff in discharging duties (60%); fair application of elections laws to all parties (63%); vehicle movement on elections day (65%) and fairness and impartiality of CSOs monitoring elections (68%). All self-scorers agreed that improvement in the indicators will come from instilling professional conduct within the individual EMBs and the local CSO monitors.

Figure 8: Impartiality and Fairness

Sub-indicator	Score
22. Does the legal/electoral framework provide effective mechanisms and remedies for compliance of electoral laws?	7.56
19. Do the EMBs provide equal access to information on elections and campaign to political parties?	6.92
23. Is the CSO election monitoring structure fair, impartial and trusted by all players?	6.83
21. Are NEC and the police prepared to ensure free but regulated vehicular movement on Election Day?	6.49
20. Are election laws fairly applied to all contesting parties/candidates?	6.30
18. Does NEC ensure that Ad hoc electoral staff discharge their responsibilities in an impartial and fair manner without undue influence?	6.06

4.8. Lawfulness (Rule of Law)

Overall, the EMBs assessed lawfulness in elections as an area of serious concern. The lack of clear provision for elections complaints and queries (59.2%) and capacity of EMBs to enforce codes of ethics of campaigns (50%) were cited as the greatest risks for rule of law. Sierra Leone has an established electoral courts, however the speed in deciding elections disputes remains slow and this may have implications for trust in the electoral system and may give cause to the use of violence as a way of seeking redress.

Table 9: Lawfulness

Sub-indicator	Score
14. Are the powers and functions of EMBs on nominations and campaigns understood by electoral actors including political parties	6.69
15. Does a system exist for all amendments to Election laws, processes and directives including nominations, to be made at least a year before election?	6.65
16. Clear provision for the resolution of complaints and queries	5.92
17. EMBs equipped to ensure commitment to relevant code of ethics for campaigns?	5.08

4.9. Participation

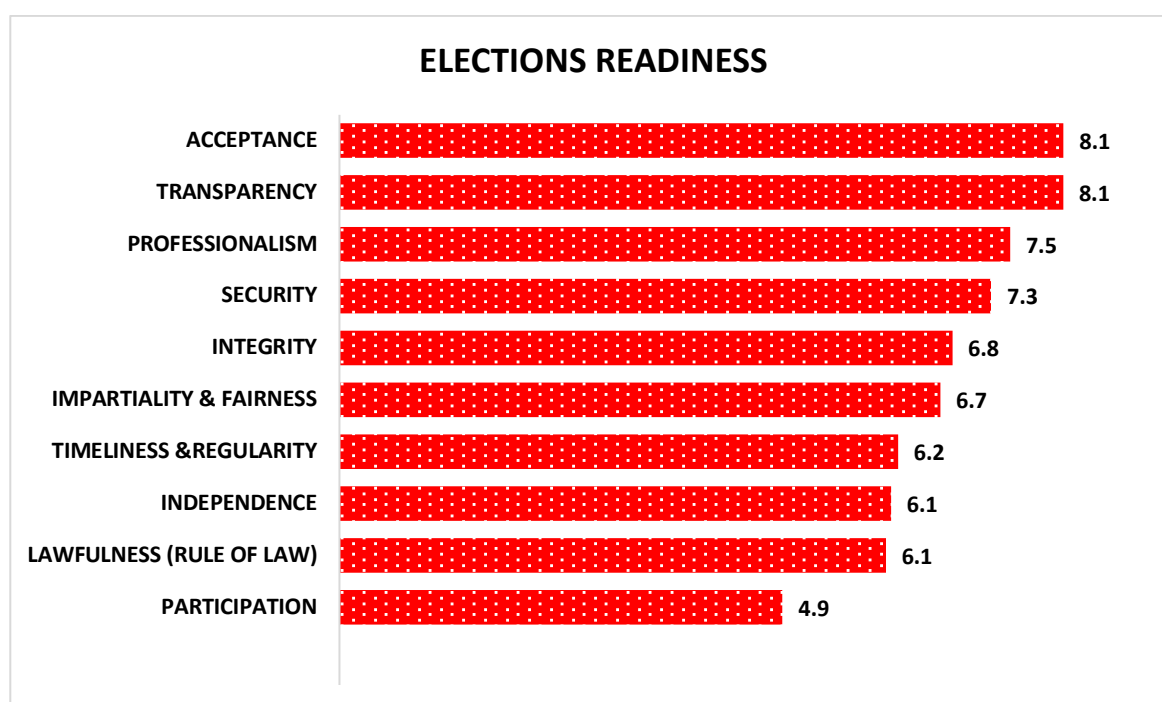
Under participation, EMBs were assessed on the extent in which citizens can participate in electoral processes, both as voters as well as aspirants and contenders. Questions tested EMBs on their inclusiveness of marginalised and under-represented groups, including women, youth and PWDs, as well as the monitoring of a range of processes on their openness to women's political participation.

Although EMBs scored relatively high (70.1%) in their efforts to ensure that electioneering programs reached disadvantaged groups, the monitoring of other processes to ascertain their openness to women's participation was less positive. Party nomination and campaign processes were not very well monitored (63.5%) by CSO groups, while systems tracking participation including that of women was relatively weak, at nearly 60%. Worse still was electoral processes in place to encourage women's political representation. The existence of nomination fees as well as the absence of any rules or laws to guarantee a minimum threshold for women's participation led to just under 30% score. Election outreach programmes for schools was also rated low at 26%.

Table 10: Participation

Sub-indicator	Score
11. Is there a deliberate targeting of disadvantaged groups (illiterate people, PWD, first-time voters, elderly and women) in electioneering programmes?	7.10
13. Is there a provision for monitoring of party nomination, campaign and other pre-electoral activities by local CSOs?	6.35
8. Promote the participation of youths & first time voters	5.88
9. System to track women's participation	5.81
6. System for distribution of ID cards satisfactory to all parties	5.75
10. Nomination fees realistic and affordable for the participation of less privileged groups?	2.97
7. Adequate process to ensure at least 30% nomination of women	2.97

4.10.Expert and Self Score average



5.Detailed Scoring and Areas for Improvement by Next Assessment

There are many ways to assess the preparedness of Election management bodies: the following are the elements that were assessed in the scorecard:

Sub-indicator	Score	Rating justification	Recommendations for improvement	Responsible
Is the election process transparent & open to public participation?	9.28	Frequent meetings are held with all stakeholders; decisions are owned by all; and there is sharing of documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More observer groups should be encouraged to come on-board and observe the process and report independently 	All EMBs
Do EMBs regularly brief party officials on electoral processes and decisions?	8.91	There is a Bi-weekly platform All political parties are members of the PPLC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Political parties Liaison committee should be sustained and decentralized in the 16 electoral districts 	PPRC
Are Pre-electoral activities open to independent observers (domestic and international)?	8.82	An MOU has been signed with CSOs to observe the process at all stages within the circle	Make the process open so allow more CSO to be part of the process independently not necessarily through NEW	NEC
Is there a Regular consultation and collaboration of EMBs on election security?	8.80	Integrated Elections planning committee exists, met regularly for the 2018 election and devised codes of ethics for the security personnel with nationwide training	Meetings to be sustained even after elections	ONS
Do EMB officials apply nomination guidelines and procedures to all political parties and candidates?	8.27	This is a standard procedure for the conduct of free fair elections and this has been happening in the past	Parties and Candidates to conform with section 21 of the political parties act of 2002	PPRC
Do CSOs promptly report their findings on the electoral process?	8.22	Yes reports are forwarded to NEC at least a week after the election. Also reports findings are sent to PPRC.	Reports to be distributed across the country and disseminated for the information of the general public	NEW

Sub-indicator	Score	Rating justification	Recommendations for improvement	Responsible
Is the Procedure for the recruitment of ad hoc electoral staff free from bias?	8.22	NEC has a manual for recruitment and there has been no complains of bias recruitment in the past. NEC has a policy that all staff should abide to	CSO monitoring should also cover recruitment of ad hoc staff.	NEC
Is there a clear acceptance of the role of NEC in electoral processes?	8.17	NEC's role is legally defined in the constitutions and the electoral act, however, there has been concern over the lack of consultation in appointment of key personnel.	Guideline to be developed on how government can consult with other political parties in making key appointments	PPRC
Are the processes for accreditation of elections support agencies such as monitors and international institutions transparent?	8.07	Overall, there has been no widespread complaints about accreditation. NEC accreditation is done online and done at both national and district level. There were however complaints about some questionable accreditation of some local observers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Names of agencies and organisations should be published in time far ahead of the electoral process. Accreditation criteria to be improved upon to avoid the proliferation of political party supported agencies being accredited 	NEC
Do EMBs regularly engage party officials/candidates?	8.06	Only when election are close but. They meet before and after the elections	Funds should be provided for regular meetings both at national and district levels	All EMBs
Are Codes of conduct subscribed to by contestants?	7.94	PPRC codes signed but not adhered to. Clearly the consequences for the breach of codes are not implemented so over time contestants do not take them seriously	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subscribers should be made accountable for breach of the codes of conducts. 	PPRC
Are electoral guidelines applied evenly to political parties and candidates?	7.93	EMBt treat all on an equal basis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guidelines to be monitored by EMBs Process needs to be more open and transparent 	CSOs And PPRC

Sub-indicator	Score	Rating justification	Recommendations for improvement	Responsible
Is the Recruitment of ad hoc staff open, transparent and impartial?	7.89	Set rules and procedures are followed with regards the recruitment of staff	Guidelines for recruitment of NEC and NEW ad-hoc staff to be open with the display of names of applicants. Politically exposed persons should not be recruited.	NEC and NEW
Has an election threat assessment been conducted and action plans agreed on to ensure a non-partisan response	7.88	Security strategy underfunded.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Security threat assessment to be conducted in 2021 as part of the early warning response system. 	ONS
Does the legal/electoral framework provide effective mechanisms and remedies for compliance of electoral laws?	7.56	Strong laws but compliance is a problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enforcement of the law when culprits are found wanting. 	Judiciary
Are the provisions for setting campaign timelines followed?	7.41	It is done in a stakeholder meeting in a democratic manner by balloting to decide who goes first. Small and fringe parties sell their campaign slots.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure a strict compliance of campaign timetables. PPRC to take steps to discipline smaller parties who sell campaign slots. 	PPRC NEC
Is the Security provided adequate and suitable for NEC's electoral activities?	7.38	Security deployment follows threat assessment. If concerns of violence increases, this may increase demand on security which will lead to thin deployment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Timely funding to be made available to the security forces for threat assessment and deployment. 	ONS
Do EMB officials conduct themselves in a professional manner to uphold neutrality in the processes?	7.36	Over the years officials of EMBs have successfully conducted elections nationwide. The EMBs have guiding principles which guide the conduct of their staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular and independent monitoring of staff performance Training programmes. Entrenched codes to ensure professionalism required 	All EMBs

Sub-indicator	Score	Rating justification	Recommendations for improvement	Responsible
Are Funds provided for elections and election-related activities used efficiently and cost effectively?	7.18	A basket fund exists for elections financing. However, there should be value for money considerations in some investments. A good example is the ID cards we got an inferior card in 2018 compared to what we had in 2012. Printing of cards every election is a waste of funds we should have cards that are fit for purpose.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring and audit of election expenditure should be carried out regularly and made public 	NEC
Do we have adequate time for the preparation of an accurate Voters' Register in line with the legal provision?	7.10	Yes. It is done a year to the election in line with the legal framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clarity to be made between a civil registration and a voter register 	NEC
Is there a deliberate targeting of disadvantaged groups (illiterate people, PWD, first-time voters, elderly and women) in electioneering programmes?	7.10	Yes there is, the use of tactile ballots. The NEC, SP has programs that targets inclusion and participation women, youth and other marginalised groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvement in the accessibility of the voting canter to accommodate people with disability 	NEC
Do the EMBs provide equal access to information on elections and campaign to political parties?	6.92	There is a political party liaison office but leadership of political parties do not attend.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EMBs to be more open and transparent all political parties, and ensure that no one political party is favoured 	NEC
Is the CSO election monitoring structure fair, impartial and trusted by all players?	6.83	Accreditation is given to as many CSOs that apply for it. There are complaints that CSOs report on electoral violence but to not help address the incidences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CSO election monitoring outfits to carry themselves in a non-partisan and impartial manner to gain the trust and respect of all stakeholder 	NEW and other CSOs
Is there an open, reliable and transparent system put in place for cross-checking of results by stakeholders and the public?	6.81	Tallying is mostly done regionally far removed from voting areas. Examples Bi-elections local context is lost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Website must be updated throughout the electoral cycle 	NEC

Sub-indicator	Score	Rating justification	Recommendations for improvement	Responsible
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholders need to have unimpeded access to the process Localise the tallying of results at constituency level. 	Parliament – law reform
Has the EMB institutionalised the criteria for recruitment of temporary staff?	6.79	Policy available. It is part of the guiding principle and standing orders of NEC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standing orders to be reviewed and monitored for strict compliance Change the laws to provide for tallying of results at constituency level. 	NEC Parliament AG
Is Conflict prevention and management mainstreamed into electoral activities?	6.76	Threat assessment is conducted but security sector lacks funding for implementations. There is an absence of network of citizen community level mediators to address incidences of violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conflict prevention and mitigation group to be empowered and expanded to act nationwide Independent panel to be set up to look into conflict prevention and management 	NEC and PPRC
Are the powers and functions of EMBs on nominations and campaigns understood by electoral actors including political parties	6.69	Citizens understanding of the function and mandates of EMBs especially PPRC and the IPCB is low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A sustained joint media engagement of EMBs on roles and responsibilities 	All EMBs
Does a system exist for all amendments to Election laws, processes and directives including nominations, to be made at least a year before election?	6.65	The NEC, SP has electoral legal reform as a key strategic pillar with laid down timelines way in advance for the conduct of electoral activities. However some of the processes can be stalled due to availability of funds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop appropriate timelines for review relevant electoral laws and ensure there is a lead institution to monitor the reform 	NEC

Sub-indicator	Score	Rating justification	Recommendations for improvement	Responsible
Are NEC and the police prepared to ensure free but regulated vehicular movement on Election Day?	6.49	Non-vehicle movement has helped minimise violence in elections. However the system has been subject to abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative security strategies with all EMBs • NEC should ensure that all parties contesting have the same number of accreditation 	NEC
Is there adequate time allocated for campaigning taking into account the type, size & context of the election?	6.44	There is a clear law guiding the timeline for campaign. The time usually given is not enough.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate and sufficient time to be given for campaigning what is provided for over the years is not enough 	NEC
Are the election and campaign guidelines understood by electoral stakeholders (political parties and observers)?	6.42	This has been a challenge and has generated conflicts. Citizens don't understand. Chief are very political and favour one party against the other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hard copies of the guidelines should be made available to all political parties and stakeholders for reference purposes 	NEC PPRC
Is there a provision for monitoring of party nomination, campaign and other pre-electoral activities by local CSOs?	6.35	NEC has laid down rules and regulations for stakeholders to observe the various electoral processes pursuant to the election Act 2012 PPRC is mandated to monitor the conduct of political parties. However, there is weak capacity for monitoring.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standardize operating system for all political parties to ensure that CSOs monitor their electioneering activities 	NEC PPRC
Are election laws fairly applied to all contesting parties/candidates?	6.30	NEC and PPRC Act provides for impartial treatment of all parties. Delays in deciding election cases and unfair treatment of opposition supporters has been reported	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Judiciary should not serve the government of the day and righting wrongs. 	Judiciary NEC PPRC
Is the Website updated regularly with decisions, procedures, planned measures?	6.24	Website officer available. Not regularly updated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The website should be updated on real time. It should be the most credible source of information by the public 	All EMBs

Sub-indicator	Score	Rating justification	Recommendations for improvement	Responsible
Does the legal framework have ethical requirements for NEC officials on electoral processes?	6.19	The NEC law is clear for professionalism of officials. The difficulty has been to manage ad-hoc staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the PPRC Act to include Regulatory Powers and an adequate legal framework 	PPRC NEC
Does NEC ensure that Ad hoc electoral staff discharge their responsibilities in an impartial and fair manner without undue influence?	6.06	There are guidelines for recruitment and conduct of ad-hoc staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure stringent vetting of Ad Hoc staff before recruitment Systems should be put in place to weed out partisan staff at recruitment stage 	NEC
Is the independence of the EMBs guaranteed and work without political influence?	6.03	Previous NEC Chairs served their full tenure and there has been upward mobility and succession planning for junior staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Save guard the tenure of office of the NEC board of commissioners so they can perform their duties without fear or favour 	PPRC Parliament
Is there a clear provision for the resolution of complaints and queries of the electioneering process?	5.92	Avenues for redress of election cases are centralised and can be slow.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop adequate conflict resolution and redress mechanisms that will effectively resolve and address electoral complaints and queries 	Judiciary IPCB
Are there Interventions employed to promote the participation of youths including first time voters?	5.88	A decline in structured political party involvement in the process e.g. APPYA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishment of Voter Education School Clubs across the country Establish programs for out of school youth groups 	NEC PPRC
Is there a system a place to track women's participation across the electoral process?	5.81	There is a gender unit in NEC and the gathering of sex disaggregated data is a major activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A tracker be introduced, to track nomination, voting and overall participation of women in elections . 	NEC and CSOs

Sub-indicator	Score	Rating justification	Recommendations for improvement	Responsible
Is the system for distribution of ID cards and other related processes satisfactory to all parties and candidates?	5.75	It is unclear what the framework is for distribution of ID cards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve the registration process and distribution of standardised the voter cards. Have a staff specially assigned to distribute IDs at the district offices IDs not collected taken to voting centres on election day Develop procedures for the distribution and production of unclaimed and lost voters ID 	NEC
Is there a transparent and secure process that prevents, detects, reports and handles fraud and malpractices in the elections?	5.50	NEC has administrative manuals on staff performance and laid down rules and regulations with electoral offences pursuant to election Act 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Electoral courts should be operational right through the electoral cycle Repeal of the laws to provide for stringent penalty for electoral fraud 	Judiciary NEC Parliament
Are there Clear prohibitions against interference by government/individuals in the electoral process?	5.49	Not within the legal framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guide for political consultations be laid out for key decisions bothering on elections 	NEC PPRC & All EMBs
Are Security outfits neutral in providing election security?	5.48	Suspensions of partisanship by some security personnel from the public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Constant refresher training roles and responsibilities in elections and enforcement of disciplinary procedures required Effective monitory mechanism by CSOs 	ONS CSOs
Are NEC, PPRC and Security forces equipped to ensure there	5.08	The PPRC laws are weak, no intermediary processes, monitoring processes are weak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reform the 2004 Act 	PPRC

Sub-indicator	Score	Rating justification	Recommendations for improvement	Responsible
is commitment to relevant code of ethics for campaigns?				
Is the Provision of resources to EMBs timely and adequate?	4.83	Provision of resources is often very inadequate and late	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single account purely meant for election should be established ahead of the electoral process. • Government to ensure adequate and timely disbursement of resources. 	NEC to coordinate with Ministry of Finance
Is the electoral adjudication and appeals handled in a timely manner?	3.93	Most of the cases handed over to the police but not prosecuted We still have 2008 cases in the courts Electoral offence courts have a short timeframe and this hampers outcome Adjudication processes are delayed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prosecutors are to be allowed to come forward with evidences to help speed up the process. • Provide timelines for adjudications 	Judiciary PPRC
Are current nomination fees realistic and affordable for the participation of less privileged groups?	2.97	The nomination fees are prohibitive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put a cap on campaign financing. • Reduce nomination fees across the board to allow the less privileged to contest elections. 	NEC PPRC
Is there an adequate process in place for to ensure at least 30% nomination of women by political parties?	2.97	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment policy has be produced by government. However Parties are still reluctant to award symbols to women. No mandatory process is in place to ensure this 30% of nomination of women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pass the 30% quota system into law to make it mandatory on political parties through enforcement regulations 	PPRC NEC CSOs
Are the Election outreach programs included in school curricula?	2.67	Not yet; no sustained engagement in schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish electoral educational programs that will be included in the curricula of secondary schools across the country 	NEC

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Political Parties, COVID-19 and Women's Political Participation

A report prepared by
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For
Institute for Governance Reform and Irish Aid - Sierra Leone



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1.Introduction

Across the world, COVID-19 has been seen to impact women and girls disproportionately (Connor et al., 2020; Salas, 2020). The epidemic could potentially delay the realization of many women empowerment targets at the country and global levels (Parsitau, 2021). In Sierra Leone, women have been vulnerable to the disease as primary caregivers within their families, and frontline health workers. Moreover concerns have been raised about the rise of sexual gender based violence as has been observed in countries worldwide particularly during lockdowns (UNHCR, 2020). These concerns are particularly salient in Sierra Leone, where the Ebola outbreak exacerbated women and girls vulnerabilities; teenage pregnancy increased as did sexual gender based violence, while maternal mortality rates rose as the outbreak had an impact on access to reproductive health care services (Muriithi, 2020). These concerns have resurfaced during the COVID-19 outbreak. Women's triple burden¹ has also increased as they juggle childcare, paid work, and unpaid community service (McLaren et al., 2020). In addition, COVID-19 has deepened women's economic vulnerabilities given their prevalence in the informal sector and overall weaker economic standing (Cuccaro et al., 2021).

Yet, women are often absent from decision making roles in the fight against COVID. There are concerns that this marginalisation contributes to the continued implementation of gender-blind policies that exacerbate inequalities reinforced by patriarchal structures, norms and values (UNWomen, 2020). For many, effectively addressing the gendered impacts of COVID-19 requires women at the table equally involved in leadership and policymaking. This report takes Sierra Leone as a case study, assessing women's current levels of leadership. Further, it examines at the effects of the pandemic on the country's chances to increase representation of women and reduce exclusion and vulnerabilities at the household and national levels. Through a close study of the existing power structures that create leaders at the community level and through the voices of women politicians from multiple interest groups across the country, the report sounds an alarm that women's representation might reduce from its current dismal 12% in governance with continued implications on other areas of vulnerability. Already the numbers of women in key institutions at the forefront of the outbreak such as the National COVID-19 Emergency Response Centre (NaCOVERC) and the District COVID-19 Emergency Response Centres (DiCOVERCs) is very low (Lahai, 2021), mirroring global data that shows that men outnumber women 1 to 3 in COVID-taskforces worldwide (UNDP 2021). Just one of the 16 District Coordinators of the DiCOVERCS is a woman. Similarly, only one of the District Medical Officers, the technical leads for the COVID-19 response in the districts, is a woman. Although there are women represented at lower levels, within the response teams, this low representation of women at the top continues to limit the capacity of frontline

¹Women's triple burden (Moser, 1993) refers to three spheres of women's work: productive, associated with paid labour; reproductive, concerning women's largely unpaid care giving roles, such as caring for the family, including childbearing, rearing, cooking and cleaning; and finally, women's voluntary community work geared toward serving and improving their larger community.

responders to address the specific priorities of women and girls and can reverse the few gains that have been made in this area.

2. Methodology

This study used a mixed methods approach: a nationwide survey was implemented and key informant interviews conducted in select districts. Data was collected between May and June 2021. The survey was administered to 1,936 citizens across Sierra Leone with an even split between men and women; 59% of respondents were rural-based and 41% urban. The surveys were administered face to face, with responses recorded through electronic data capture on tablets. The margin of error was +/- 2.3%.

Survey questions focused on women's vulnerability during COVID-19 with emphasis on SGBV and human rights. Within this context, women's leadership was examined, given the correlation often made between women's inclusion in decision-making bodies and gender sensitive policies. Questions sought to elicit the roles that women have played during the Covid-19 outbreak, and to examine women's political participation at community and national levels, noting opportunities, constraints and recommendations to improve women's participation.

To triangulate the data, we collected three rounds of key informant interviews (KIIs), totalling 150 respondents. Open-ended questions enabled greater discussion and deeper understanding of the challenges women face in entering the political space at all levels, from the zone or chiefdom level right through to the national level. We interviewed female and male party leaders, including secretary generals, chairpersons, female parliamentarians and unsuccessful female candidates for a variety of positions. Data was again recorded using electronic data capture. Interviews were transcribed and coded for primary themes that emerged from the responses to the questions. Survey data and key informant interviews confirmed women's increased vulnerabilities due to COVID-19. For example, for the policing and human rights module, women (50%) were more likely to say that they were treated poorly for COVID-19 violations compared to men (39%).

The first set of KIIs were conducted in four districts identified as strongholds of the two oldest parties: Kenema, Bo, (strongholds of the Sierra Leone People's Party, or SLPP), Port Loko and Tonkolili (strongholds of the All People's Congress, or APC). A total of 44 key informants were interviewed on four main questions: women's leadership during the COVID outbreak, the constraints women face in delegate selection processes, women's constraints in general elections, and policy recommendations to address issues raised, with focus on PPRC, NEC and the political parties. Women represented 64% of the key informants compared to 36% men.

The second set of KIIs sought to probe a little more deeply, the differences in selection/election processes for party delegates, in addition to the other questions. Interviews were conducted in Kenema, Moyamba, Port Loko and Tonkolili at all three levels, zonal, constituency and district. Key informants included members of the executive (women's

leader, chair and organizing secretary), unsuccessful candidates and influential women in the party where no female executive leader outside of the women's leader was available. These KILs targeted more women (92%) than men (7.8%) given the emphasis on women's experiences. The final set of KILs were held with 14 of the 18 female parliamentarians (six APC parliamentarians, six SLPP parliamentarians, one C4C parliamentarian and an independent parliamentarian).

The report proceeds in four parts. First we examine women's vulnerabilities during COVID-19. Second we look at how women have led during the outbreak and the challenges they have faced in taking a leadership role. Third, we use the delegate recruitment process as a prism to understand the constraints that women in leadership face. We look at women's ability to access these positions and constraints faced. We conclude with policy recommendations to help ensure that in the next elections, Sierra Leone women's participation does not continue to decline. We suggest ways to address the challenges of getting more women into politics, given that this absence is often seen as a contributing factor to the prevalence of gender-blind policies that do little to ameliorate women's unique vulnerabilities, particularly during the COVID-10 outbreak (UNDP, 2021). AS UNDP has shared, "Without women in decision-making roles, COVID-19 measures taken by governments are more likely to ignore women's needs and it could further exacerbate the unequal recovery opportunities from the pandemic." (UNDP 2020).

3.FINDINGS

3.1. SGBV and COVID-19 in Sierra Leone

Links have been made between COVID-10 and increased incidences of sexual gender based violence to COVID-19, or what the UN has termed, a "Shadow Pandemic" (UN News, 2020). Similar fears emerged early on in Sierra Leone, where the country's history of increased vulnerabilities of women and girls during and after the Ebola outbreak reinforced these concerns. Lockdown measures then, along with the closure of schools and decline in the use of health care facilities not only contributed to increased pregnancy rates among school girls, but also contributed to rising maternal and infant mortality rates as women were unable to receive routine prenatal and antenatal care in an overstretched health care system (Muriithi, 2020). Moreover, outside of COVID-19, Sierra Leone has historically high rates of Sexual Gender Based violence (SGBV), which some have attributed to the atrocities of the civil war, reinforced by patriarchal attitudes and beliefs that marginalise women (Mills et al., 2015). Concern over these rates, and particularly, the sexual abuse of minors in Sierra Leone contributed to the President's Declaration of rape as a national emergency in February 2019 (Kardas-Nelson & Inveen, 2019). Later that year, the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act was passed, providing more stringent punishment for perpetrators of gender based violence, including expanding the maximum punishment to life in prison and criminalising compromise. An Afrobarometer report found that knowledge and awareness of this new law is high: 86% of respondents said they had heard about its passage, while 89% believed that it would help to reduce the occurrence of rape and sexual assault (F. M'Cormack-Hale & Appiah-Nyameke Sanny, 2021)

Since the implementation of the law, a number of additional steps have been taken. This includes the establishment of several one-stop centres country-wide to provide services for survivors, along with a model Sexual Offences Court to fast track cases. Victims can also report sexual assault incidents through a free hotline (Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs, 2020).

The 2019 Sierra Leone Demographic and Health Survey (SLDHS) notes that around 62% of women report experience with physical or sexual violence with fears that this would rise with the lockdowns implemented to curb covid cases (Muriithi, 2020). Cases reported at the Rainbo Centres showed a rise from 2,900 in 2018, to 3,701 in 2019 (Mitchell, 2020). However, in 2020, Rainbo reported 3,226 cases, a slight decline. Further research is required to understand these figures. Questions have always been raised as to whether higher numbers of SGBV reflected increases in occurrence or simply higher reporting, particularly with greater sensitisation. Another possible explanation is with the increase in one-stop-centres nationwide, attendance at Rainbo has declined given that victims now have additional options for help seeking. Others have expressed fears that the more stringent laws might discourage reporting, particularly as SGBV is often a crime where victims know perpetrators, including family members. Further, the new laws on compromise might discourage people from coming forward. It is also possible that lockdowns made it more difficult for women to seek assistance for SGBV crimes. In addition, the majority of crimes reported to Rainbo is sexual penetration of minors, and not women. Thus, these figures would need to be further triangulated with data from other institutions that monitor SGBV like the Family Support Unit (FSU) and Legal Aid Board.

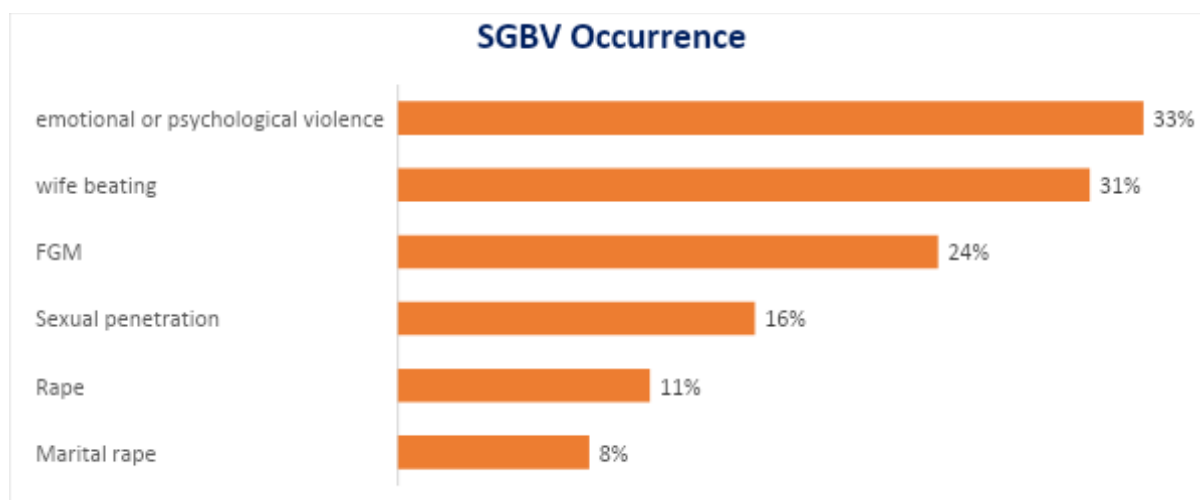
3.1.1. Survey Responses on COVID-19 and SGBV

To understand COVID-19's impact on SGBV rates, survey respondents were asked a series of questions about their perception of incidences of SGBV in their communities, as well as whether crimes were reported and prosecuted.

SGBV was reported in all communities. Emotional violence (33%), wife beatings (31%) and FGM/C (24%) were the most frequently reported cases of SGBV. The latter was most prevalent in the North (38%) and North West (42%) in the country (Figure 1).

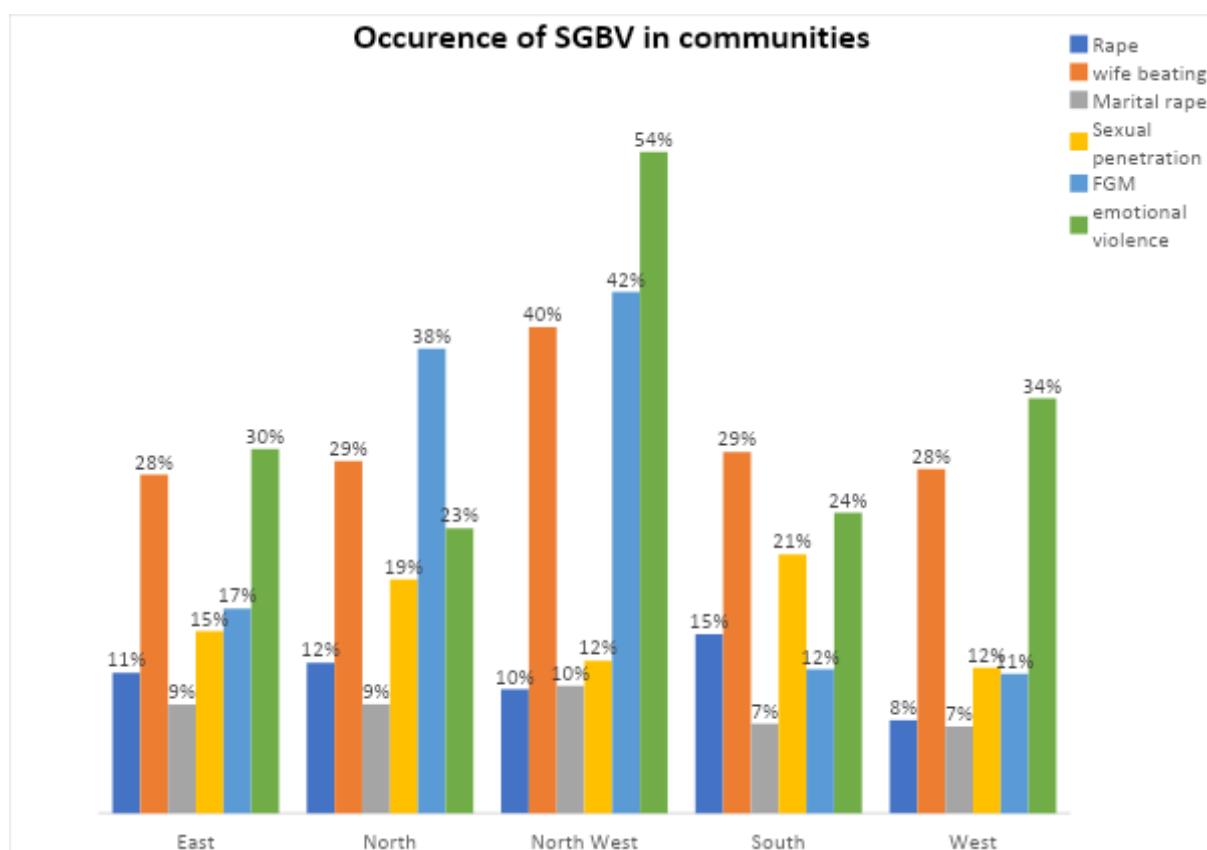
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Figure 1: Occurrence of SGBV During COVID-19



Respondents were asked: In your community do you know whether the following take place?

Figure 2: Occurrence of SGBV by District

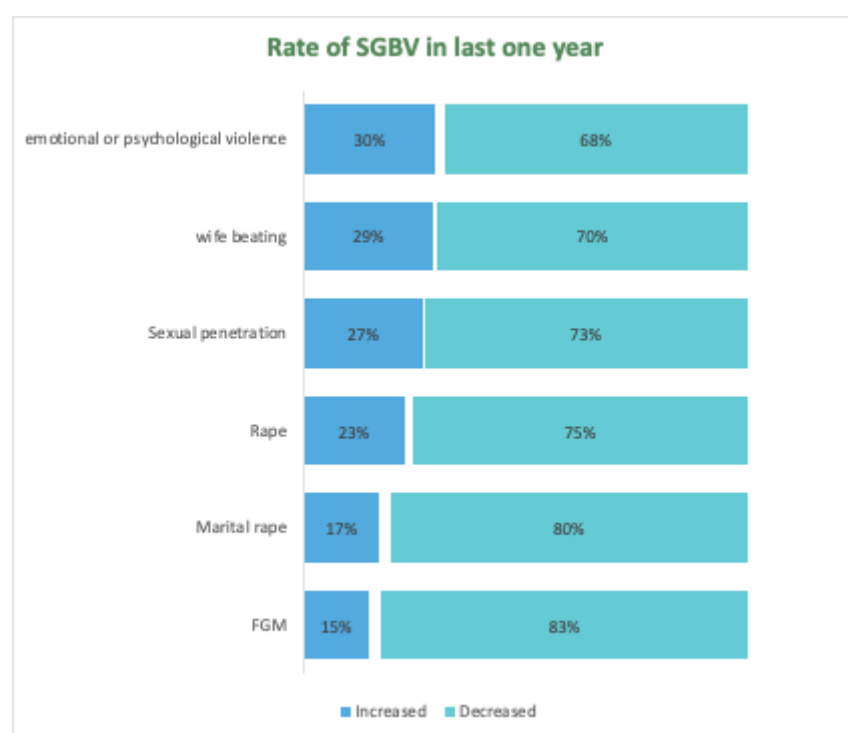


Respondents were asked: In your community do you know whether the following take place? Rape, wife beating, marital rape, sexual penetration, FGM, emotional violence

Respondents were also asked about the extent to which SGBV had increased in local communities. Interestingly, the majority appeared to believe that violence against women has decreased over the past one year (Figure 3). However, similar to the decline in reports of

abuse by the Rainbo Centre, it is important to conduct additional research to understand and contextualise these findings. Potential explanation of these findings include the fact that this is a perception survey, rather than observations based on objective findings, or it could be that with the new law people are afraid to commit SGBV offences because of the more stringent punishments. It would be useful to triangulate this data with actual records of cases reported from sources such as the Rainbo Centres, Legal Aid Board and the police.

Figure 3: Rates of SGBV in the Past One Year

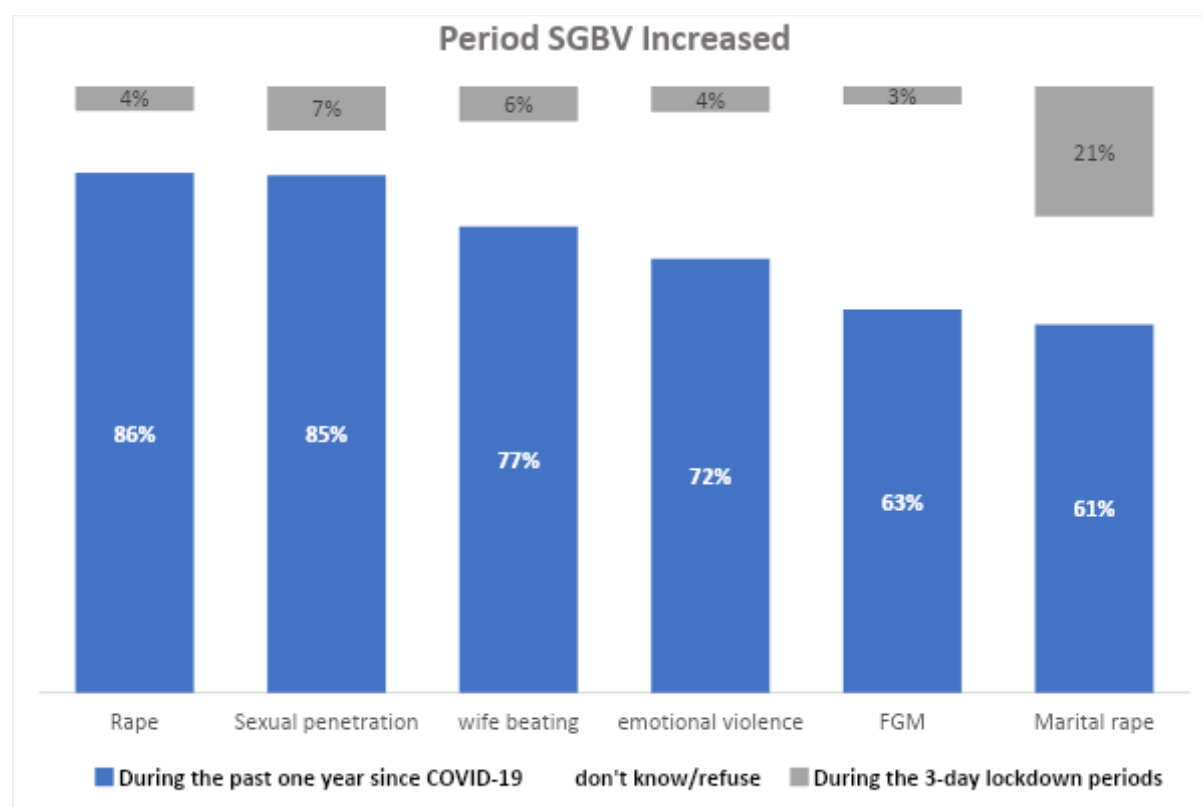


Respondents were asked: In your opinion, for each of the issues above, do you think they increased or decreased in the last one year? Increased, decreased, don't know

- Rape/sexual penetration
- wife beating
- Marital rape (husbands forcing wives to have sex)
- Sexual penetration (sex with children under 17)
- Female genital mutilation
- emotional or psychological violence

For those that said SGBV had increased, the three most prevalent forms mentioned were: emotional violence (30%), wife beating (29%) and sexual penetration (27%) (Figure 3). When asked to specify if incidences of SGBV had increased overall generally during the past one year or specifically during one of the three day lock down periods, marital rape was most frequently cited as increasing during the lockdown by just over 2 in 10 respondents (21%) (Figure 4).

Figure 4: The Period During which SGBV Increased



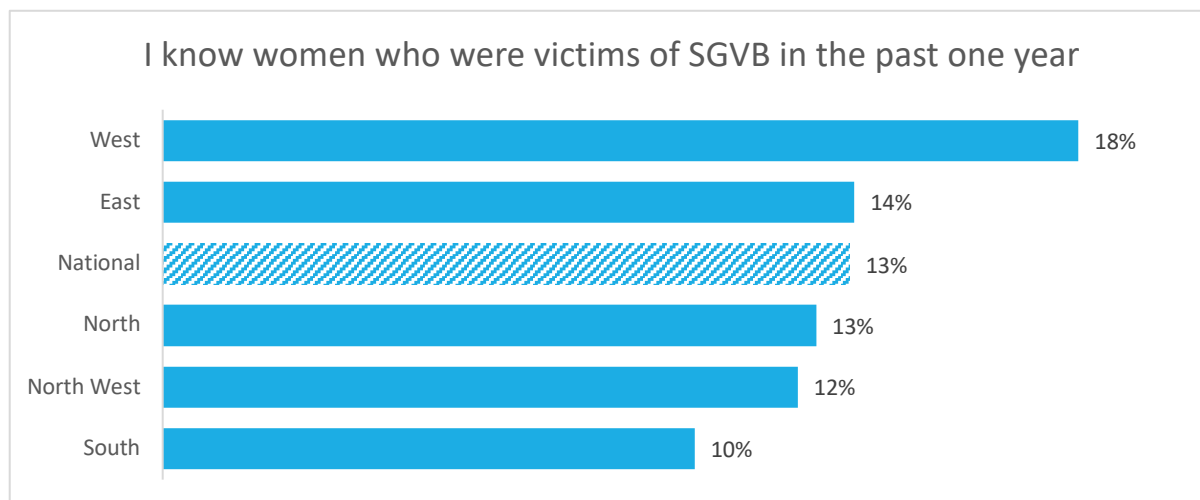
Respondents were asked: For the incidences mentioned above, during which period do you think they increased?
a. During the 3-day lockdown periods; b. During the past one year since COVID-19 generally; c. I don't remember/Don't know

Respondents were also asked about whether they knew of any woman who experienced SGBV in the past one year. On average, 13% of citizens reported knowing female victims of SGBV in the past year. Knowledge was highest in the Western Area (Figure 5). Four in 10 (41%) of respondents said that the cases they knew of had been charged to court; while 70% said those charged led to a jail conviction (Figure 6). This seems to imply higher rates of accountability for SGBV crimes than what current data shows. Again, it is important to treat this information with some caution, as we are asking about second-hand information. It bears further study and triangulation with independent bodies that record actual cases such as the FSU and the Legal Aid Board.

The survey also asked about awareness of the toll line established by the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs with support from UNFPA to provide referral services as well as counselling for women who had experienced SGBV. Unlike the widespread knowledge of the Sexual Offences Amendment Act of 2019 (F. M'Cormack-Hale & Appiah-Nyameke Sanny, 2021) few knew about the toll free line: only 15% of respondents had heard about it. Awareness of the telephone line was highest among educated and wealthier households, as well as in the Northwest (25%) (Figure 7).

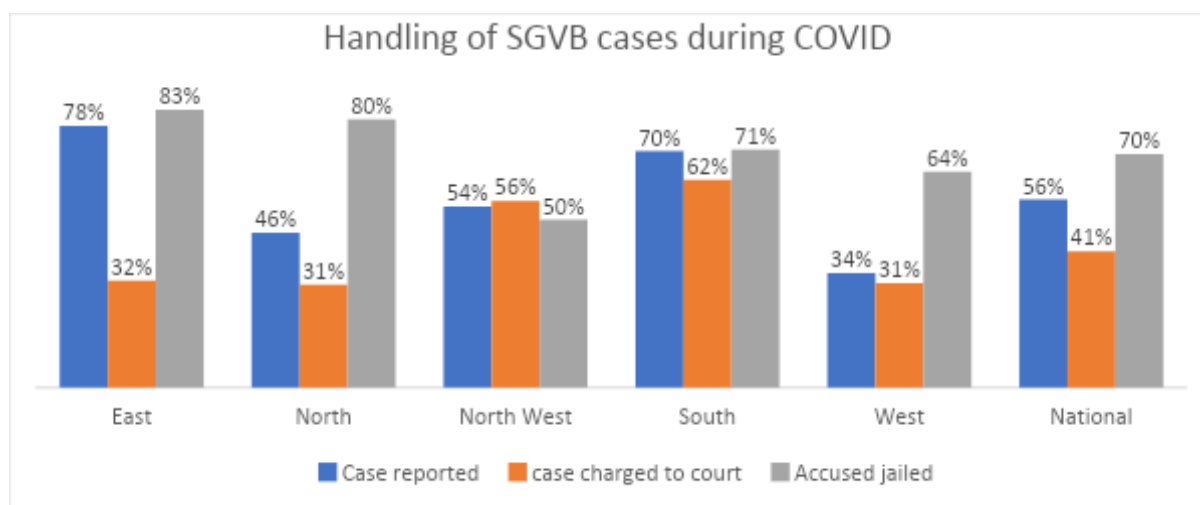
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Figure 5: Knowledge of women who were victims of SGBV in the past year



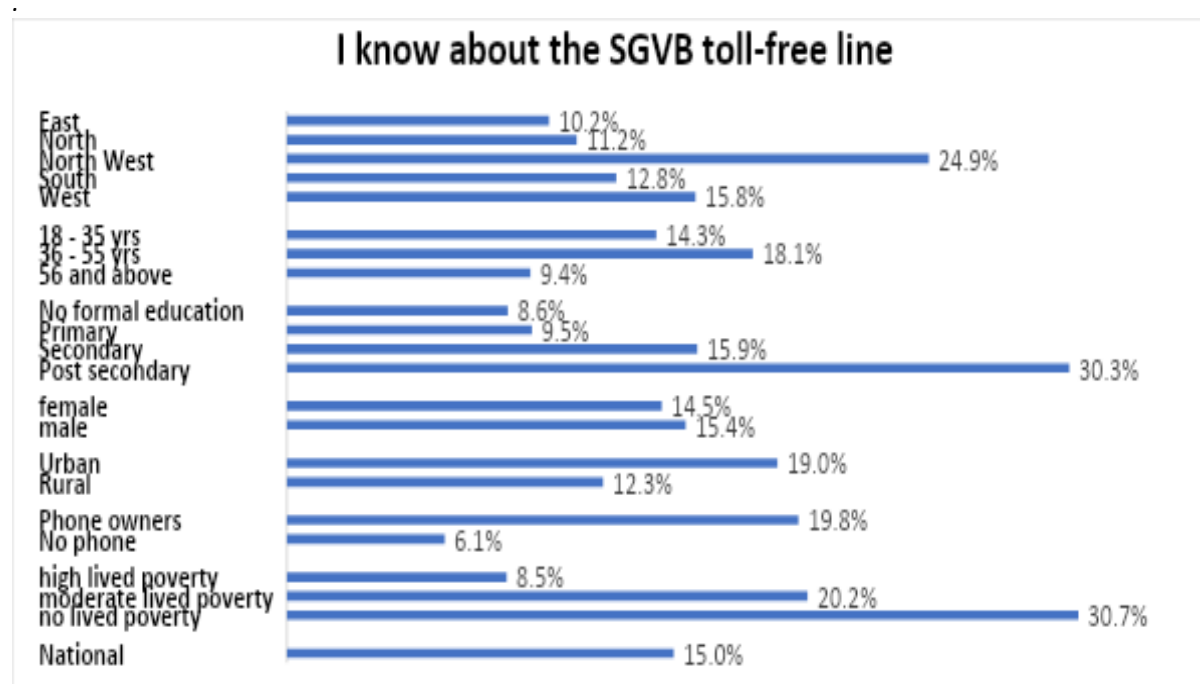
Respondents were asked: Do you know of any woman who was a victim of any of the issues mentioned above during the past one year? (Percentage that say yes).

Figure 6: Justice for SGBV Cases during the Past One Year



Respondents were asked: For each woman mentioned please let us know the following: Was she able to report the case?; If yes, was the case charged to court?; Was there a conviction?

Figure 7: Knowledge of Where to Call to Receive Support for SGBV



Respondents were asked: Do you know that there is a toll free number now for women to call and report domestic or sexual violence? (Percentage that say yes)

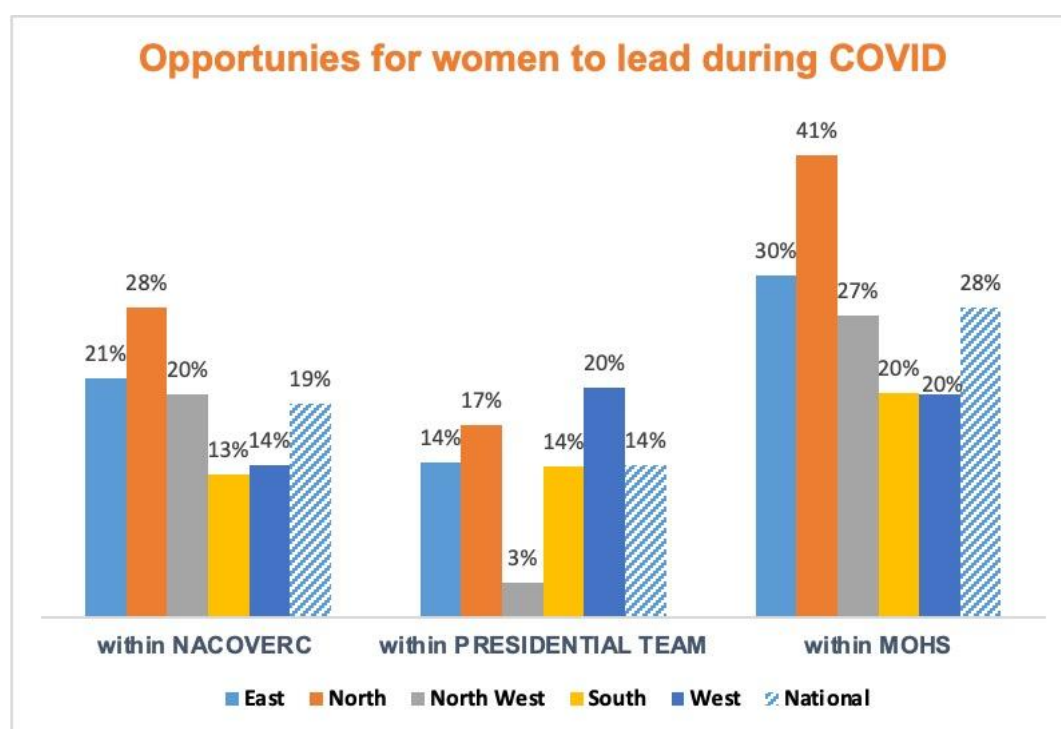
In sum, it would appear that while a majority of respondents believe that SGBV incidences have decreased overall, there are concerns over emotional or psychological violence, wife beating and sexual penetration. FGC/M was also mentioned as still taking place within local communities. Given the restricted mobility during COVID-19 and in particular during lockdown periods, it is important to expand awareness of the phone line for victims to receive help. It would also be good to triangulate the information on cases that are charged to court and successfully resolved, particularly for 2021. According to 2020 data from Rainbo, only 123 cases were successfully prosecuted out of the 3,339 cases (Rainbo Initiative, 2020). Similarly, data from the FSU shows that of the 3,226 cases received in 2020, 582 were charged to court, while 64 have been closed.

3.2. Women and Leadership in the COVID-19 Response

As the discussion above shows, it is clear that women are facing unique vulnerabilities during COVID-19. At the same time, there is an extensive body of literature that tells us that despite these challenges, policy responses tend to be gender blind and women are absent from positions of leadership in the institutions charged with leading the response (Mantouvalou, 2020; UNDP, 2021). Nevertheless, while women have not necessarily been formally included in the response, examples abound of women at the forefront of the response, volunteering, even without formal support.

This finding was echoed by respondents in the survey. Respondents were asked about whether the government provided sufficient opportunities for women to lead, with a focus on three main bodies working on the response: NACOVERC, the Presidential team and the MoHS. In all three, respondents perceived women to be severely under-represented, although MoHS had the greatest level of representation comparatively (28% of respondents said MoHS provided opportunities for women to lead, compared to 19% in NACOVERC and 14% in the Presidential Team) (Figure 8). Again, it is important to note that these are citizens' perceptions; NACOVERC and MoHS are the more public facing institutions of the three. However, the Technical Advisory Group for Emergencies to support the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 (STAGE C-19) is less well known publicly. While women's presence in NACOVERC and MoHS is indeed low, five of the 12 members of the Technical Advisory Group for Emergencies to support the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 (STAGE C-19) are women, making for 42% female representation.

Figure 8: Women's Presence in COVID Leadership Institutions



Respondents were asked: In your community, do you think government provided enough opportunities for women to lead in the following positions during the pandemic? Within the NaCOVERC/DiCOVERCs, the MoHS and the presidential team (percentage that say yes).

Nevertheless, the overall sense of women's limited presence in the official response was echoed by key informants. Respondents were asked a series of open-ended questions about women's leadership during the outbreak, to understand the ways in which women have contributed to addressing the crisis.

The majority of key informants said that while they had not been formally included in response initiatives, they had conducted sensitization around COVID infection, prevention and awareness, social mobilization and advocacy, and generally spreading awareness about the disease, largely in a voluntary capacity. Both SLPP and APC respondents reported working

on sensitization. In addition to general sensitization, women leaders shared that their activities included the distribution of hand sanitizers to schools, the buying of buckets, facemasks and soap, etc.

An APC respondent said, *"We showed leadership in so many ways, we were going in and out of this constituency to talk to women as to how to prevent themselves from getting the sickness, we were even going into the Bondo bushes to talk to the Soweis to stop their FGM practices because it can undermine the fight against the Corona sickness. We used to supply Veronica Buckets, face masks, hand sanitizers, and soap backed up with sensitization."* (APC female party member).

When asked what, if anything, women did better than men in the response to the pandemic, a majority of respondents said that women played greater roles in community sensitization than men; a few spoke of the double burden of carrying out community sensitization while also ensuring the wellbeing of their families and taking care of the home:

"We used to abandon our busy schedules to go out to talk to people, which was extra work for us looking at the fact that we have to take care of our homes" (SLPP female party member);

"We make sure that we protect our children and our family than the men, because we are the ones who were in charge of controlling the homes, while the men were busy with their own businesses and we are stuck with the children and the rest of the family at home" (SLPP female party member);

"We the women came together and carried out community sensitization, which men did not do. We contributed and bought face masks and distributed it to our community people. Men did not do that at all." (APC female party member).

While some received assistance to facilitate their work, others did not, and like Ebola, there were concerns about the politicisation of the response. More SLPP respondents than APC respondents said they received some assistance from government. Concerns about the politicisation of the response echo similar findings by Babawo et. al (2020) and Amara et. al. (2021). For example, social commentators have noted that the SLPP women's leader has been at the heart of the leadership of the social mobilisation pillar. It would appear that similar to the Ebola response, support to women has taken a partisan coloration with more women in SLPP party structures being supported and others left out.

"No! [government did not provide enough opportunities] When government took over the fight against COVID-19 in the district [by setting up DICOVERC etc.] the composition of all these bodies became political. As a result, a lot of women who were on the side were left out. Women should have more leadership roles. This is so because they have stronger voice and [are] charismatic." (APC male party member).

"Yes, the government was giving us transport allowance, soap, face masks, and hand sanitizer at party level. Our district women leader also was part of that work. Women are good at nursing anything. We the women can carry out any responsibility given to us better than men,

therefore we are supposed to be in leadership positions in every aspect of life, not only in the Corona fight.” (SLPP female party member);

For another SLPP respondent, *“We were going out to sensitize people on how to take care of themselves during the Corona outbreak on our own. We used to go to the churches and mosques to talk to people. We were doing it at party level because the national women's leader came here and talked to us [and provided us] with some logistical support to carry out the sensitization” (SLPP female party member).*

Nevertheless, the overarching message was that insufficient opportunities and support had been given to women's leadership, even among some SLPP respondents, and that women had largely mobilised on their own to meet this challenge. This is similar to what happened during Ebola.

“From my end I did not see much from the government in providing opportunities for us to lead in the fight.” (SLPP female party member).

“We were not given opportunities to lead, however some of us decided to lead in the fight in order to prevent what happened during Ebola. More women should be involved as they can handle things better, and if they fail as the men are used to failing they will suffer more.” (APC female party member);

“Nobody appointed us to help with the Corona fight, but we as women gathered together and contributed some amount of money. From there we bought Veronica buckets, hand sanitizer and soap, going further we were going around to do community sensitization.” (APC female party member).

Reasons women gave for wanting to be involved in the fight were often grounded in essentialist perceptions of women as more caring, as having maternal instincts as well as the perception that they suffered more. Respondents talked about traits they felt were unique to women, such as their levels of integrity, transparency, and loyalty alongside the view of their greater vulnerability in the face of the disease. The perception that these qualities enabled them to address the issues better than men further underscored to reasons they gave for believing that women should be given more opportunity to lead. This is in line with global narratives that have put a spotlight on women leaders' better handling of the COVID-19 response, like New Zealand's Jacinda Arden and Germany's Angela Merkel, grounding this in narratives that leverage their roles as mothers, and caregivers (Johnson & Williams, 2021).

“...we have found out that women can lead better in other countries, we have soft hearted people, we can easily [feel] sorry for everybody including men, if we are in a leadership position we can do better than men.” (APC female party member);

“As the saying goes, he who feels it, knows it. Women are mostly a sect of the deprived group hence they should be in front targeting these problems. When they escalate they will suffer more.” (SLPP female party member).

3.3. Women in Formal Political Leadership

Although the data suggests that women are playing prominent roles in the response, particularly around social mobilisation, sensitisation and enforcement of COVID-19 regulations, these activities are largely voluntary, without much formal support from the State. Party women in the community were active, as were female parliamentarians, the bulk of whom did receive some support, particularly from the 50/50 Group, with funding from the EU and in partnership with Search from Common Ground, to engage in sensitisation and provide tools such as hand sanitisers, Veronica buckets and masks to constituents. However, overall, women did not feel adequately included and supported in the efforts to combat the COVID-19 outbreak as the KIIs indicate. These findings support Amara et. al. (2021) who also found that women felt underutilised in the response. To what extent can we understand these limitations as an illustration of women's under-representation in formal avenues of leadership? In this section, we review women's political participation in Sierra Leone, generally, before focusing on delegate elections to help us understand the barriers that women face in accessing political positions.

Women's political participation has long been identified as an issue of concern in Sierra Leone and recommendations to boost women's political participation is a recurrent theme in numerous election observer reports by actors such as the EU, USAID and the Commonwealth Secretariat. Sierra Leone is signatory to a host of treaties and policies Government has committed to address in its Medium Term National Development Framework (Government of Sierra Leone, 2019). In the most recent elections, women represented just 12% of parliamentarians (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2018).

Women's representation has steadily declined since a high of 14.5% in 2002 (Pathways of Women's Empowerment, 2011) immediately after the war when a proportional representation system was used. This dropped to 14% in 2007, and declined even further to 13% in 2012 (NEC 2018). Numerous studies and reports have examined challenges to women's political participation in Sierra Leone (Abdullah & Fofana-Ibrahim, 2010; Fofana Ibrahim, 2015; F. A. O. M'Cormack-Hale & Beoku-Betts, 2015; Trocaire, 2018). Studies have sought to understand reasons behind this steady decline, and proffer recommendations to reverse it. However, the focus is often on the parliamentary elections, after women have received their party symbol to contest.

Yet, before women can compete for parliamentary positions, they first have to receive their party's nomination, securing votes by delegates who through various processes are elected or selected by the party. Less studied has been the delegate recruitment process: how party delegates are themselves selected and the extent in which women are able to attain these positions, given the critical role they play in determining their party's parliamentary aspirants. We turn now to the political party nomination processes by the two main political parties, the SLPP and the APC to understand what constraints women face at this level. As the first line of access for political candidates to attain political positions, understanding the extent in which

women are in leadership positions within the party executives at all levels (zonal, constituency, regional and national) is key. Examining the processes of nomination to these posts, and the obstacles that women face at this level, will help to inform the activities of organisations seeking to increase women's political participation. It can also inform policy prescriptions geared at increasing women's political participation, and ultimately, ensure that more women are in leadership positions where they can contribute more formally to the development of gender sensitive policies that can reduce women's vulnerabilities during COVID-19.

3.3.1. Party Requirements for Delegate Elections

Party standard bearers are determined through votes by the various parties among competing applicants through primaries. The process is enshrined in the party constitution, and for the SLPP, the Conduct of Symbol Manual. The SLPP recently completed delegate elections at the zonal, constituency and district levels (in April 2021), although some of the SLPP election results were cancelled due to a series of irregularities. The APC has yet to hold constituency elections; the last election was in 2018, according to respondents. Moreover, the party is in transition; some party members have taken the party to court, and a ruling has not yet been announced. Although the party has plans to revise the constitution, moving to an election process for delegates rather than the "selection," and election process that many APC respondents described as being the norm, this has yet to be adopted given the court case.

To become a party delegate, respondents described a variety of approaches. For the SLPP, most respondents said that "election" is the official policy according to the Constitution. Eligible party members vote for the executive, several of whom form delegates. Delegates are elected by party members at every level, from the zonal/sectional, to the constituency, to the district and finally, to the national level. Zonal level delegates are responsible for electing constituency level executives, some of whom become the delegates that elect the MP candidate: constituency level delegates elect district executives, some of whom become delegates for the districts. District delegates elect regional executives whom again form some of the delegates. Within the executives of every level, the four main positions that confer delegate status are Chairperson, Secretary General, Women's Leader and Young Generation Leader.

In APC on the other hand, the majority of respondents pointed to a mix of selection and election process. Also, the APC does not have zonal executives. Instead, respondents spoke of chieftom or section level organisation, followed by constituency, district and then national structures. Twelve executive members are selected, five of which have voting rights as delegates: The Chair, the Secretary General, Women's Leader, Youth Leader and Veteran. Other executive members include the treasurer, financial secretary, organising secretary, PRO, chaplain and Imam. Constituency executive members select/elect the District level members who in turn select the national level representatives. Selection generally involves senior party members with authority in the party.

However, while these might be the dominant patterns, members also pointed to other approaches. Within SLPP, while the majority of respondents pointed to elections as the primary mechanism, a few stated that selection was also used. It would appear that this was more in the areas that were not the party strong hold, and/or took place only at the zonal level:

"...For my own part, which is the SLPP, we start from the zonal/sectional (for some areas they don't have zones) they go round to get their sectional elections either by consensus or voting or you agree and choose people who are there, but criteria has been set wherein the chairman of the constituency conducts those elections, supervises those elections and for the zonal to the sections then go to the chieftdom, from the chieftdom to the constituency, constituencies to districts and to regional before they go to national." SLPP Female Parliamentarian.

"Election and selection. Before elections, party executives ask party members to recommend any strong party member in their area that they think is fit to lead them. If there is, then no need for election. This is normally done in order to give preference to loyal party members." (SLPP Female Party Member, Women's Leader, Tonkolili)

Similarly, while APC respondents noted that both selection and election were practiced, it appeared that selection was more frequent, although this depended on the level of election being held as well as the particular nature of the election, including the number of candidates. However, there are plans to change the APC constitution to formalise election as the principal standard; the process is pending as the party is currently in court.

"First it was selection but we see it fit to change it to election because it always favoured the men and made the election free and fair, and the men are always protecting themselves, you must be an active member of the party, you must have a party card." APC Female Party Member

"Elders use selection, but if the people they select are many they will conduct an election though we trying to put an end to the selection process (APC, Influential Party Member, Port Loko)

"Apply and go through [the] voting process. Before it was selection/appointment by minister or deputy or zonal executives (APC Female Party Member)"

"Election and selection. People are mostly chosen to hold positions by consensus. Here, the incumbent chieftdom executive members in consultation with the constituency chairperson, [Name withheld] reached a consensus on who to select to hold certain positions at this level. People are normally selected for positions based on their hard work, commitment and qualities that fit such positions. In a situation where there is an opposition, then election comes in. Election is normally done by raising hands in approval or disapproval of a candidate. I was elected by the 'raising-hand' method.....Also at the constituency level, the constituency executives are responsible for voting and selecting members of this level. All of these are overseen by the district chairperson (APC Women's Leader, Tonkolili).

"First of all our party has no zonal level executive. The party only has mandated to have constituency and district level executives. However, here we have a chieftdom executive added to the list. Selection and sometimes election. We use both selection and election method. But mostly, we do select through consensus. The district chairperson oversees every selection process whether at the chieftdom/zonal level or at the constituency level. Incumbent executives at the constituency level select incoming members while at the same time incumbent executives at the chieftdom level do the selection for incoming members at this level." (APC Female Party Member).

"It could be by election or selection. I was selected based on popular request by the constituents." (APC Female Party Member)

For the most part, respondents said that the processes for executive member recruitment were clear and largely abided by.

3.3.2. Candidate requirements to compete for delegate positions

In light of the above mentioned criteria, respondents were asked about the criteria that determined eligibility to run for these positions. A majority of key informants responded positively to the question of whether formal guidelines existed that governed selection of executive members. However, when asked what the criteria were, responses differed. There was largely consensus around the following: being a paid up, card carrying party member; have a strong track record of service to the party (where service included recruitment, representation, and, or, defense of the party) and the community; and being resident within the community. Emphasis was also placed on community popularity; and the ability to mobilise support. Other mentioned criteria but by fewer respondents, included being married and educated. While these were the stated rules, anecdotally, another unwritten or hidden reason that has been heard is that parties want someone who is able to defend the party in the face of violence from other political parties. Thus, they want a candidate who is both able to mobilise against this violence and if needed, return it as well.

"At the constituency level an aspirant must be a registered member of APC party and pay his or her membership contributions. They should also be active members, not passive. Paid members can contest for any position and those voting should also be paid members of the APC party. We conduct elections and if there is a draw we either elect or select based on the party constitution. The winner gets the position." (APC Women's Secretary General, Port Loko).

At least one respondent questioned the residency requirement: She found that the requirement for women to live in a particular locality for a specific time prior to running for a party symbol could be challenging for female aspirants who as a result of marriage, move to their husband's locale. Nevertheless, overall, respondents articulated largely the same criteria for selection at all levels, from the zonal, and constituency to district levels, although at the zonal level, more emphasis appeared to be placed on community work and being well known in the community .

3.3.3. Do women run?

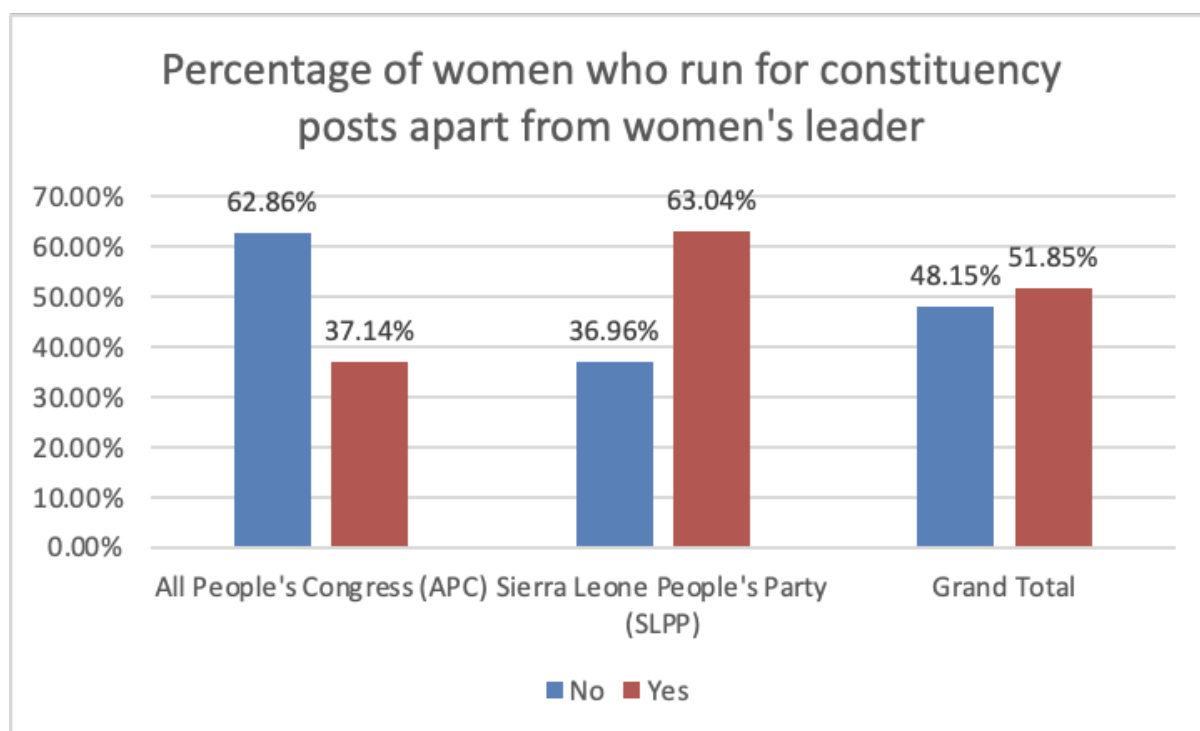
In light of the above criteria, we asked women and male party leaders in the target districts about women's ability to contest for delegate positions with the power to elect candidates. We asked respondents if they knew of any women who ran for positions (apart from women's leader) at the constituency and district levels respectively.

According to respondents, women did run for positions, (Figures 9 and 10), although not in great numbers. They also faced challenges when running. Nearly half of respondents noted that women ran for positions outside of the women's leader at both constituency and district levels. However, the ability to run varied by political party, rural/urban divide, district, and whether women were contesting in their party strongholds.

SLPP respondents (63%) at the constituency level were more than one and half times more likely to know women who had run for positions outside of the women's leader than APC respondents (37.1%). However, overall, responses indicate that women in urban communities were more likely to run for executive positions (outside of women's leader) than women in rural communities (Figure 10) where patriarchal barriers are stronger. It also appeared that women were more likely to run for executive positions in non-party strongholds. For example, in rural areas, APC respondents noted they knew of APC women who ran for executive positions in Kenema and Moyamba (a non-APC party strong hold). Conversely, they did not report any woman running for these positions in Port Loko and Tonkolili, which are APC strongholds. The same was noted in urban communities in Kenema and Moyamba. However, APC women did run for executive positions in the party stronghold as well, in Port Loko. Only Tonkolili recorded no women running for these posts in both rural and urban communities.

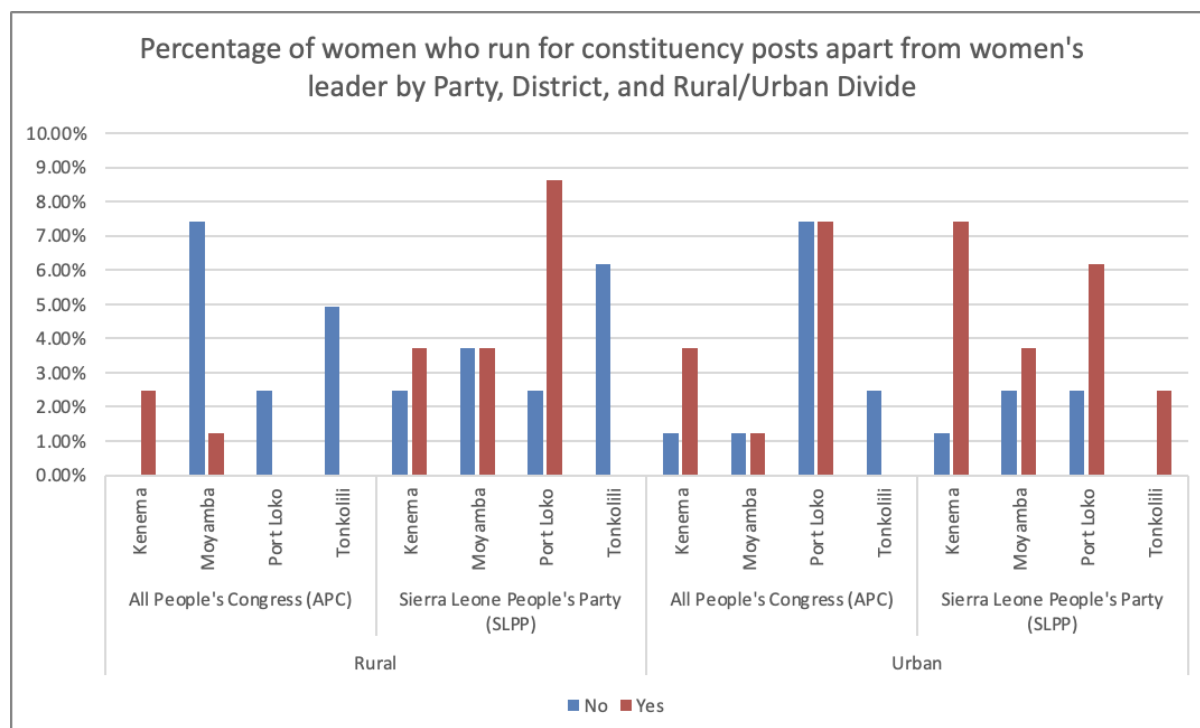
A similar trend was noted for SLPP, although not as stark. In rural communities, twice as many SLPP women party members ran for positions in Port Loko than Moyamba and Kenema, although again, none were recorded in Tonkolili. In urban communities, SLPP women ran in all four districts, including Tonkolili. The highest numbers were recorded in Kenema, with Port Loko coming in second, followed by Moyamba and Tonkolili (Figure 10).

Figure 9: Percentage of women running for general leadership positions (constituency level)



Respondents were asked: During the last constituency contest do you know if any women ran for positions apart from women's leader in your party?

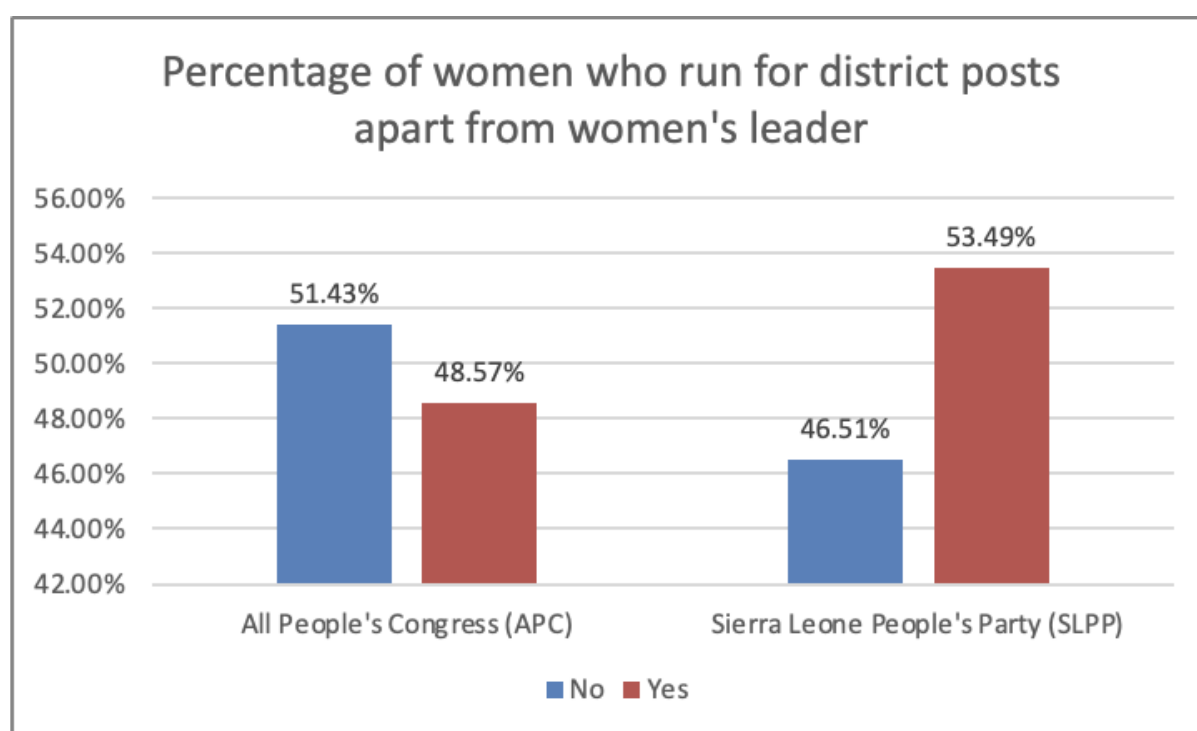
Figure 10: Percentage of women running for leadership posts by Party, District and Locale



Respondents were asked: During the last constituency contest do you know if any women ran for positions apart from women's leader in your party?

A related question, posed at the district, than the constituency level, revealed similar results. There was a roughly 50-50 split in the numbers of respondents who noted women running for these positions and those that said they did not know of any women running for executive posts other than women's leader. However, it appears that more APC women are running for these posts at district level (37% at constituency level compared to 48.6%). Conversely, the numbers of SLPP respondents saying they knew of women who ran for posts other than women's leader at the District level declined from 63.4% to 53.5%. Interestingly, Tonkolili in particular posed constraints for both APC and SLPP female candidates. Given the Sierra Leone cultural context where historically northern districts have been more resistant to women in leadership, (for example, female chiefs can be found in the South, but not the North), it would be worth examining the extent in which this is also a factor, beyond the character of the political party.

Figure 11: Percentage of women running for general leadership positions (constituency level)



Respondents were asked: during the last District delegate contest do you know if any women ran for positions apart from women's leader?

3.3.4. Challenges Faced by Women in Contesting for Zonal, District and Party level Executive Positions

Although women do run for delegate positions, the number of women in these positions is overall very low. To understand the reasons for this, we asked respondents "who/what is the main hindrance for women's participation in this constituency?" Responses showed that irrespective of which process (election or selection) was in play, women faced stiff resistance to delegate positions. Successful women (including parliamentarians and delegates) were less likely to attribute these constraints to structural conditions within society. Instead they pointed to women's agency, including a lack of confidence, education, and party inactivity as the main barriers women face.

For the majority of respondents however, structural constraints were the main barriers to their successful election. A predominant issue was culturally grounded patriarchy, including male resistance to female leadership entrenched within the parties. Financial barriers and violence were also frequently mentioned. The perception of suppression by the ruling party was also mentioned by APC respondents.

3.3.4.1. Male Executives

Respondents pointed to male dominance in society and the implications this has had on restricting the political space for women - many felt that men systematically schemed to keep women out. Party leaders at all levels were implicated - from zonal/sectional level, all the way to the national level.

"Our male executive leaders are making it very difficult for us to fully participate in politics in this part of the country. For example, we are currently divided in this district based on their way of playing politics. They are not allowing us to fully participate, they micromanage us, they control us in every aspect of our political activities. (APC female party member);

The party does not want women in the delegate positions, if a women decide to aspire for this position the party executives will not give their support to that aspirant, some of our strongholds have been divided, for instance in Port Loko although we are still in the majority some people transfer to the ruling party (APC, Influential Party Member, Port Loko).

"Firstly the position women always acquired within the party is Women Leader position and that involves many challenges. Positions like Chairperson, Secretary General, YG among others are not given to women. It's only women's leader that is given to women... There are four main positions that are delegate positions that leads to party convention...We always face challenges with men for such positions. In Port Loko district we are lucky to have a woman as Chairperson in one constituency. Persons acquiring such a position is not easy. You have to sell the party ideology to people in towns, villages and everywhere. This place is an APC stronghold but the SLPP party is making inroads and progress now. Anywhere I go I ensure to sell the party ideology because most of the people here are APC supporters. I convinced people to see reasons to crossover to SLPP. I explained about the Free Quality education in the country and

for instance I advocated to approved both primary and secondary schools including teachers in my village.” SLPP Female Party Member

“Culture is one of the key hindrances to women’s political participation here. People generally do not believe women can be more of a good leader than men. So as a result even if a capable female candidate aspires, it’s somehow difficult for people to vote for her due to their mentality. ” (APC male party member);

Women are also subject to violence and intimidation, including sexual abuse by fellow party members as ways to prevent them from gaining office.

“The party has some certain groups who have considered themselves to be the owner of the party, if they see any extra person want to contest for a position. For example, I was pushed to the point of getting very serious damage by the constituency chairman [name withheld] because I decided to contest for an executive position; all that is preventing other women [and causing them] to be afraid of joining politics. These men can insult us publicly, molest us, [mis]treating us with so many things.” (APC Female Party Member)

3.3.4.2. Financial Constraints

Another frequently mentioned constraint was that of finances. Women lacked money to buy delegates, as well as to campaign more generally. General campaign costs include travel, buying food and other goods for supporters, paying for publicity such as PA systems and T-shirts among other expenses. Lavali (2017) for example, in outlining the substantive costs that MPs incur included meeting voters’ personal demands, party contributions to help underwrite party costs, greater expenditure in swing districts, as well as rewarding supporters, among the drivers of costs for MPs.

As the criteria for delegate election has illustrated, securing a parliamentary position requires support at all levels of the process since in principle, the constituency level delegates in turn elect the district level delegates, who then elect national level delegates who are responsible for voting in the symbol allocation process. Thus, to win, it is important that you are able to have enough people who can vote for delegates that will support you. It is within this process of jockeying for delegates that many respondents spoke about vote buying and intimidation.

The dangers of this process was clearly illustrated through events on the ground in Kenema, where elections had taken place in April. However, concerns around vote buying had led to the cancellation of a number of elections and re-runs were pending. Researchers reported the buying of party cards in Kenema by a prominent senior member of the SLPP party in order to influence the elections. However, according to respondents, to circumvent this, the president, who is the party leader, decreed that rather than party cards, voters could stand openly behind the candidate of their choice. Eligibility to vote was based on community knowledge of the voter as a party member in good standing, notwithstanding whether they had a party card or not, which was the standard criteria. Concerns over the misuse of party cards to control the voting process underscores one of the primary complaints women had about the use of money to control the process.

"For example, when a poor woman contests against a wealthy person, it would be very difficult for the poor woman to contest. In our constituency we have 80 delegates, if a wealthy person bought 60 of them with Le1,000,000 for each delegate that would be the end." (SLPP female party member).

Women also lack the zeal and enthusiasm to participate in governance at the constituency level because they lack the financial resources. It's difficult to see people supporting women financially to aspire for political positions. All of these put together break their aspirations and moral strength." (APC male party member);

The issues that emerged in Kenema also reveal the importance of the centre in what are ostensibly local level elections. Control of party cards can effectively determine who gets a delegate position, a point that was reiterated by the Kenema respondent cited above regarding the difficulties of lack of money to buy delegates. The question of money to buy delegates is one that contributes also to the low numbers of women elected as parliamentarians as delegate votes are seen as being up for sale. This makes politics considerably expensive for women in the SLPP party, and women are generally less able to meet these costs.

In the words of an SLPP party member, *"[it's] not that women are not capable but the problem is when someone who has more money comes, the delegate will sell their vote and that is a challenge for us women who can't afford to give them the money. So lack of financial assistance is a key constraint women face in running for the party symbol in this constituency."* (SLPP Female Party Member).

Another SLPP party member said, *"Lack of financial support. At times symbol awarding can be a problem at zonal level because someone can come with plenty of money. The community people might not even want him but because of money they will decide to give him the symbol instead."*

Thus, irrespective of the process, selection or election, women are discriminated against. Objective qualifications do not appear to be as useful as personal ties and connections:

As one respondent put it:

I became constituency secretary general in the 2013 constituency, district, regional and national elections. I was selected because of eligibility; that is, I was a fully registered member and paid my contributions. During the selection process, ranking members of the APC party told three of us aspirants to consult ourselves who should get selected. This was fruitless and inconclusive among us but party members selected me based on eligibility. Moving forward in 2018 elections this was the other way around because few selected ranking members already chose selected executives they favoured. I lost my position because the process was unfair. The APC party constitution clause is either election or selection. This is what the party adheres to (APC Female Party Member).

For another,

"People acquiring positions for zonal executives do not require any educational qualifications like WASSCE, BECE or whatsoever. Those that acquired their positions gained it through familiarity with high ranking SLPP party members or political connections. The process is not fair, to [not] check for eligibility like being a registered SLPP party member, paying membership dues and influence among the people (SLPP Female Party Member)

From the discussions above, it is clear that for women to succeed, connections with influential (often male) party members who can help broker their way, as well as money are key. Moreover, responses show that there are "big men," within the party that are able to use money to influence elections. While it would seem that a process of selection could help address the concerns with vote buying that respondents mention as operating within the SLPP, women's responses showed that the selection process was also problematic; women who were affiliated to "big men" or party leaders were often the ones most likely to do well, even if they were not necessarily the choice of the community. Thus, what mattered was loyalty to, or the favour of, key people within the party.

Being in the opposition

Another factor mentioned by respondents was the opposition dynamic. For APC members, particularly in districts that were the stronghold of the ruling party, women reported facing particular challenges. It is not clear if these problems are different from ones that male politicians might also face however.

The SLPP Kenema executive are my main hindrance because they are in governance they are blocking us in all aspects. Even if we are going out to talk to our colleagues, they would monitor us with the idea that we [are] on campaign. They are making it very difficult for us. (APC female party member).

3.3.4.3. Perceived Deficiencies in women (education/Shyness)

Men and successful women in leadership positions in the party were more likely to blame women's lack of participation on the women themselves. Successful women were more likely to emphasise their accomplishments as helping them to do well (such as education) and to ascribe women's poor performance to qualities inherent to women such as shyness, lacking self-confidence, or their perception that leadership positions should be for men.

The women are also a factor because only a few of them show up to participate in constituency politics. Most women don't aspire for positions; those who show up are likely to be selected. Moreover, most women are shy and lack self-confidence. In addition, culture/customary barriers is also a factor. Some traditions do not encourage women to participate (Male Party Member).

Another mentioned concern was women's lack of engagement with the party, including registering and being active within the party and familiarity with the party's laws and regulations.

"In some cases most women have not registered with her party, [is] not active in party activities, they don't even know the party laws and regulations." (Female SLPP Party Member)

3.3.4.4. Is it easier to be selected in party strongholds?

As is clear from above, respondents shared that women found it difficult to attain delegate positions within the executive, outside of the women leader position. To understand whether this was the same across parties and in all regions we asked respondents whether it was easier to be selected in prominent positions in non-party strongholds. Recall that Figures 9, 10 and 11 suggest that women are more likely to attain executive level positions in urban areas as well as in areas that were not the party strong hold. However, responses to this question were mixed. Some respondents believed that it was indeed easier to run for a delegate position outside of the party stronghold. Others however felt that challenges to women's leadership transcended the issue of strongholds.

For those that believed opposition areas were easier, they found that the competition was not as fierce, as men were less interested in the positions:

In speaking about being given a symbol, a female parliamentarian had this to say: "Because it's the party stronghold, that's the more reason the woman will be bullied by the men knowing that it's possible to win in that community. If not the party stronghold the party might encourage a woman to run because it's a game of chance." (SLPP Female Parliamentarian).

However, other women felt that given patriarchal contexts where men do not believe women should lead, even opposition strongholds could be difficult for women. Moreover, some women felt that they stood a better chance of being known and having their record speak for them in strongholds. At the same time, ruling party abuse and opposition was also cited as a concern in opposition strongholds.

It's still not easy whether it's in the party stronghold or not. As a woman you have to face the same challenges every woman faces (such as being considered incompetent to men, finance, inferiority syndrome etc) in aspiring for party executive positions (SLPP Party Member Tonkolili)

"It's possible to acquire leadership positions only if the men agree and support the process. Patriarchal system is disturbing the process because men take it that they should lead always. ...Yes there are women in this position in opposition strongholds....APC award symbols or allow women to acquire leadership positions in SLPP strongholds but in their strongholds like Bombali and Port Loko that is not the case. Where the party does not stand the chance to prevail is where they allow women to acquire positions. Definitely men fight women for positions in these locations. When women come forward to acquire leadership positions men feel challenged and therefore intimidate female aspirants. For example in the 2012 elections, a female aspirant contested for leadership position in Lokomasama. She faced great challenges and violence. What they did to her is unspeakable. I don't know if she's alive because I understand that they killed her. So this can happen in a party's strongholds or in opposition strongholds. (APC Female Unsuccessful Candidate, Port Loko)

3.3.5. Impact of COVID-19 on Women's Ability to Be Selected as Party Standard Bearer

Given that COVID-19 has generally been seen to exacerbate women's vulnerabilities, key informants were asked whether they believed COVID-19 would affect women's chances of being elected. A total of 45% of respondents believed that COVID-19 would not affect their chances of being selected as the party's candidate, compared to 37.5% of respondents who believed that it would. For those that believed COVID could affect their chances, the most frequently cited concerns included restrictions on gathering, crowds and movement, which could affect their ability to campaign, and concerns around finances given the economic constraints generated by COVID-19.

As one parliamentarian put it, "Yes, it will affect the women's ability to run because poverty will increase. Some women are in businesses but if this capacity is affected, it will hamper women's ability to run." (SLPP Female Parliamentarian).

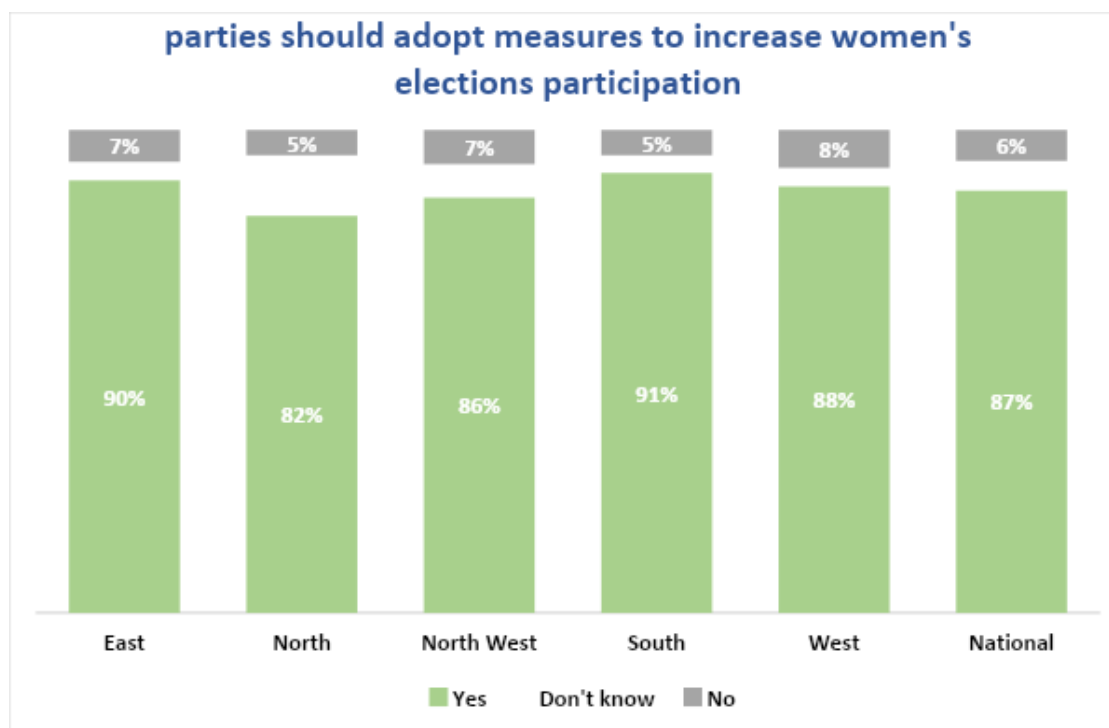
3.3.6. Measures to Support Women's Political Participation

In light of the low numbers of women in politics, survey respondents and key informants were asked if they thought political parties should adopt measures to ensure that more women were able to compete and win.

3.3.6.1. Parties and COVID-19

Both survey respondents and key informants were in favour of increased measures by political parties to increase women's political participation. In the survey, a total of 87% of respondents felt that parties needed to take concrete steps to increase women's participation, and that, "parties should adopt measures to increase women's elections participation" (Figure 11).

Figure 12: Should Parties Adopt Measures to Increase Women's Political Participation

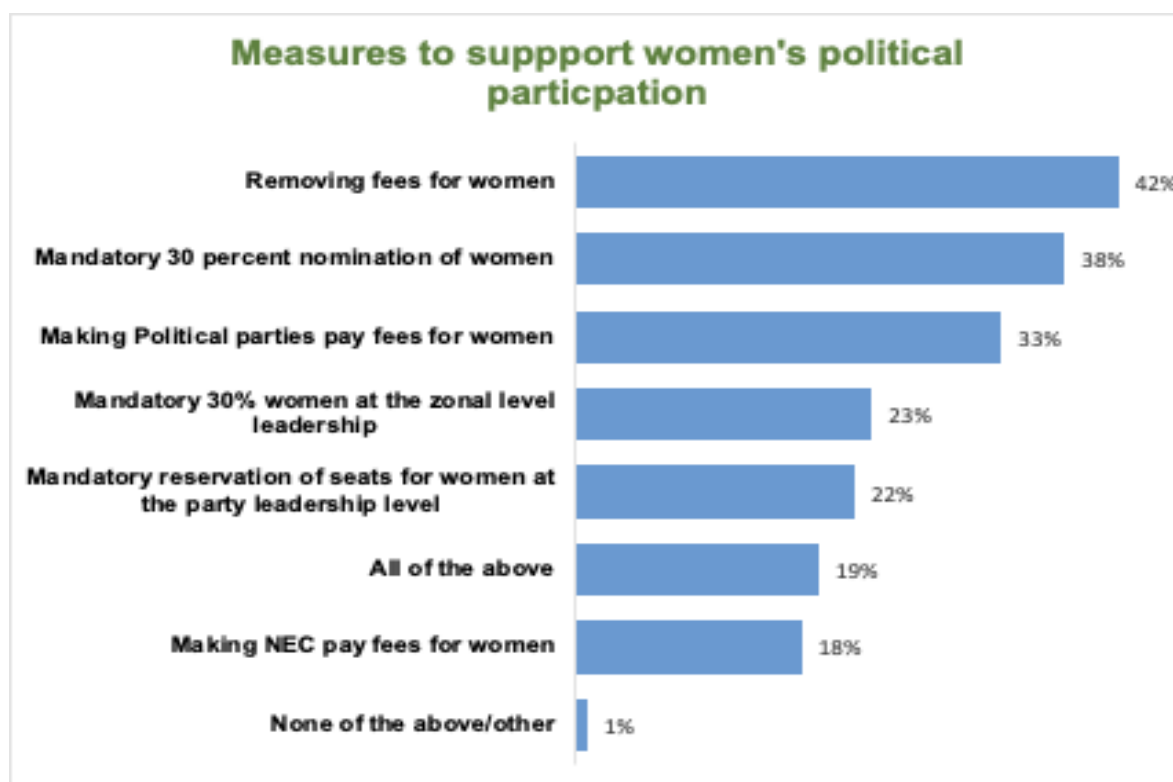


Respondents were asked: Do you believe that political parties should adopt measures to ensure more women are able to compete in elections and win seats?

Interventions to boost women's political participation were offered at two levels. The first were measures aimed at addressing structural constraints external to women; namely the financial and cultural barriers.

Removal of nomination fees for women received the most support: just over four out of every ten respondents (42%) supported this measure, followed by provision of a 30% quota for women, supported by 38% of respondents. One third of respondents felt that political parties should pay fees for women. Other measures with some level of support included establishing a quota for women at the party leadership level (22%), as well as having NEC pay women's nomination fees (18%). Nearly two in ten (19%) respondents supported all of the measures (Figure 12).

Figure 13: Measures to Support Women's Political Participation



Respondents were asked: If yes, (to the above question) which of the following measures would you support?

Similarly, a majority of key informants also believed that parties should adopt measures to boost women's political participation. Only one respondent from the SLPP responded in the negative to this question. In addition to the responses above, KIIs provided several more examples of measures that could be undertaken to boost women's political participation. Responses were open-ended and then coded, rather than the pre-determined list that formed part of the survey questions.

Key informants provided more detail about quotas, speaking about them on several levels. They discussed both constitutional and party level quotas and called for quotas for all posts, including leadership positions within the executive. In the words of an APC female respondent,

"Give them a quota of at least 30 in Party leadership roles. Encourage more women to come forward. For a start, allocate certain executive roles for women to contest only outside the women leader and deputy role (APC female Respondent)."

Key informants also emphasised the need for the party to "encourage women" or to 'give them a chance.' For respondents, if parties could provide opportunities for women to lead, and encourage them to play key roles in the party, this would help in enabling women to have leadership roles within the party. Effectively, they wanted parties to be open to women's participation.

Let them give opportunity to women to participate (SLPP Woman Party Member);

They should encourage and provide more safety for women who want to play leadership roles in the party” (APC Woman party member).

This was closely linked to comments around sensitisation – that the party should take a lead role in sensitising people to be open to women:

“the party must have a robust campaign to encourage women to aspire and be voted for” (APC Male Party Member).

Massive sensitization by the Party to the grassroots (SLPP Male Party Member).

On the question asking specifically about how the party can ensure that more women are able to run for the party's nomination, many of the same issues emerged, particularly, provision of financing for women (including waiving or paying for nomination fees), establishment of quotas and winnable seats, encouragement, and empowerment. The issue of protecting women against violence was also frequently mentioned. A parliamentarian mentioned party members accompanying women on campaigns as one way to help protect women from violence.

“Less violence from various parties. This is one of the reasons why women don't want to be involved in leadership positions”(SLPP Female Party Member);

“They should protect women from intimidation and political violence (APC Female Party member);

Another factor mentioned by one respondent was removal of some of the qualifying conditions for candidates:

“Some political parties should remove rigid conditions so that women can get their party's nomination. Although the SLPP party doesn't have tough conditions, but other parties should remove such conditions. For example, an aspirant must have residence in a specific locality for a prolonged time or be an active member within the party ranks. If some parties don't remove these conditions this will hinder women participation (Male Party Member, unknown political party).

Similarly, a question was asked about what political parties can do to ensure that more women are selected as their party's nominee. The results were very much in line with the above mentioned points, including quotas, encouragement and sensitization of male party members, fee reduction, and free and fair elections. While a few respondents mentioned the importance of strongholds, one response implied that increased competitiveness even in strongholds could provide opportunities for women:

Every political party has strongholds. Therefore, political parties should identify potential women with substance to get selected as their party's nominee. In the past APC bragged that Port Loko is their stronghold but the dynamics have changed and SLPP is making great

headway in the district. In addition, training and capacity building of women is important. (SLPP Male Party Member).

3.3.6.2. The role of NEC and PPRC

Respondents were asked what role they felt NEC and PPRC should play to ensure that parties awarded more symbols to women. The two most frequently mentioned issues were for PPRC and NEC to advocate with the political parties to allocate symbols to women, as well as the provision of discounted or full payment of registration fees for candidates, and/or other financial assistance. Several respondents also mentioned the importance of NEC and PPRC providing a level playing field for all parties to compete, and to show impartiality in their rulings. This last point was most frequently mentioned by APC female party members.

"They should be neutral and not support any party. NEC and PPRC must not be biased because all that is the reason why political violence is on the rise and women can't compete for the fear of their lives and families (APC woman)" (APC Female party member)

Respondents also wanted PPRC and NEC to play stronger roles in enforcing existing policies.

As one respondent said, "PPRC encouraged political parties to have women's policy, these policies should be enforced by the political parties....PPRC should enforce the party policies for women...if PPRC enforces, NEC will comply" (SLPP female parliamentarian).

3.3.6.3. Existence of a Gender Policy

Both APC and SLPP have a gender policy. Respondents were asked if they knew if their party had a gender policy. Nearly 46 percent (45.82%) of respondents said "no," compared to 31.3% that said yes. Others did not know. This shows that knowledge of the party gender policy is very low. Moreover, of those who said yes, when asked what the policy said, responses differed. For some, the policy meant that certain positions were reserved for women – namely the women's leader:

*"Our policy is clear, there are certain positions meant for men and women. Women are supposed to have their women's leader, while the men are referred to as Chairmen." *APC Female Party Member)*

If we say there is a meeting, everybody should come, both men and women. Both men and women are allowed to participate in party politics at the same level. (APC female party member)

Women have the freedom to contest for any position within the party (SLPP Female party Member)

We have what we called women's leadership position that is purely for women, and only women are allowed to cast their vote in that election for the women's leader position (SLPP Female Party Member)

The lack of both knowledge about the gender policy and what it actually says clearly shows that these policies are not being implemented. Moreover, if women do not know to what they are entitled, how can they make demands and hold the party accountable?

4. Conclusions and Implications for Women's Political Participation

Covid-19 has clearly deepened the existing vulnerabilities of women. Women are severely under-represented in leadership positions and the overall response structure from national to district and community levels. This research shows that notwithstanding COVID-19, women face severe hindrances when it comes to accessing executive positions at the zonal, constituency, district and national levels. For both these parties, respondents mentioned that women did run/stand for executive level positions with delegate rights; but the main executive position women held was that of women's leader. While this is a voting position, it was difficult to see women attain positions outside of this one, restricting the number of women who can actually vote in the delegate selection process.

The reasons provided for these challenges are very similar to those that women have mentioned in numerous studies as barriers to their political participation in general elections (Fofana Ibrahim, 2015; National Democratic Institute, 2007; Trocaire, 2018). Although there was some variation noted in the delegate recruitment process with APC relying more on selection/consensus and election, and SLPP relying on elections/voting, the main constraints raised by women were largely the same, the two processes in practice make it difficult for women.

The main barriers for women were within their own political party. Culture and tradition, reinforced by patriarchal party structures all combined to make it difficult for women to access these positions. This along with men's greater financial power has enabled men to keep women out of these spaces. The prevalence of buying delegate votes and party cards (for votes) were widely noted by both political parties, but particularly within the SLPP.

This speaks to the need to guarantee competitive intraparty politics ensuring that the playing field is fair and level, and that discriminatory or illegal practices are swiftly followed up on. For instance, women provided examples of unfair electoral practices, including being given the wrong time for the election leading to the unavailability of their supporters at the time of voting; or elections being held during problematic times for women, thus ensuring they were unable to be present, and so on. Given that delegate elections are largely internal affairs, there needs to be some level of intervention to ensure that these processes are indeed free and fair. Women must be protected in these competitive spaces from unfair and

discriminatory practices, as key informants revealed that there are quite a number of mechanisms currently being used to undermine them.

At the same time, there has to be a balance between competition and party destabilisation. One of the recurrent concerns by APC respondents was suppression by the ruling party. This included intimidation and limits in allowing them to meet. Simultaneously, the party is facing some level of internal strife, as evidenced by current court cases. In such a context, processes such as selection could be seen as one way to maintain party cohesiveness, yet, it has negative implications on women's political participation as described below, given that the committee of leaders responsible for this selection are largely male senior party figures, or women affiliated with key male leaders within the party. The space for independent new voices was very small. Women who tried to run against favoured others were gently encouraged to drop out in favour of the preferred candidate.

Women also noted the prevalence of violence and intimidation, all as factors preventing them from attaining positions even at the lowest levels. Yet, accessing these institutions is crucial: if women are not represented, it reduces the chance of bringing more women into politics. As one APC female party member put it, speaking about the National Executive Committee, the highest leadership body within the party:

"There is only one woman within that body. With a male dominated body, how can women acquire leadership positions? Other reasons are lack of financial support, familiarity with ranking members and high ranking men of the party want sexual intimacy with women aspiring for higher positions. The party needs to restructure NEC (APC Female Party Member).

Moreover, these institutions provide important leadership opportunities and exposure to women. Several of the current parliamentarians cut their teeth in them, moving up through the ranks. For example, one current parliamentarian started off as a zonal chair, before becoming a district executive member, to serving as a councillor.

To address these constraints, while respondents noted a range of activities that rely on changing behaviour and attitudes and beliefs, other recommendations directly addressed the deep structural barriers by advocating legal reform. Across respondents from both parties, quotas were a frequently mentioned initiative that women felt would allow them an even playing field to compete. Quotas were mentioned at several levels. For some respondents, political parties needed to develop quota policies that included reserving seats within the executive for women, and also more generally, for symbol allocation. One way to do this would be to ensure that parties develop gender policies that are part of the party constitution, which can then be monitored and enforced by PPRC. Currently, although several parties have gender policies, these are voluntary and there are no penalties for lack of enforcement. Nevertheless, while parties prepare to incorporate these policies into their constitution, they could popularise them and CSOs could engage with parties to encourage them to comply as well as monitor compliance.

Other respondents called for quotas at the level of the constitution, with the force of the law. Some asked that the process of transforming the new GEWE policy into a bill be speedily implemented. Such legal reforms should be accompanied by attitudinal and behavioural

change sensitisation activities encouraging greater acceptance of women in leadership, as well as reducing violence against women. NEC and PPRC should play stronger roles in regulating political party behaviour, particularly around violence in elections as well as ensuring that all voting processes, including at the delegate level are properly done. While such policies are not directly gender-specific, given the ways in which violence as well as flawed voting practices has been used to intimidate and exclude women, this will have positive implications.

Finally, also required is greater tangible assistance to women to enable them to access these positions: this includes financial opportunities and provision, protection from violence, and continued capacity building programs, such as education, training and capacity building, to encourage women to take, and continue to excel in leadership positions.

5. Recommendations

1. Addressing SGBV

- a. There needs to be a sustained public campaign to increase awareness of the SGBV hotline. Women need to be able to easily access help for SGBV, both at the reporting and service level.
- b. Deepen sensitisation and activities with men on changing mindsets, attitudes, and practices that facilitate sexual gender based violence against women. This includes in the political sphere where women political candidates face SGBV-related violence and abuse.

2. Provision of quotas and safe seats:

- a. There should be a deliberate and targeted effort to increase women's representation at ward and constituency levels, in addition to national level efforts. This starts with the implementation of enforceable quotas at the level of the Constitution and the Political Party. Party-level affirmative action policies should be incorporated into party constitutions and formalised. Quotas should be comprehensive and mandate all political parties to have more females in leadership positions across the various institutional organs of the party.
- b. Parties should popularise existing gender policies. CSOs should monitor compliance and encourage parties to abide by these policies.
- c. These efforts should be combined with the provision of safe seats, again within the constitution for women in their party strongholds.
- d. Sensitisation must also continue on the need to increase women's political participation with citizens as well as politicians.

3. Strengthen PPRC and NEC's regulatory powers:

- a. Empower PPRC to monitor, regulate and enforce quotas and safe seats with ramifications for non-compliance.
- b. Protecting women from violence: PPRC to enforce party codes of conduct particularly around violence and strengthen regulatory powers for violators.
- c. Political parties should also sanction members that participate in violence, and provide protection for women in their campaigns.

- d. Ensure that PPRC regulates parties fairly and without prejudice.
 - e. Ensure that NEC conducts and monitors elections at all levels including constituency elections, freely, and fairly.
 - f. Monitoring and regulation of the use of money to buy votes at the various levels for delegate positions.
- 4. Financing women's electability:
 - a. Steps should be taken to make politics affordable for women. We recommend that both NEC and the political parties provide discounts, pay, or waive nomination and candidature fees for women candidates including those running as independents. A separate election fund for women candidates should be set aside to address financial constraints.
 - b. Implement wider development activities to enable women to be financially independent, including microfinance, and business training opportunities.
- 5. Confidence building of women
 - a. Continue training and empowerment programs for women to enhance their leadership, communication and other skills.

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