Parliaments and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda Case Study: SIERRA LEONE

1. Introduction

This case study has been produced in support of the UNDP Handbook on Parliamentary Implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. It is one of three case studies that were commissioned by UNDP as part of the pilot phase of the “Parliamentary Implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda Project” (Parliaments and WPS Project) which was implemented during 2018 and will soon commence Phase 2 from 2019-2020.

The three case studies capture the work supported by UNDP in three legislatures – Sierra Leone, as well as Kyrgyzstan and Sri Lanka – as part of the Parliaments and WPS Project. These countries were chosen through an “expression of interest” process, whereby UNDP Country Offices in each country volunteered to be part of the Project. As a result of this self-selection process, the case studies represent a variety of country contexts in relation to women, peace and security (WPS). All three have suffered from conflict, though the conflicts had very different durations, causes, participants and trajectories. All three are in what is commonly described as the “post-conflict” phase, though of course, in reality this means all three are also still focused on ongoing peacebuilding.

Purpose of this case study

This case study reflects a process of engagement through the Parliaments and WPS Project over the course of approximately nine months, from mid-2018 to early 2019. The case study seeks to describe the work undertaken with the national legislature through the Project in each priority country, within the context of the overarching national WPS priorities and issues facing the country. It seeks to explain both how the Project worked with each legislature and what follow up approaches were agreed and implemented. It is hoped that this information could be useful to other legislatures seeking to progress the WPS agenda through their own parliamentary processes. The case study should be ready alongside the UNDP Handbook on Parliamentary Implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda.

This case study is a good example of a National Parliament engaging in the process of developing a new WPS National Action Plan (NAP), including through participation in the National WPS NAP Working Group and in regional consultation processes. It is also a good example of Parliament using its own parliamentary processes to encourage better WPS NAP implementation, including by debating and endorsing a Parliamentary Resolution on WPS and following up by developing a complementary Parliamentary WPS National Action Plan, which identifies the specific actions to be prioritised by MPs.
Methodology

The Project was implemented through an international consultant, in collaboration with Ms Lakshmi Pillai, the UNDP Parliamentary Development Specialist based in Freetown and Dr Nana Pratt, the local WPS expert recruited by the UNDP Sierra Leone Country Office with funding from the global Empowering Parliaments to Support National Implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda Project (the Project). Dr Pratt is co-chair of the National WPS Steering Group (alongside the Director of the Gender Director, Mr Charles Vandy) which was due to commence work developing Sierra Leone’s second WPS National Action Plan (NAP) during the period of this Project, and she was heavily involved in the process of developing and monitoring implementation of Sierra Leone’s first WPS NAP (2010-14).

The international and national consultants worked together to develop a “Background Paper on WPS issues in Sierra Leone”. This background paper has been used to inform the analysis in this case study. It was also used to underpin a national WPS Workshop held in July 2018, with support from Dr Pratt and her team at the National Office for Women (NOW) a leading gender NGO, Ms Finda Fraser, the Director of the Department of Parliamentary Affairs and Coordination (DEPAC), Mr Paran Tarawally, Clerk of Parliament and Mr Mohamed Lebbie, Deputy Clerk of Parliament. This WPS Workshop resulted in a Parliament Outcomes Statement on WPS which has been developed into a resolution to be tabled in Parliament in 2019 (see Parts 5-6 below for more).

2. National Parliament

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AT A GLANCE:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name of Parliament</td>
<td>Parliament</td>
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<tr>
<td>System of government</td>
<td>Presidential</td>
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<tr>
<td>Type of electoral system:</td>
<td>132 MPs elected through first-past-the-post + 14 Paramount Chiefs indirectly elected to represent the 14 provincial districts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Structure of Parliament</td>
<td>Unicameral</td>
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<tr>
<td>Last presidential election</td>
<td>April 2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>Last legislative election</td>
<td>March 2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total number of MPs</td>
<td>146 MPs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of women MPs</td>
<td>23 MPs</td>
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The national Parliament operates as a unicameral body with responsibilities for law-making, budget approval and review, oversight and representation. Sierra Leone’s system of government is still evolving, as multi-party democracy was only reintroduced in 1996 and since that time there have only been four elections held, from 2002 with the end of an intense civil war.¹ Sierra Leone has historically implemented a strong presidential system, with parliament offering little balance to a strong executive prior to multi-party politics being introduced. Even since that time, parliamentary culture has been slowly developing over time. It was only with the passing of the Parliament Service Commission Act 2007 that Parliament began to evolve as a distinct and separate arm of the state.

¹ President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah was in power during the peace transition and won the first peaceful elections held in 2002. President Ernest Bai Koroma then won two 5-year terms from 2007-2018 and President Julius Maada Bio won the presidential election held in April 2018.
Notably, following the March/April 2018 presidential election, the presidency shifted between the two dominant national political parties, resulting in a President from the Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP), even though a parliamentary majority was held by the (newly in opposition) All People’s Party (APP).

This has resulted in some procedural confusion, as Sierra Leone has not historically had experience with different parties holding power in the two political branches of government. Due to electoral disputes in the immediate aftermath of the March 2018 parliamentary elections which resulted in a parliamentary boycott by the APP, the election for the Speaker resulted in the speakership going to the SLPP, despite the APC holding a majority of seats.

This has led to ongoing procedural challenges, as the President’s party holds the Speaker’s chair but the Opposition has the numbers needed to pass legislation. Nonetheless, it has also encouraged efforts at consensus-building across political parties.

It is within this context that the process of parliamentary strengthening is ongoing, as Members of Parliament (MPs) continue to develop the legislature as a stronger, independent arm of government. UNDP has been supporting these efforts for more than a decade, with a dedicated Parliamentary Support Project in place since 2008. The Project responded to the reality that the civil conflict and long period of one-party rule meant that Parliament experienced a haemorrhage of its well trained and experienced technical, legal and administrative professionals that seriously depleted its institutional capacity.

UNDP has worked closely with the Parliamentary Administration to rebuild its capacities to provide professional parliamentary services to MPs. In 2018, after the general elections, the new Parliament was comprised of Members from four political parties, plus three independent MPs. More than 80% of MPs were newly elected, which meant they were also keen to be supported to develop their knowledge of parliamentary rules and procedures. UNDP also supported the setting up of the Parliamentary Women’s Caucus following the elections; notably only two former women MPs were re-elected.

3. Country Context

When the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (UNSCR 1325) in 2000, Sierra Leone was still in the depths of civil conflict; in fact, the UN’s experience peacekeeping and peacebuilding in Sierra Leone during the 1990s informed the development of UNSCR 1325. Sierra Leone’s post-independence history since 1961 was characterised by corruption, conflict and increasing poverty and hardship for the people of the country. The rise to power in 1968 of President Siaka Stevens saw the gradual drift towards authoritarianism and a one-party state. He was replaced in 1985 with Major General Joseph Momoh, whose incompetence paved the way for a violent revolutionary uprising in 1991 that quickly broke the weak national Government and resulted in complete civil war.

The Sierra Leone war that raged from 1991 to 2002 is considered one of the most bloody conflicts in recent history, characterised by brutal violence inflicted on the civilian population, including the targeting of young children to become child soldiers and one of the most significant examples of rape and sexual slavery being used as a weapon of war. “It has been estimated by Physicians for Human Rights that up to 257,000 women were victims of gender related violence during the war”, with all key players being implicated, including the Sierra Leone Army.


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3 Ibid.
4 “UNDP Project summary” (undated), http://mptf.undp.org/factsheet/project/00071609?lo=1
5 “Rape during the Sierra Leone civil war”, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rape_during_the_Sierra_Leone_Civil_War.
documented the many atrocities inflicted on women and girls in their 2003 report, "We'll Kill You If You Cry: Sexual Violence in the Sierra Leone Conflict". The report found that:

Throughout the armed conflict in Sierra Leone from 1991 to 2001, thousands of women and girls of all ages, ethnic groups, and socioeconomic classes were subjected to widespread and systematic sexual violence, including individual and gang rape, and rape with objects such as weapons, firewood, umbrellas, and pestles. Rape was perpetrated by both sides, but mostly by the rebel forces. These crimes of sexual violence were generally characterized by extraordinary brutality and frequently preceded or followed by other egregious human rights abuses against the victim, her family, and her community. Although the rebels raped indiscriminately irrespective of age, they targeted young women and girls whom they thought were virgins. Many of these younger victims did not survive these crimes of sexual violence. Adult women were also raped so violently that they sometimes bled to death or suffered from tearing in the genital area, causing long-term incontinence and severe infections...

Thousands of women and girls were abducted by the rebels and subjected to sexual slavery, forced to become the sex slaves of their rebel "husbands." Abducted women and girls who were assigned "husbands" remained vulnerable to sexual violence by other rebels. Many survivors were kept with the rebel forces for long periods and gave birth to children fathered by rebels. Some abducted women and girls were forcibly conscripted into the fighting forces and given military training, but even within the rebel forces, women still held much lower status and both conscripted and volunteer female combatants were assigned "husbands." For civilian abductees, aside from sexual violence their brutal life with the rebels included being made to perform forced labor, such as cooking, washing, carrying ammunition and looted items, as well as farm work.6

The conflict came to an end in 2002 following an extended peace process and Sierra Leone was then supported by UN peacekeeping missions for another decade as it moved forward through processes of peacebuilding and democratic transition. During this period, efforts were made to address the traumas inflicted on the civilian population, including on women and children specifically, but more work still needs to be done. Women’s groups continue to identify sexual and gender-based violence as one of the most critical issues facing women today, with law reform to address ongoing child marriage and female genital mutilation also a priority.

4. WPS National Action Plan & other frameworks

Sierra Leone has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women and has endorsed the African Union Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality and the African Union Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol). Sierra Leone has also produced numerous policies and plans to progress gender equality and WPS over the years, including the National Policy on the Advancement of Women (2000), the National Gender Mainstreaming Policy (2000) and the National Gender Strategic Plan (2009-2012).

In 2010, the Government of Sierra Leone became the third country in West Africa and the seventh country in Africa to domesticate UNSCR 1325 by developing a WPS National Action Plan (NAP). The first NAP covered UNSCR1325 (2000), as well as the later UNSCR1820 (2008) on Sexual Violence in Conflict. The NAP was titled Sierra Leone National Action Plan for the Full implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325(2000) and 1820(2008) and referred to as SiLNAP. SiLNAP was a 5-year plan, running from 2010-2014. It had five Pillars, each with its own budget:

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• Pillar 1: Prevention of conflict including violence against women/children (SGBV)
• Pillar 2: Protection, empowerment of victims, vulnerable persons especially women/girls
• Pillar 3: Prosecute, punish perpetrators effectively and safeguard women/girls’ human rights to protection (during and post-conflict) as well as rehabilitation
• Pillar 4: Participation and representation of women
• Pillar 5: Promote coordination of the implementation process including resource mobilization, monitoring and evaluation

SiLNAP was developed through an inclusive and active participatory process, led by a Government-Civil Society Task Force on 1325(G-CiST or WANMAR 1325 Taskforce or National WPS Taskforce), which was chaired by Government and co-chaired by a CSO. Four MPs were part of the National WPS Taskforce - three MPs from the Women’s Parliamentary Caucus (one of whom was also the chair of the Social Welfare Oversight Committee) and one male MP, who was an ally of the Women’s Caucus. The SiLNAP was drafted over a period of about 12 months and unanimously adopted on 4 September 2009 at the National Consultative Conference on 1325. The Conference included delegates from all regions, MPs who were members of the Taskforce, key MDAs, CSOs and community-based organisations.

In 2015, the Ministry for Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs (MSWGCA) and the National Steering Committee for the Implementation of 1325 was supported by UN Women to conduct an evaluation of the implementation of the SiLNAP. The evaluation showed that some successes had been achieved, including:
• Awareness raising and popularization through seminars/workshops/jingles. MSWGCA and various CSOs also undertook capacity building for women and women’s CSOs, to build their understanding and ability to use the WPS agenda and the SiLNAP as a tool for promoting more meaningful participation by women in development and decision-making;
• MSWGCA and various CSOs conducted several training workshops on UNSCR 1325 and SiLNAP for government bodies, highlighting the link to the broader effort to promote women’s equality. A key focus of these trainings was on local level government, to improve the gender perspective of MDAs, including Local Councils, and other institutions that deliver services throughout the country and need to be more sensitive to the needs of women and girls;
• Implementation at local level through the “WPS Localisation Program” (2012-2016). The Localisation Program brought on board Paramount Chiefs, tribal heads, Mayors/local councilors, ward committee members, military personnel, local unit commanders, SLP/FSU, regional technical facilitators of the MLGRD and Regional Gender Officers of the MSWGCA;
• Late in the implementation of the SiLNAP, the Government demonstrated its commitment to preventing sexual violence by enacting the Sexual Offenses Act in August 2012 and ratifying the African Union Maputo Protocol in July 2015;
• Increased participation of women police in multi-dimensional peace support operations;
• Introduction of Sexual Harassment and Sexual Abuse policies by the Sierra Leone Police (SLP). The SLP also adopted an Accelerated Police Promotion scheme for female graduate officers as an affirmative action measure to bridge the gender gap in decision-making positions. There is also a positive discrimination policy which places a woman at the rank of sergeant if she meets the basic requirements to enter the force as constable.8

8The policy places a woman at the rank of sergeant, if she meets the basic requirements to enter the force as a constable: Age limit for male is 18-25, for female it is 18-28; Educational Requirement: Basic Education Certificate Examination level with Aggregate 30 for male and for female it is 35 which is comparatively, a lower grading rank than 30 and below.
A female with a first degree passes out of the Police Training College as an inspector.

8
However, there were also a number of critical challenges that slowed or prevented progress, despite MSWGCA and CSO partners being keen to take action. Most notably:

- There was a severe lack of budgetary allocation, despite the SiLNAP including costing. Implementation was slow due to a lack of resources. The SiLNAP 2010-14 budget estimate was USD$21,301,314, approximately $5 million per year. However, the national budget did not include sufficient and/or specific funding for MSWGCA to action the SiLNAP, which meant that MSWGCA had to spend considerable effort simply trying to mobilize support from development partners, and used those funds to carry out several activities;
- Although a National Steering Committee for full implementation was established, including Regional and District Steering Committees through activities under the Localisation Programme, coordination among critical actors was poor, especially between MDAs and CSOs;
- Addressing the SGBV that still continues years after the war continues to be a major problem. As part of a set of initial reforms, the Government set up Family Support Units (FSUs) which operate as a specialized unit of the Police Force exclusively tasked with addressing domestic and other forms of violence against women. There are currently 62 FSUs across the country but they lack investigative capacity and logistical resources;
- There is also a huge problem of prosecuting and punishing perpetrators of SGBV. Limitation of access to formal court systems in rural areas makes it challenging for survivors seeking redress;
- Women and girls continue to suffer from harmful traditional practices like Female Genital Cutting (FGC) and early marriage;
- Many communities at chiefdom levels were still not aware of the principles captured by UNSCR 1325 & 1820 and their linkage to national gender justice laws. Customary laws and norms still prevail over parliamentary laws, with the result that women still often suffer discrimination.

5. Parliamentary action to address WPS issues

During the first SILNAP process, in addition to being members of the National WPS Task Force on 1325 and 1820, parliamentarians also took part in a one-day information and advocacy session, during which the findings of the baseline study on WPS and regional WPS action plans were shared. This occasion was also used to emphasize the urgent need to translate the provisions of UNSCR 1325 and 1820 into practical interventions, particularly at constituency levels. After this engagement however, there was limited parliamentary engagement with the WPS agenda, with no progress reports submitted for parliamentary oversight. That said, Parliament was involved in enacting some key gender equality and SGBV legislation, which did contribute to achievement of the some of the objectives identified under the first SILNAP.

7.1 Activities so far

At the time the UNDP Parliaments and WPS Project was initiated in mid-2018, Sierra Leone had committed to developing a Second SILNAP, but the process had stalled as MSWGCA searched for external funding to make up for a shortfall in Government resources. As such, no engagement with Parliament had yet commenced. The July 2018 “WPS Workshop for Parliamentarians” organised by

9UNDP’s Access to Justice Programme supported Saturday Courts exclusively for hearing SGBV-related cases. This support was designed to help clear the backlog of cases as well as to save survivors from the embarrassment of open court hearings. In the absence of UNDP continued support, limited funds mean that Saturday courts are now not regularly held.
10An assessment was undertaken to inform the SiLNAP which mapped relevant existing initiatives and interventions on related gender issues, based on the principles and pillars of UNSCR 1325 in order to generate baseline data on which the SiLNAP drafting process was based.
11These Action Plans resulted from 2-day regional consultative workshops held in each of the four regions, which were designed to input into the drafting of the SiLNAP.
UNDP and the Sierra Leone Parliament was therefore the first WPS discussion held in advance of the Second SiLNAP process. It was also the first awareness raising activity on gender equality and WPS issues held for the MPs who were elected in the March 2018 national parliamentary elections.

In order to contextualize the WPS agenda for the benefit of the MPs, as noted above, as part of the Parliaments and WPS Project, the national and international WPS consultants prepared a comprehensive background paper consolidating the issues identified in the first SiLNAP and key policy documents and identifying entry points for engagement by the new Parliament in the designing of the second SiLNAP. The paper informed discussions at the 2-day “WPS Workshop for Parliamentarians”, which was inaugurated by the Speaker and attended by key leaders of the different political parties represented in Parliament. Stakeholders from all key institutions engaged in the SiLNAP also participated in the workshop, which was intended to facilitate ongoing relationships between MPs and key WPS officials. Several male MPs and a few of the Paramount Chief MPs participated alongside MPs from the Women’s Caucus.

The workshop raised the awareness of MPs regarding international commitments relating to WPS, progress made to date, and key issues that needed to be addressed in the next SiLNAP. At the end of the workshop a detailed outcome statement covering the current situation, achievements, challenges and the way forward as per the stakeholder participation was approved by the MPs. It was agreed by MPs that it would be presented to the Speaker for his approval.

As an outcome of the “WPS Workshop for Parliamentarians”, women MPs became more actively engaged in the process of designing of the second SiLNAP, which was finally launched by the Government in August 2018. The Chair of the Women’s Caucus participated as a member of the National WPS Steering Committee and participated in several planning meetings related to the SiLNAP drafting processes. She was also part of the team to validate the assessment tools to be used for the consultations. Eight MPs – four male and four female – then participated in the regional consultations on the second SiLNAP draft and contributed their own inputs and ideas into the draft.

Following the July 2018 workshop with MPs, UNDP also worked with the Women’s Caucus to develop the Outcomes Statement from the “WPS and Parliaments Workshop” into a resolution that will be tabled in Parliament for discussion and endorsement. In February 2019, leveraging the momentum around the development of the second SiLNAP, the Speaker, working with the Women’s Caucus, officially tabled a Parliamentary Resolution on WPS for debate and endorsement by MPs. The Resolution drew on the Outcomes Statement from the earlier workshop, while focusing the attention of MPs on practical activities that legislators should prioritise for action.

In March 2019, the Chair of the Women’s Caucus and one support staff from Parliament were supported by UNDP to attend the WPS side event held at the UN Commission on the Status of Women in New York, to share their experiences in promoting WPS through parliamentary processes. This side event brought together MPs and officials from around the world, and was a valuable opportunity to share practical experiences of MPs working to promote WPS.

**7.2 Next steps**

- With the endorsement of the second SiLNAP by Government, as well as a Parliamentary Resolution on WPS, complemented by a more operational level parliamentary WPS action plan, strong foundations have been laid for the Parliament to keep working away at ensuring that the

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enabling environment for women in Sierra Leone is conducive to peace and security. To this end, UNDP will continue to support the Parliament, including:

➢ The Women’s Caucus will be supported to hold regular meetings with key Government officials, stakeholders and other community members to assess progress with implementing the SILNAP and identify issues which the Women’s Caucus can continue to advocate around;

➢ MPs will be supported to progress key amendments/laws identified in the second SILNAP, including (i) amendment of s.27 (4)(d)&(e) of the 1991 Constitution which allows for discrimination against women; (ii) amendments to the Child Rights Act 2007 to make it consistent with the Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce Act 2009; a new Bill on affirmative action in Parliament;

➢ The parliamentary Social Welfare Committee will be supported to hold public hearings which will be used to assess the capacity and preparedness of key institutions at the district level to move forward with the implementation of the second SILNAP;

➢ The parliamentary Finance Committee and relevant sectoral committees will be supported to examine the national budget in order to assess existing allocations to gender equality and specifically, towards implementation of the second SILNAP.