

**REPORT OF THE ACERWC ON THE FOLLOW-UP MISSION CONDUCTED TO
MONITOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ITS CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS AND
RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE**

8-11 August 2023

I. Introduction

The African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC/the Committee) has undertaken a follow-up mission to the Republic of Sierra Leone on 08-11 August 2023. The purpose of the Mission was to monitor the level of implementation of the Concluding Observations and Recommendations issued by ACERWC to the Government of Sierra Leone following the submission of the State Party's initial report which covers the period from 2002 to 2014. The Initial Report was submitted in line with the Republic of Sierra Leone's reporting obligation derived from the ratification of the Charter on 13 May 2002. During its 30th Ordinary Session, held from 6 to 16 December 2017, the ACERWC considered the initial report and adopted its concluding observations and recommendations on the State Party's report and invited the State Party to submit its combined periodic report in 2021.

After nearly 03 years since the State Party report was due, the Committee decided to undertake a follow-up mission in the Republic of Sierra Leone pursuant to Article 45 of the African Children's Charter to assess the status of the implementation of the Concluding Observations and Recommendations. The Committee, through Note Verbal, sent to the Government of Sierra in May 2023, requested the State Party's authorisation of the mission. The Government of Sierra Leone welcomed the proposed mission and confirmed their approval of the Committee's request to undertake a follow up mission and providing adequate assistance and support to the ACERWC's delegation throughout its mission.

The Committee wishes to express its appreciation to the Government of Sierra Leone for the assistance provided to ensure the smooth conduct of the mission, also for the collaboration of its authorities as well as the involvement of all stakeholders with the delegation in the course of its mission in Sierra Leone.

The present report, therefore, covers the activities undertaken and captures the major findings of the ACERWC Mission.

II. Objectives of the ACERWC in this Mission:

The ACERWC's follow-up mission in the Republic of Sierra Leone had the main following objectives:

- To identify achievements in the implementation of the recommendations of the Committee which can be shared as best practices with other State Parties and stakeholders through various activities of the Committee;
- To identify challenges that the Government is facing in the implementation of the recommendations in order to suggest mechanisms to address the challenges as well as solicit assistance from other stakeholders;
- To inform the Committee about the kinds of interventions it may undertake to assist

the State Party in the implementation of its recommendations as well as the Charter;

- To create an opportunity of stronger partnership with CSOs and stakeholders working with and for children;
- To inform potential partners and stakeholders about the gaps that exist in the implementation of the Charter;
- To look for opportunities of resource mobilization for the protection and promotion of children's rights in the Republic of Sierra Leone;
- To suggest actions that may be taken by the Government to implement the recommendations of the Committee and the provisions of the Charter; and,
- To ensure the reporting cycle is maintained.

III. Delegation:

The Delegation of the ACERWC was composed of:

- i. Hon. Aver Gavar, Member of the ACERWC and Country Rapporteur;
- ii. Hon. Theophane Nikyema Member of the ACERWC and special rapporteur on Child justice;
- iii. Dr. Ayalew Getachew Assefa, Senior Child Protection Officer;
- iv. Ms. Aouatef Mahjoub, Technical Expert;
- v. Mr. Chiti Kampamba Mwatula- Administrative Assistant.

IV. Methodology:

During the mission, the delegation engaged in constructive discussions and held bilateral meetings with Government Authorities, UN Agencies, CSOs and Children's representatives. The delegation also organised a workshop and made on-site visits to identify the achievements and challenges in relation to implementation of the concluding observations and recommendations.

V. Mission activities

1. Courtesy Calls

The delegation has paid courtesy calls on the following high-ranking Government Officials:

- i. The Minister of Foreign Affairs and international cooperation
- ii. The Minister of Gender, and Children's Affairs, and
- iii. The Minister of Social Welfare

2. Consultation with Various Ministries and other stakeholders

Meetings were held with representatives of the following Ministries, Offices and stakeholders where the delegation discussed the status of the implementation of the concluding observations and recommendations:

- i. Ministry of Gender, and Children's Affairs,
- ii. Ministry of Education

- iii. The Ministry of Justice
- iv. UNICEF
- v. CSO Coalition
- vi. Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone
- vii. Children forum network (CFN)

3. Visit to Family Court and the Remand home in Freetown

The Delegation visited one the family courts and remand homes located in the capital Freetown.

4. Workshop on the status of the implementation of the concluding observations and recommendations of the ACERWC, preparation of the first periodic report

As part of its Mission, the Committee organized a one-day consultative workshop on the implementation of its concluding observations and recommendations and the situation of children's rights and welfare in Sierra Leone. The Workshop brought together representatives from a wide range of Government Ministries and Agencies, UN agencies, Children, the National Human Rights Commission, and a pool of CSOs. The Workshop provided the Committee with information to assess the progress made in the implementation of the concluding observations and recommendations and identify gaps that can be improved through coordinated efforts. With remarks from the Head of Delegation of the ACERWC Hon Aver Gavar, the Representative of Ministry of Social Welfare, the UNICEF Country Representative Mr. Rudolf Schwenk, and the representative of CSO coalition and by Children's Representative, the Workshop was officially opened by Honourable Minister of Gender and Children's Affairs, Dr Isata Mahoi.

VI. MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE MISSION

Through the above-mentioned activities, the Delegation of the ACERWC identifies the following main findings on the status of the implementation of its recommendations, and the implementation of the African Children's Charter in general.

1. On General measures of implementation

The delegation notes that considerable progress has been achieved in terms of legislative and policy measures. Among other things, the Committee notes the adoption of the National Social Protection Strategy for Sierra Leone 2022-2026; National Strategy for Addressing Issues of Children in Street Situations 2022-2024; National Policy on Radical Inclusion in Schools 2021-2026; the revised Education Sector plan 2022-2026; the adoption of the Gender equality and women empower policy of 2022 and the Medium-term National Development Plan 2019-2023.

The delegation further noted that the government has embarked on a law reform process to review the Child Rights Act of 2007 in order to include various pieces of child-related issues and harmonize them with the provisions of the Charter, which includes to abolish

and ban child marriage, corporal punishment, FGM and, ensure child friendly justice and adoption procedures. Furthermore, the delegation noted the Government's commitment to ensuring that all recently promulgated laws are in line with the Charter including the Cyber security act 2021, Anti-Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Act 2022, the Sexual offences Act 2019.

The delegation further observed the Government's commitment to reinforce child protection responses which resulted from dividing the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs into two distinct Ministries in 2019: Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs and the Ministry of Social Welfare. Despite the challenges, the delegation notes the efforts to streamlining child protection functions and ensure more organizational and institutional structures in place to the protection of children.

The delegation welcomes the establishment of National Reporting Mechanism Secretariat at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The delegation observed with appreciation the measures undertaken by the Government to address the ACERWC recommendations from the progressive increase of the budgetary allocation over the years to the National Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) as well as its activities and interventions. It was further noted the Government support to the Commission through the establishment of its offices in each of 5 regions of the country in addition to the Headquarter office in Freetown, as well as a branch in the central prison district of Freetown. Furthermore, the delegation appreciates that the National Children's Commission (NCC) is benefiting from a regularly allocated national budget.

However, the delegation notes the following challenges/gaps:

- The lack of a sufficient budgetary allocation continues to persist as the budget allocated to the Ministry of social welfare and the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs is only 1% of the national budget. In addition, there is no budget line for child protection at the level of the local government.
- The Observatory of Children's Rights in the HRCSL is not yet established.
- Whilst the delegation noted the government's promising efforts and initiatives to generate and improve data availability through the establishment of Child Protection Information Management System and the work of Health Care Access and Information and the National Civil Registration Authority, the delegation noted disaggregated and centralized data is lacking specifically for some categories of children such as children with disabilities.

2. On the Definition of the child and other age-related requirements

The Committee recommends that the Government of the Republic of Sierra harmonizes the minimum age for marriage with the Charter in all forms of marriage without exception. The delegation was informed that a new Bill entitled "The Child Rights Act 2022" that seeks to repeal and replace the Child Rights Act, 2007 which deals with the inconsistency in the age of marriage in the 2007 child Rights Act and the Customary Marriage Act of

2009, was presented to the parliament in February 2023. The Committee observed that after debated by the parliament, the new bill is currently under review by the legislative committee for further scrutiny and improvement before introducing it to the Sierra Leone's new parliament.

3. General Principles

Non-discrimination

The Committee note with appreciation the wide range of measures undertaken by the Government of the Republic of Sierra Leone addressing discrimination that children in vulnerable situations facing. Measures include the adoption of the National Policy on Radical Inclusion to provide access to quality education to the most vulnerable children, including pregnant girls and parent learners, children with disabilities, children in rural and remote areas, and children from poor/low-income backgrounds.

The delegation was informed that although the government lifted the ban prohibiting pregnant schoolgirls from attending school in 2020, visibility of pregnant girls in the classroom remains low, and they come out high doing public examination because of societal stigma they are facing at the family, community and school settings. The delegation notes that this challenge is being addressed by the Government through the work of gender network structures at national and community levels to support and encourage pregnant girls to return to school.

Despite the progress, it was noted that various forms of discrimination persist including discriminations related to geographical barriers in terms of equal access to health care and birth registration services as well as discriminations against children with disabilities in terms of access to education mainly because of lack of equipped schools and rejection and exclusionary behaviors at schools. To address these challenges, the delegation notes the initiatives conducted by the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities geared towards enhancing societal awareness and outreach programs .

The delegation was informed that regarding the committee's recommendation to amend Section 27 of The Constitution, a white paper on the constitutional review process was launched in 2022 contains recommendation including to revise and rewrite a new section 27 because of its discriminatory clauses and the process is still ongoing.

Best interests of the child

The delegation noted that the consideration of the best interests of the child in judicial and administrative proceedings has shown progress. As demonstrated in the work of the Children Committees and social workers to accompany children to ensure they can communicate their views during investigations and hearings and provide them with services. However, the delegation observed that the best interests of the child still not considered in many areas including in court proceeding and decision of detentions.

Right to life, survival and development

The delegation noted that multidimensional poverty is a challenge to child survival and development in the country as it overlaps with other issues faced by children and considered one of the main underlying drivers of child marriage, teenage pregnancy, transactional sex and abuse and drop out school. The Committee appreciates that the recent social protection strategy introduces child grants as one of strategies to tackle child poverty and strengthen families' capacities.

Child participation

The delegation noted that the Children Forum Network (CFN) being the main platform for child participation through which children can express their concerns and be involved in activities at the district and national level, has representatives of wide range of children from all the country and present in all districts except for 2. In addition, the CFN activities are coordinated by the Ministry of Gender and Children Affairs, and it receives technical and logistical support from the National Commission for Children (NCC) to ensure their views are considered in decision making processes. Moreover, the delegation noted that the government facilitated the Child Rights Coalition participation to the consultations and the review processes of the Child Rights Act of 2007 and the Children and Young Persons Act. The delegation further noted with appreciation that at local government level children are participating in the meetings and activities of the Development Coordination Committees at districts levels, to follow-up on projects and programmes on children's issues at local levels.

The Committee, however, noted that despite its existence for 23 years, the Children Forum Network doesn't have a permanent structure, an office base nor a budget allocation. Also, though establishment of children's parliament is among the key considerations in the new Bill that is currently reviewing the Children's Act, the Committee notes that there is no children's parliament officially established in the Country which affects the level of the impact of children's voice in decision making processes. Furthermore, the delegation noted that children with disabilities are still facing challenges in terms of the enjoyment of their rights to meaningful participation and the weight of consideration given to their views.

4. Civil rights and freedoms

Right to name, nationality and birth registration

The delegation noted that the Civil Registration reform undertaken by the government increased the Birth Registration rate of children in the country which has shifted from 81% in 2017 to 92% in 2022. The delegation however noted that despite the improvement, birth registration is still not universal and there is no disaggregated data available.

The Committee notes the various efforts put in place by the National Civil Registration Authority (NCRA) and other Authorities to improve the level of birth registrations, issuance of birth certificates and digitalization of registrations. The delegation further noted the Government efforts to register every child including children born to foreigner parents. However, while the Committee applauds the amendment of Citizenship Act in 2017 to

remove gender discrimination in transmission of citizenship to children by granting the right of citizenship by birth directly through the mother, it was noted that regarding the Committee recommendation pertaining to citizenship, it is still restricted to children born at least for one Sierra Leonian parent, if not they still can register but in their parent's country of origin.

Protection against abuse and torture

The delegation noted that in 2023, the government enacted the revised Basic and Senior Secondary Education Act, which bans corporal punishment administered by school staff and teachers. The Code of Conduct for Teachers and other Education Personnel in Sierra Leone reviewed in 2019, in principle 2.2 establishes zero tolerance for corporal punishment and promotes alternative positive methods for discipline. Also, the delegation was informed that during the review of child rights act, Corporal punishment was taken into consideration in the new Child Rights Bill.

The delegation learned that bullying, verbal and sexual abuse are more prevalent than corporal punishment especially in schools despite the Education Act prohibition of any form of exploitation including bullying, harassment, verbal abuse and sexual abuse as well as cyber bullying. This has been addressed by engaging school leaders and educators in the implementation of the Code of Conduct to ensure safe learning environment.

5. Family environment and alternative care

The delegation noted the measures adopted by the government to enhance the welfare and protection of children in family and communities' environments including the implementation of the child welfare policy that was launched 2018 and its assessment in 2022; the development of the National Strategy for Addressing Issues of Children in Street Situations 2022-2024. It was also noted the establishment of the family welfare directorate and Mental Health and Psychosocial Support directorate at the Ministry of Social Welfare. In addition, the Government in line with the implementation of the National Social Protection Strategy 2022-2026 provided Social Safety Nets cash transfers to support families with children.

However, the delegation noted that the high number of neglected children and children without parental care is a matter of concern in the country, this is compounded by a high number of children living on the streets and increasing the likelihood of violence and exploitation. The delegation further noted that the investment in family Foster Care remained limited and below standards and foster family is mainly facilitated by NGO's. In addition, poor parenting is one of the reasons of domestic and cross border trafficking, in particular when caregivers or fosters through traditional foster care, give their children without following the legal processes.

The delegation noted the efforts made in terms of responding to this issue, including family strengthening though the development of positive parenting education program with the support of UNICEF which is piloted in 5 district and been implementing awaiting

the national launch. Social services support to families have increased through the strengthening of the social workforce through a Human Resource Strategy by the recruitment and capacity building of social workers, the harmonization and dissemination of social workers curriculum in universities, and the inclusion of social workers in Family Support Unit (FSU) and police station to ensure child safeguarding. The delegation noted that despite the government investment in human resources to provide proper social services delivery, national wide, there is still a gap in terms of number of social workers.

The Delegation noted that the Adoption Act of 1989 is currently under review to regulate and monitor domestic and inter-country adoption. However, the ratification of the Hague convention on international adoption, is not yet done.

6. Basic health and welfare

The delegation noted the continuous efforts made by the Government to strengthen health care system through investments in accessibility to reach every child with preventive and curative quality essential health services including the HPV vaccine launch; providing HIV services including HIV testing kits, vaccines and antiretroviral treatments for children and adolescents.

The delegation observed that there are urban-rural disparities in terms of provision of services and the lack of access to supply facilities including basic sanitation services and safe drinking water. Therefore, it was noted that access to water is a concern across the country and it doesn't concern only the rural areas, while 38% lack access to water, households in urban areas can't afford its costs. The delegation further observed the Issue of food insecurity in some areas of the country.

The delegation noted that measures have been undertaken to address these issues including investments in WASH interventions, institutionalizing the nationwide Community Health Worker (CHW) Programme, with a network of over 8,000 trained CHWs delivering a package of essential health and nutrition services reaching children and families in the most hard-to-reach communities, Universal health coverage road map piloted in districts since 2020 which addresses discrimination among children related to geographic barriers in term of access to vaccine and health care services.

7. Education, leisure and cultural activities

The delegation noted with appreciation that the government launched the Free Quality School Education Programme in 2018 and passed the Basic and Senior Secondary Education Act in April 2023 which aims to reform the education system and remove barriers by providing tuition waiver, making it more inclusive and accessible to all children including the most vulnerable and disadvantaged ones. According to UNICEF, since the launch of the Free Quality School Education Programme, the enrolment in schools has increased by 58 per cent across all levels of education. The delegation further noted that this coupled with the National Strategy for Out-of-School Children in Sierra Leone (2022) and the National Policy on Radical Inclusion in Schools (2021) helped to strengthen access to quality education, and keeping all children in school, including with disabilities,

adolescent mothers, children in rural remote areas, and children from poor/low-income backgrounds.

For the full implementation of the national policies, it was noted that the revised Education Sector plan 2022-2026 is guided by four core priorities including radical inclusion, comprehensive safety, universal access, quality teaching and learning.

However, the delegation noted that there is still high dropout rates due to child marriage and teenage pregnancy, which has been addressed by the government through integrating Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in education curriculum and the adoption of the Comprehensive school Safety Policy in March 2023. Furthermore, limited access to adequate school sanitation facilities affects the attendance of girls particularly for pregnant girls and mothers. The government alongside the reform of education sector is making efforts toward the construction and refurbishment of classrooms and WASH facilities.

In terms of access to school for children with disabilities, the delegation was informed that retention is improving, however, it was noted that CWDs are still facing issues such as equipped schools for them, also, there is a limited specialized teachers for children with disabilities and special needs and teachers in general across the country. The delegation noted that efforts have been made to train teachers on sign language for example and the government is working to increase the number of qualified teachers in the country to meet the needed demand, but this remains a challenge thus far. The delegation further learned that the Government is maintaining special needs schools including schools for blind and deaf children. Moreover, the government is establishing a new school for children with autism and providing school bus for blind children national wide.

In terms of budget allocation, the Delegation noted that 22% of the country budget is allocated for the education sector but most of it goes to teachers' salaries which has an implication on the implementation of policies and projects aiming to increase access to education for all.

The Delegation notes that efforts made to reduce hiding costs by engaging in supervision and monitoring schools' leaders and capacity building to ensure these cots can be used at access to school and retention in school. So, there is an instrument of code of conduct for teachers and a Handbook the ministry has developed that is targeting safe schools and safe environment.

8. Special Protection Measures

Children in conflict with the law

The delegation noted that Child justice is absent in Chapter 44 of the Children and Young Persons Act of 1945 as it doesn't cover procedures on juvenile justice that comply with international standards. However, the delegation was informed that this law is included in the ongoing amendment of the Child Rights Act and that the new Bill proposes new measures on diversionary approaches to the issue of juvenile justice. Moreover, the

delegation observed that awaiting the enactment of the Bill to a law, Chapter 44 of the Children and Young Persons Act is still applicable.

Furthermore, the delegation noted the Government endeavors to reform the child justice system in line with the reform in the Justice sector. The delegation learned that the child justice strategy 2014-2018 was reviewed and the development of the next 4 years strategy is still ongoing to ensure that better services are provided for children in conflict with the law. It was further noted that the Government developed the diversion policy which currently been piloted in 6 police stations in 6 districts across the country, to ensure child-friendly police stations and divert cases of children from the formal justice system.

It was further noted that the interim Investigation with children is being conducted jointly with the Family Support Units (FSU) to ensure child safeguarding and the police recruitment manual was reviewed to ensure child justice section is integrated. In addition, the Legal Aid Board was operationalized, and his offices been decentralized among the 16 districts and chiefdoms in the country to provide free legal advice and legal representation for children as well as legal education in schools and communities.

The delegation observed that there are only 2 remand homes in the country in Freetown and Bo. In addition, from its visit to Freetown remand home the delegation noted that it is overcrowded with children in conflict with the law, many of them detained for committing minor offences, under-funded and children leaving under deplorable conditions and lacking formal education programs or rehabilitation services and many of them remain for long period in the remand homes without trials, or because they can't afford bail or notify their parents.

Moreover, following its visit to the juvenile court in Freetown, the delegation observed that there is one separate court established in the country when the family and juvenile courts seats together, dealing with a high number of cases and children placed with adults. Often children spend more than 90 days in detention. Also, for appeal, there is no division of family or juvenile court at the high court or special judges. It was considered that the administration of juvenile justice is still not a diversionary process, that diversion programme is not yet operative in court proceeding.

Children of imprisoned parents or caregivers

The Delegation noted that regarding the Committee's prior recommendations pertaining to the situations of children of incarcerated caregivers, most of children who were born in prison, were initially kept with their mothers until that child is weaned whereafter the child is placed under the care of family members following an assessment of family conditions by the Ministry of Gender, and Children's Affairs, or the foster care system through partners. The delegation was informed that currently there is only 5 children with their incarcerated mothers all over the Country.

The Delegation was further informed that the Government created 'child-friendly center' in all Female Correctional Centers where the child spends the day playing under the supervision of professionals and reunited with the mother in the evening.

Sexual abuse and exploitation

The delegation noted that sexual violence and gender-based violence against children are serious concerns that the government addressed in its legislative and institutional reforms. Therefore, the delegation was informed that in September 2019, the government amended the Sexual offences Act of 2012, which increased the maximum penalty for rape and sexual penetration of a child from fifteen years to life imprisonment. The delegation also noted the measures taken by the Government to give effect to that Act including the establishment in 2020 of the first sexual Offences model court in Sierra Leone to deal with cases of rapes and sexual penetrations and others forms of violence against women and children. Moreover, in July 2020, the government established six One Stop Centers in 6 districts in the country in order to victims of sexual and gender-based violence by providing multisectoral response services to victims. The delegation also noted that the Government of Sierra Leone enacted the Cyber Security and Crime Act 2021, which contains a section on online child sexual abuses.

The delegation noted with satisfaction that Sierra Leone is one of few countries that have rolled out the Child Protection Information Management System and the Gender-Based Violence Information Management System. It has been piloted in 6 districts and expected to cover all districts in 2024, to improve quality and timely registration, assessment, referral, and response to cases of violence.

Drug Abuse

The delegation noted that the country is experiencing a massive drug abuse among children which increased mental health issues and poses significant challenges related to public health due to the limited capacity of the Psychiatric hospital and mental health services. Also, drug abuse is among the reasons of the increasing number of children in conflict with the law, drop out of schools and violence. It was noted that recently a separate unit on Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) was established at the ministry of health. The delegation noted that measures are being undertaken to address this issue, including the enforcement of the national drug control Act of 2008 which provides a legal framework for penalties on drug-related crimes.

Child trafficking

The delegation was informed that Children are identified as the most trafficked person in the Country. Moreover, the delegation noted that wide range of measures has been undertaken in addressing this issue, including the passing of the Anti-Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Act in 2022, which amend and replace the Anti- Trafficking Act of 2005. The new Act provides for the protection of children and introduced a large number of measures towards more protection for children including the sexual exploitation of children through tourism, fraudulent adoption, illegal removal of organs and all forms of migrant smuggling. Moreover, other measures include: the establishment of the National Anti-Trafficking in Person Task Force secretariat attached to the Ministry of Social Welfare which is mandated to implement the new Act; the implementation of the NAP against Trafficking in Persons especially Women and Children (2021-2023); adoption of

the National Strategy to End Human Trafficking (2022-2026); the development of Standard Operation Procedures of the National referral mechanism for Protection and Assisting Victims of Trafficking which provides special measures of intervention, referral and identification for trafficked Children; and the development of safeguarding measures to protect minors and migrant workers against human trafficking. In addition, the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRC SL) established a new Directorate of Migration and Human Trafficking (MHT).

The delegation further noted that the government has embarked on public awareness and education to tackle trafficking in persons. The Government also has bilateral collaboration with Guinea and Liberia to address the issue of cross boarder trafficking especially trafficking under children on the move crossing the borders.

Children in street situations

The delegation noted that children in street situations are among the most vulnerable group of children in the country, engaging in casual work and begging on the streets mainly in urban setting of cities. The delegation noted that the government developed the National Strategy for Addressing Issues of Children in Street Situations 2022-2024 to guide interventions for protection and service provision for children in the street.

Harmful practices

The delegation noted that Female Genital Mutilation and Child Marriage are still widely practiced in the Country. It was also noted that there is still no national law that explicitly prohibits FGM. However, the delegation was informed that the prohibition of FGM and Child marriage are addressed among the provisions of the draft child rights Bill.

The delegation further noted the efforts made by the Government including the launch in December 2018 of the 'Hands Off Our Girls' campaign; the adoption of the Gender equality and women empower policy of 2022 which addresses FGM and child marriage among its key priorities; the implementation and evaluation of the National Strategy for the Reduction of Adolescent Pregnancy and Child Marriage (2018–2022); the development of the national strategy for ending FGM which still has not yet been approved or implemented. Furthermore, the delegation noted the measures undertaken to tackle these practices in collaboration with UNICEF and other stakeholders through engagement with traditional leaders, sensitization and awareness raising among families and communities to encourage reporting. However, these issues remain under reported due to fear of stigmatization.

VII. Actions points

Considering the above-mentioned findings, the Committee recommends that the State Party undertakes the following measures:

- Submit its first periodic report to the Committee on the status of the implementation of the Charter as soon as possible;

- Expedite the adoption process of the new Child Rights Bill 2022 as well as the amendment of the constitution, and ensure the amendments related to children issues including child marriage, FGM, adoption, diversion, corporal punishment among other issues are addressed in line with the charter;
- Allocate sufficient resources to popularize, and implement all legislation and policies adopted during the period under review at national and district levels;
- Allocate sufficient funds for the effective functioning of the Ministry of Gender and Children Affairs and the Ministry of Social Welfare as well as allocate budget line for child protection at local government level and adopt child friendly budgeting in resource allocation to all sectors;
- Strengthen the national reporting mechanism by ensuring it is a standing mechanism with a comprehensive formal legislative or policy mandate, and a capacitated and continuous staff;
- Ensure that all sectors take due note of the best interests of the child in their policies, decisions and in all setting including police stations, courts and remand homes;
- Intensify efforts to address issues affecting the life, survival and development of children such as poverty, child malnutrition, and access to drinking water. Moreover, the State Party is encouraged to waive any attached fees to the services introduced;
- Strengthen child participation structures in the country through formally establishment of children's parliament and ensure the Child Network Forum has sustainable formal structure, and avail necessary support and adequate resources allocation to their functioning to guarantee a meaningful contribution of children in decision-making processes and the promotion of their rights;
- Increase budgetary allocation and improvement of human resources to support the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities and ensure the establishment of its offices at district levels;
- Take the necessary measures to ensure newborn and children under five screening for early identification of disabilities including capacitating the public health sector with trainings for health professionals and providing screening tools;
- Ensure diversion in juvenile justice is established by law and integrated into the overall legislative reform efforts and adopt the next child justice strategy;
- Operationalize the diversion policy and intensify efforts to train and capacitate judges, prosecutors, law enforcement officers, legal representatives of the child, FSUs and all relevant professionals on the policy. Moreover, the State Party is encouraged to ensure diversion programmes are structured and regularly monitor

that diversionary methods are applied in dealing with children in conflict with the law, avoid pretrial detention wherever possible and fast track cases of children in detention facilities;

- Allocate adequate resources to the establishment of specialized juvenile courts and remand homes at regional and district levels; as well as more sexual offences model courts;
- Rehabilitate places of deprivation of liberty for children and equip them with psychosocial and educational programmes. And ensure the refurbishment of courts and remand facilities are integrated in the development plans and budgets of district and city councils;
- Review and regulate the formal foster care system in compliance with the minimum standards to ensure structured and quality family care and adoption. And review the Policy on Alternative Care for Children of 2012;
- Adopt legislation prohibiting female genital mutilation and adopt the draft national strategy on FGM and implement it;
- Undertake robust awareness-raising on child marriage and FGM to promote behavior change and encourage reporting;
- Intensify efforts to ensure that adolescent girls have access to sexual reproductive health care services in school and out of school settings and fully operationalize the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education's initiative to integrate the Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) into the basic education curriculum to ensure the sexual reproductive health education is provided in curriculum- based education as well as non-curriculum activities to prevent teenage pregnancy;
- Address the teacher's shortage by increasing the recruitment of qualified teachers including special needs trained teachers on sign language and Braille;
- Ensure all teachers and education personnel at all levels are trained on inclusive education including tailored training on radical inclusion policy, the Comprehensive school Safety Policy as well as the Code of Conduct for Teachers;
- Reinforce the efforts for the rehabilitation of Education sectors services and ensure learning materials are in accessible format for children with disabilities;
- Continue anti-trafficking efforts by increasing awareness raising activities and advocacy across the country and community engagements on positive parenting to prevent trafficking and encourage reporting as well as the implementation of the NAP against Trafficking in Persons (2021-2023);
- Provide training to police officers, prosecutors and judges on the Anti-Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Act of 2022 as well as training for law

enforcement agencies, FSU, psychologist and social workers on the SOPs on victim identification and NRM;

- Enhance the capacity of ATIP Task Force Secretariat by providing budgetary allocation, human resources and logistics to ensure the coordination and the monitoring of anti-trafficking interventions, plans and policies;
- Strengthen the capacity of the Child Protection and GBV case and information management systems by allocating adequate financial, logistics and human resources to its functioning;
- Undertake coordinated actions in the realm of data collection on child protection issue.