

**Joint NGO Submission for
Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Sierra Leone
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Edmund Rice International



VIVAT International



**Christian Brothers Development Office
Sierra Leone**

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

1. This joint submission to the Universal Periodic Review of Sierra Leone is made by two ECOSOC accredited NGOs, Edmund Rice International Limited and VIVAT International and Christian Brothers Development Office, Sierra Leone.
2. **Edmund Rice International Limited (ERI)** is an international non-governmental organization, founded in 2005 and with Special Consultative Status with ECOSOC since 2012. ERI is supported by two Catholic Religious Congregations, the Christian Brothers and the Presentation Brothers. It works with networks of like-minded organizations and in the countries where the two Congregations are present. ERI has a special interest in the rights of the child, the right to education and in eco-justice.
3. **VIVAT International** is a Non-Governmental Organization with a membership of more than 25,000 from 12 Catholic Religious Congregations, working in 122 countries to promote human rights through advocacy at international and local levels. VIVAT International addresses human rights issues with particular focus on the rights of children, women, and eradication of poverty, sustainable development and the culture of peace. It has Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC) and is associated with the United Nations Department of Global Communications (DGC).
4. **Christian Brothers Development Office, Sierra Leone** is the development arm of the Christian Brothers in West Africa Area. We empower marginalized communities through education, advocacy, livelihoods, social justice and gender equality. By mobilizing resources, managing projects and fostering partnerships, we uplift vulnerable populations, especially women, children and youth. Our mission is to promote human dignity, social inclusion and long-term development, ensuring lasting change where it is most needed.
5. This submission is prepared by the above organizations in consultation with members of their respective networks in Sierra Leone. It is the result of an intensive consultation process that took place in Sierra Leone. The data and information reflect the experience of the submitting organizations and of their partners in the field. It is based upon information obtained from several Government departments, as well as upon data and research made available by various civil society organizations as credited in the references.
6. The submitting organizations respect the progress made by Sierra Leone in promoting and safeguarding human rights and the commitments made in relation to previous UPR cycles but believe there are areas requiring further attention. This joint submission focuses on six interrelated areas of concern in Sierra Leone - the right to quality education; the right to Health; the right to an adequate standard of living; Gender

Equality; Sexual and Gender based Violence (SGBV) and the right to Equality before the Law.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

7. This Universal Periodic Review (UPR) submission addresses critical human rights issues affecting students, women and rural communities in Sierra Leone.
8. **Right to Quality Education:** While Sierra Leone has made commendable progress in expanding access to education, increasing enrollment rates and success in national examinations since its last UPR, persistent challenges like teacher shortages, low teacher salaries, funding gaps, infrastructure issues, and ongoing reform efforts remain to be addressed.
This submission calls for urgent measures to increase education funding, invest in school infrastructure and teacher salaries, promote educational equity and strengthen policy implementation.
9. **Right to Health:** While we commend the Government of Sierra Leone and its partners for initiatives like the Free Health Care Programme for mothers and children, national responses to HIV and AIDS, TB, malaria, enhanced vaccine coverage and advancing health and well-being under SDG 3, we draw attention to the maternal mortality crisis, the critically under-resourced health centers, severe doctor shortages especially in the rural areas and urge the State to increase its health budget, build health centers in the interior rural areas, invest in training, recruitment and retaining trained medical personnel.
10. **The right to an Adequate Standard of Living:** While Sierra Leone has implemented a range of social protection programs, gender - equality initiatives and has invested in infrastructure and agricultural development, significant gaps remain in the realization of economic, social, and cultural rights.
This submission stresses the need for timely measures to expand social protection programs to cover vulnerable groups, ensure universal access to basic services, provide increased support to small-holder farmers and eliminate barriers to education, healthcare, employment, and political participation for women and girls.
11. **Gender Equality:** While Sierra Leone has implemented gender equality initiatives, women still face barriers to education, healthcare, economic opportunities and protection from gender-based violence.
The submission highlights the necessity of strengthening implementation of the Customary Land Rights Act (2022), promoting community-level dialogues with traditional leaders, integrating gender-sensitive land rights education and launching nationwide awareness campaigns.

12. Sexual and Gender based Violence (SGBV): Challenges like weak law enforcement, cultural norms, and limited resources underscore Sierra Leone’s ongoing struggle with sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

The submission advocates for the strengthening of SGBV law enforcement, expanding support services for victims, increasing judicial capacity and providing specialized training for law enforcement.

13. The right to Equality before the Law: While the State has a National Human Rights Commission and has made efforts to implement Gender Equality legislation and provide legal Aid Clinics to vulnerable populations including those affected by conflict and displacement, this submission presses for swift implementation of effective measures to address corruption in the justice sector and concrete steps to address gender-based violence.

14. These key areas are addressed through specific recommendations aimed at improving human rights protections and fostering social justice in Sierra Leone.

A. RIGHT TO QUALITY EDUCATION IN SIERRA LEONE

15. Quality Basic Education (FQBE) Program¹: We commend the Government of Sierra Leone for the progressive steps it has taken in promoting access to quality education for all. The launch and continued implementation of the Free Quality School Education (FQSE) initiative by His Excellency President Dr. Julius Maada Bio since 2018 has led to significant progress in school enrolment figures across the country. This flagship initiative has helped dismantle some of the financial barriers that previously prevented children particularly those from low-income households from accessing primary and secondary education. By making tuition, books, and examination fees free of charge, many more children, especially girls, are now in classrooms, laying the foundation for national development.

16. Establishment of Teaching Service commission: This commission is charged with the responsibility of recruitments, Training, retirement and replacements of Teachers across the country².

17. Teacher Training and Development: We further acknowledge the government’s effort to strengthen the human resource capacity of the education system through the recruitment of over 5,000 teachers in recent years. These new appointments have been instrumental in filling critical staffing gaps, especially in rural and hard-to-reach communities where qualified and trained teachers have long been in short supply. This is a laudable step towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education and the promotion of lifelong

¹ <https://mbsse.gov.sl/>

² www.tsc.gov.sl

learning opportunities for all. These initiatives aim to improve the quality of teaching and increase teacher retention rates.

- 18. Education Access and Retention Initiative:** The initiative led by the First Lady of Sierra Leone, Madam Fatima Maada Bio, in distributing free sanitary materials to adolescent girls in schools³, deserves commendation. This timely intervention has improved menstrual hygiene management and contributed to reducing dropout rates among girls, who would otherwise miss school during their menstrual cycles due to lack of sanitary resources. Such action demonstrates a gender-sensitive approach to promoting educational access and retention, particularly for girls in marginalized communities.
- 19. School Feeding Program:** This program provides nutritious meals to school children, with the goal of increasing school attendance and enrolment. The program also aims to address malnutrition and improve the overall health of children in Sierra Leone.
- 20. Community-Based Education:** The government has also implemented community-based education programs to increase access to education in rural areas. These programs involve training community members to serve as teachers and provide education in local communities.
- 21. THE GAPS:** Despite the efforts undertaken by the Government of Sierra Leone, the country continues to face several challenges in the education system. These gaps highlight the need for continued government investment in education, as well as international support and collaboration to address the challenges facing Sierra Leone's education sector. These include:
 - a) Limited Access to Education:** *Despite the Free Quality Basic Education (FQBE) program, many children in Sierra Leone still do not have access to education⁴. This is particularly true in rural and hard to reach areas, where schools are often under-resourced, lack basic infrastructure such as clean water and electricity, have unsafe or dilapidated facilities and children have to walk long distances to schools. Children with disabilities are almost completely excluded because schools are not disability-friendly.*
 - b) School Feeding Programme:** *The school feeding program does not cover all pre-primary and primary schools in the country, is inconsistent and mainly supported by donors. Many schools, especially in more remote or underprivileged areas, are still excluded. Countless children attend school hungry, which severely undermines concentration and learning.*
 - c) Inadequate Teacher Training:** *While the government has implemented programs to improve teacher training, there is still a shortage of qualified teachers in many*

³ <https://firstlady.gov.sl/>

⁴ <https://www.unicef.org/sierraleone/education>

parts of the country⁵. This has resulted in large class sizes and inadequate attention to individual students.

- d) *Insufficient Funding:*** *The educational system in Sierra Leone is underfunded, with inadequate resources for schools, teachers, and students. This has resulted in a lack of learning materials, poor infrastructure, and inadequate teacher salaries⁶, far below the national living wage⁷.*
- e) *Gender Inequality:*** *Gender inequality remains a significant challenge in Sierra Leone's educational system. Girls are often discouraged from pursuing certain subjects, such as science and technology, and face discrimination in accessing education.*
- f) *Governance and Accountability:*** *Systems for tracking the use of FQBE resources are weak, which makes corruption and leakage common. School subsidies and support arrive late and are often inadequate.*
- g) *Transition and Retention:*** *There is a lack of mechanisms to support children who fall behind academically. High dropout rates in upper primary and junior secondary are due to poverty, child labor, early marriage, and teenage pregnancy.*

22. RECOMMENDATIONS: We recommend that the government of Sierra Leone proactively address these challenges which will require a sustained commitment to education reform and collaboration with international partners, civil society organizations and the Media by: -

- a) *Increasing investment in education, improve access and address infrastructure challenges, particularly in rural areas.***
- b) *Enhancing rural school infrastructure for accessibility; deploy incentivized special needs teachers; map and register out-of-school children with disabilities; provide inclusive learning and assistive materials; and rigorously enforce the "Radical Inclusion" policy⁸ by monitoring and publishing schools' accessibility compliance and progress nationwide.***
- c) *Expanding and standardizing school feeding coverage in remote areas; strengthen home-grown models through local food procurement; ensure timely funding for uninterrupted meals; link feeding with health and welfare services; and***

⁵ <https://reproducibility.worldbank.org/index.php/catalog/155>

⁶ https://www.edgefund.org/ids_documents/eldis-teacher-motivation-and-incentives-in-sierra-leone/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

⁷ <https://sierraloading.sl/news/ngc-proposes-5-million-minimum-wages-teachers/>

⁸ <https://mbsse.gov.sl/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Radical-Inclusion-Policy.pdf>

monitor nutrition, attendance, and learning outcomes for accountability and improvement.

- d) **Improving teacher training and retention**, by strengthening professional development, reviewing salaries and benefits in line with inflation and the national living wage, and implementing a new salary structure to attract and retain qualified teachers.*
- e) **Taking concrete steps to address gender inequality in education**, by designing gender-sensitive curricula and ensuring equal opportunities for girls to pursue all subjects.*
- f) **Promoting community engagement in education**, by supporting community schools and ensuring the participation of parents and community members in school governance and decision-making.*
- g) **Providing conditional support** for vulnerable children to remain in school; addressing dropout causes through community programs; offering remedial learning for lagging students; monitoring attendance by gender, region, and disability; and ensuring safe, inclusive environments with proper sanitation and protection measures.*
- h) **Enhancing transparency in FQBE** and related programs by publishing district budgets; ensuring timely disbursement of school funds; regulating and integrating unapproved schools; empowering communities to monitor resources; and conducting regular public audits of key education and school feeding initiatives.*

B. RIGHT TO HEALTH

23. We commend the Government of Sierra Leone and its development partners for initiatives such as the Free Health Care Programme for pregnant women⁹, lactating mothers, and children under five, as well as national responses to HIV and AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, and efforts to improve vaccine coverage, aligned with SDG 3.

24. Persistent Health System Challenges: Despite these efforts, public health facilities remain critically under-resourced. Many hospitals and peripheral health units lack essential drugs, functional equipment, electricity, clean water, and sanitation. Pregnant and nursing mothers are disproportionately affected, often traveling long distances on foot or by motorbike to reach health care facilities, resulting in preventable deaths¹⁰.

⁹ https://sierraleone.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/UNFPA_support_Free_Health_Care_Initiative.pdf

¹⁰ <https://reproductive-health-journal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12978-025-02051-9>

- 25. Maternal Mortality Crisis:** Sierra Leone records approximately 443 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births¹¹—one of the highest in the world. Preventable causes, including hemorrhage, sepsis, eclampsia, and obstructed labor, are widespread. Understaffed facilities and insufficient trained medical personnel exacerbate the crisis, leaving women at the mercy of underqualified staff.
- 26. Staffing Gaps and Unsafe Practices:** Many rural communities rely on untrained practitioners due to severe doctor shortages. In some districts, fewer than five qualified doctors serve over 150,000 people¹². A 2023 joint monitoring mission found over 30% of rural clinics without full-time staff and 70% lacking basic emergency obstetric care equipment. Urban hospitals face overcrowding and high costs, limiting access for poor patients.
- 27. International Obligations:** The UN Special Rapporteur on the right to health emphasizes that states must guarantee functional, well-staffed, and equipped public health systems without discrimination. Sierra Leone’s underfunded and poorly managed health sector violates obligations under ICESCR, CEDAW, and CRC, forcing families to rely on costly private or informal care.
- 28. Urgent Need for Reform:** The health crisis threatens SDG 3 targets, including maternal and child survival, universal health coverage, and access to essential medicines. Only the financially privileged can access quality care abroad, while most citizens die from treatable conditions locally. This inequity underscores the urgent need for sustainable reforms in Sierra Leone’s health infrastructure.

29. RECOMMENDATIONS:

ERI and its coalition of partners, recommend that the Government of Sierra Leone: -

- a) Increase the national health budget to meet the Abuja Declaration target of at least 15% of total public expenditure, prioritizing rural infrastructure, maternal care services, and the availability of essential drugs.*
- b) Recruit and retain qualified health professionals, by improving conditions of service, raising salaries, decentralizing deployment to remote areas, and providing incentives and housing support.*
- c) Strengthen regulatory frameworks to eliminate unqualified medical practice, by licensing all health workers, conducting regular supervision and training, and ensuring that health facilities—particularly those providing maternal and child health services—operate with qualified personnel and functional equipment.*

¹¹ <https://www.afro.who.int/photo-story/improving-quality-care-save-lives-sierra-leone>

¹² <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s12982-025-00700-9>

- d) Organize capacity-building programs for traditional birth attendants to enhance their knowledge and skills in counselling pregnant women on the benefits of delivering in health facilities. Strengthening the competencies of traditional birth attendants in this regard will promote safer delivery practices and contribute to the reduction of maternal mortality rates.*

C. THE RIGHT TO AN ADEQUATE STANDARD OF LIVING

The government of Sierra Leone has made significant strides in addressing standards of living in the country:

- 30. Social Protection Programs:** The government has implemented social protection programs, such as the Social Safety Net Program, to provide financial assistance to vulnerable populations, including those affected by conflict and displacement. These programs aim to reduce poverty and improve access to basic services, such as healthcare and education.
- 31. Infrastructure Development:** The government has invested in infrastructure development, including the construction of roads, bridges, and schools, to improve access to basic services and promote economic growth.
- 32. Agricultural Development:** The government has invested in agricultural development, including the provision of training and support to smallholder farmers, to promote food security and improve rural livelihoods. The ‘Tomabum Rice Projects’¹³ are an example.

33. THE GAPS

Despite efforts by the Government of Sierra Leone to improve living standards, significant gaps remain in the realization of economic, social, and cultural rights:

- a) Many communities continue to lack access to basic services such as clean water, electricity, and healthcare¹⁴, while social protection schemes remain limited in scope and insufficient to cover the needs of vulnerable groups, particularly those affected by conflict and displacement.*
- b) Smallholder farmers—who form the backbone of the country’s agricultural sector—continue to face inadequate support in terms of training, credit, and access to markets, which undermines food security and rural livelihoods.*

¹³ <https://sierraloadee.sl/news/bio-first-lady-commission-tomabom-rice-project/>

¹⁴ <https://www.unops.org/news-and-stories/news/powering-progress-supporting-sierra-leones-green-energy-transformation>

- c) The legacy of conflict and ongoing displacement continues to fuel poverty, vulnerability, and instability in several regions.*

34. RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of these challenges, we recommend that Sierra Leone: -

- a) Ensure universal access to clean water, sanitation, electricity, and healthcare, particularly in rural and marginalized communities.*
- b) Strengthen and expand social protection programs to cover vulnerable groups, including children, persons with disabilities, older persons, and conflict-affected populations.*
- c) Provide increased support to small-holder farmers, including access to credit, training, modern inputs, and markets.*
- d) Promote climate-resilient agricultural practices to enhance food security and mitigate climate risks.*
- e) Improve rural infrastructure, including feeder roads, storage facilities, and market access for farmers.*
- f) Develop and implement community-based programs for conflict resolution, reconciliation, and sustainable livelihood generation in affected regions.*
- g) Ensure that displaced and vulnerable populations are fully included in national development planning, social protection programs, and legal protections*

D. GENDER EQUALITY

35. Sierra Leone has implemented gender equality initiatives, such as the National Gender Policy, to promote gender equality and address gender-based violence. The Gender Equity and Women's Empowerment-GEWE, the Three Gender Laws, The Prohibition of Teenage Marriage, Child Protection Laws are some of these initiatives.

36. However, Gender inequality remains pervasive, with women facing barriers to education, healthcare, economic opportunities and protection from gender-based violence. Women's representation in leadership roles, particularly at local levels, remains limited.

37. Legal frameworks have been strengthened to promote equal pay and workplace protection for women. The landmarks legislation¹⁵ recognizes women's right to own, inherit, and manage land, which was previously restricted by customary laws.

38. Despite significant progress, Sierra Leone faces several challenges:

- a) **Customary law & cultural norms still dominate:** *Even though formal legal frameworks now guarantee women equal land rights under the Customary Land Rights Act (2022), many rural areas still follow customary practices which discriminate against women—widow inheritance issues, daughters being excluded, preference for male heirs¹⁶.*
- b) **Cultural Norms and Harmful Practices:** *Traditional practices such as early marriage especially in rural or traditional communities (30% of girls are married before 18, and about 9-13% before age 15¹⁷) and female genital mutilation (as of 2019, about 83% of women aged 15-49 have undergone FGM¹⁸) continue despite legal prohibitions. These practices contribute to gender inequality and violence against women¹⁹.*
- c) **Institutional weakness and limited resources²⁰:** *The Ministry of Gender & Children's Affairs is underfunded, understaffed, with limited capacity to monitor, enforce, and support implementation of gender equality laws.*

39. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

We recommend that the government of Sierra Leone: -

- a) **Strengthen implementation of the Customary Land Rights Act (2022)** by developing clear guidelines and awareness campaigns to ensure women can claim their legal land rights in rural areas.
- b) **Promote community-level dialogues with traditional leaders** to reconcile customary practices with national law and human rights standards, ensuring equal inheritance rights for women and daughters.
- c) **Integrate gender-sensitive land rights education** into local schools and adult literacy programs to challenge norms favoring male heirs.

¹⁵ Customary Land Rights Act, 2022 (CLRA)

¹⁶ <https://wunrn.com/2014/01/sierra-leone-discrimination-in-widowhood-to-cedaw-committee/>

¹⁷ UNICEF and Girls Not Brides

¹⁸ UNICEF - Tech-based-Interventions-Adress-Harmful-Practices-2023-Sierra-Leone-v2.pdf

¹⁹ The Guardian (28 July 2025) - The ECOWAS Court of Justice ruled that Sierra Leone must criminalise female genital mutilation, recognising it as a form of torture and a violation of women's rights.

²⁰ UN Women Report, 2024

- d) Expand and Strengthen enforcement of laws prohibiting child marriage and FGM, including targeted monitoring in rural and traditional communities.*
- e) Launch nationwide awareness campaigns emphasizing the harms of child marriage and FGM, highlighting girls' health, education, and rights.*
- f) Engage traditional and religious leaders as partners to publicly denounce harmful practices and promote alternative rites of passage that respect human rights.*
- g) Increase budgetary allocations and staffing for the Ministry of Gender & Children's Affairs to enable effective monitoring, enforcement, and capacity-building activities.*

E. SEXUAL AND GENDER BASED VIOLENCE (SGBV)

- 40.** The government of Sierra Leone has taken several steps to address sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in the country. These efforts include the establishment of the National Committee on Gender-Based Violence (NAC GBV) and the Spotlight Initiative in 2017²¹, which is responsible for coordinating and implementing policies and programs to prevent and respond to SGBV. The government has also enacted the Sexual Offences Act of 2019, which provides for the prosecution of perpetrators of SGBV and offers protection and support to survivors.
- 41.** In addition, the government has implemented a number of programs aimed at preventing SGBV, including community-based initiatives, school-based education, and awareness campaigns. The government has also provided support services for survivors of SGBV, including medical and psychological care, legal assistance, and shelter.
- 42.** They have created a strong policy and legal framework, including amending the Sexual Offences Act to strengthen penalties and establish specialized courts. They also prioritize the participation of men and boys in SGBV prevention through the National Male Involvement Strategy²².

43. THE GAPS

Despite these efforts, SGBV remains a significant problem in Sierra Leone and there are still substantial gaps in the fight against the issue of SGBV:

²¹ <https://sierraleone.un.org/en/297861-eu-un-%E2%82%AC15-million-spotlight-initiative-end-violence-against-women-and-girls-launched-sierra>

²² <https://sierraleone.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/National%20Male%20Involvement%20Strategy%20for%20the%20Prevention%20of%20GBV%20in%20SL%2020.pdf?>

- 44. Limited resources:** The government's efforts to address SGBV are often hampered by limited resources, including inadequate funding, lack of trained personnel, and insufficient infrastructure.
- 45. Weak legal framework:** Despite the enactment of the Sexual Offences Act of 2018, the legal framework for addressing SGBV in Sierra Leone remains weak, with many cases going unreported or unpunished.
- 46. Limited access to support services:** Survivors of SGBV often face significant barriers in accessing support services, including medical and psychological care, legal assistance, and shelter.
- 47. Deep-seated cultural and social norms:** SGBV is often perpetuated by deep-seated cultural and social norms that normalize violence against women and girls²³. These norms can make it difficult for survivors to come forward and seek help, and can also create a hostile environment for those who do.
- 48. Limited community engagement:** The government's efforts to address SGBV have often focused on top-down approaches, with limited engagement with communities. This can make it difficult to address the root causes of SGBV and to ensure that interventions are culturally appropriate and effective.

49. RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that the government of Sierra Leone: -

- a) Ensure the effective implementation of the Sexual Offences Act of 2018 and strengthen the legal framework to address sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), including by holding perpetrators accountable.*
- b) Increase access to support services for survivors of SGBV, including medical and psychological care, legal assistance, and shelter, ensuring availability and accessibility regardless of location or socioeconomic status.*
- c) Promote gender equality and challenge harmful cultural norms that perpetuate SGBV, by engaging with communities to promote positive social change and transform harmful attitudes and behaviors.*
- d) Engage with communities in developing sustainable solutions to SGBV, by collaborating with local organizations and community leaders to design culturally appropriate and effective interventions.*

²³ https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2022-10/UNDP_Sle_Drivers-of-SGBV-Report-Sierra-Leone.pdf

- e) *Increase funding and resources for programs addressing SGBV, ensuring adequate support for the National Commission on Violence Against Women (NCVAW) and other organizations working to prevent and respond to SGBV.*
- f) *Strengthen data collection and monitoring systems to track and respond to SGBV, by establishing a robust reporting mechanism and using data to inform policy and program development, in collaboration with civil society organizations such as the Justice Peace and Human Rights Commission (JPHRC) and Rainbo Initiatives²⁴ (RI)*

F. EQUALITY BEFORE THE LAW

The Government of Sierra Leone has made relentless efforts to promote equality before the law in the country. Listed are some of their initiatives:

- 48. **National Human Rights Commission²⁵:** The government has established the National Human Rights Commission to promote and protect human rights in the country. The commission is responsible for investigating human rights violations, providing recommendations to the government, and promoting human rights education.
- 49. **Access to Justice Initiatives:** The government has implemented access to justice initiatives, such as the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) program²⁶, to provide alternative mechanisms for resolving disputes and promoting access to justice for marginalized communities.
- 50. **Legal Aid Services²⁷:** The government has launched legal aid services, such as the Legal Aid Clinic, to provide legal assistance to vulnerable populations, including those affected by conflict and displacement.
- 51. **Judicial Training:** The government has organized judicial training programs to promote the professional development of judges and improve the quality of justice in the country.

52. THE GAPS

Despite the government's efforts to promote equality before the law in Sierra Leone, there are still significant gaps:

²⁴ <https://www.fambul.com/directory/rainboinitiative>

²⁵ <https://www.sierra-leone.org/Laws/2004-9p.pdf>

²⁶ <https://www.parliament.gov.sl/uploads/acts/THE%20ARBITRATION%20ACT%2C%202022.pdf>

²⁷ <https://odi.org/en/publications/cost-effective-front-line-justice-services-in-sierra-leone-a-case-study-in-frugal-innovation-and-domestic-resourcing/>

- a) **Limited Access to Justice:** Despite the government's implementation of access to justice initiatives, many communities in Sierra Leone still lack access to justice, particularly in rural areas. This has resulted in a lack of access to legal services and a reliance on informal justice mechanisms.
- b) **Discrimination:** Discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, and other factors remains a significant challenge in Sierra Leone. This has resulted in unequal treatment and access to services for marginalized communities.
- c) **Limited Legal Aid Services:** While the government has launched legal aid services, these services are often insufficient to meet the needs of vulnerable populations, particularly those affected by conflict and displacement.
- d) **Corruption:** Corruption remains a significant challenge in Sierra Leone's justice system²⁸, with many people unable to access justice due to corruption and lack of resources.

53. RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that the State promote equality before the law and: -

- a) *Strengthen access to justice, by expanding access to legal services, improving the efficiency of the justice system, and promoting alternative dispute resolution mechanisms.*
- b) *Combat all forms of discrimination, on the basis of ethnicity, religion, and other factors, by promoting diversity and inclusion and providing support services for marginalized communities.*
- c) *Increase access to legal aid services, particularly for vulnerable populations, including those affected by conflict and displacement.*
- d) *Take effective measures to address corruption in the justice sector, by implementing anti-corruption measures, strengthening transparency and accountability, and providing training and support for judges and other justice sector workers*

²⁸ <https://www.anticorruption.gov.sl/blog/anti-corruption-commission-sl-news-room-1/post/corruption-and-the-justice-system-62>