

FOURTH STATE OF THE NATION'S SYMPOSIUM

REPORT OF THE MINISTRY OF SOCIAL WELFARE, GENDER & CHILDREN'S AFFAIRS FOR THE PERIOD 1ST JANUARY – 31ST DECEMBER 2002 **BY MRS. SHIRLEY Y. GBUJAMA**

INTRODUCTION

The Government of H. E. The President Alhaji Dr. Ahmad Tejan Kabbah has a commitment to this nation, to the people of this country, for their social welfare. This covers all categories of men, women and children, whether they are strong and healthy, aged and weak, poor and handicapped, in a home and family, or on the streets.

A few years ago that same Government determined to report itself to the nation on all its obligation to the people. It is in this vein that I have great pleasure once more to join colleagues for the fourth time to present the State of Government to the people and in my particular case it will be with respect to the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs which I currently head, and relevant to the year ending December 2002.

I know we have expounded three times before on the mission and structure of the Ministry in past symposia, but there may be some who are yet to understand the situation of this Ministry in addition to the scope and coverage of our assignment. Allow me therefore to re-present briefly some basic facts about the Ministry, especially for those in this nation who may not have heard us before now.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and gentlemen, first, we start with the mission of this Ministry.

MISSION OF THE MINISTRY

The mission of this Ministry is to ensure the provision of services to the socially marginalized, disadvantaged groups, and the less privileged, particularly children, whether in homes or "street" children and those affected by the war or in conflict with

the law, women, the aged, the physically disabled, as groups or individual, or family units, and all who need welfare attention in our communities. In this regard, the Ministry strives to promote and advocate for the needs and rights of these groups, mainly in the area of resource mobilization and allocation, without gender discrimination and to ascertain policies and any necessary law reforms that enhance the effective work of the ministry. Not a simple mission I dare say as at now.

STRUCTURE OF THE MINISTRY OF SOCIAL WELFARE, GENDER AND CHILDREN'S AFFAIRS

Since April 1998 Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs has been one Ministry and continues to be so as at now. I mention this because we have always been referred to only in part, either as Ministry of Social Welfare, or Ministry of Gender or Ministry of Children's Affairs or a combination of any of the two, but hardly all three together or in the right order as designated by H. E. the President, and yet, so it is.

This Ministry is headed politically by a Minister, assisted since June 2002 by a Deputy Minister. The Permanent Secretary is administrative head of the entire Ministry, which has two divisions, namely the Social Welfare Division and the Gender and Children's Affairs Division, with several sections/units.

Headed by the Chief Social Development Officer as Professional Head, and assisted by two Deputy Chief Social Development Officers as Deputy Professional Heads, the Social Welfare Division implements social programmes either directly or indirectly through welfare oriented government and non-governmental agencies. It has five operational sections, namely, the Child Welfare Secretariat, Probation, Family Case Work, Disability Issues, and Community Based Organisations. These sections are supported by an Audio Visual Unit and Welfare Institutions namely Remand Home, Approved School, a Training Institute for the Blind, and the National Training Centre (NTC). Each section is headed by a Principal Social Development Officer, assisted by

Social Development Officers, Social Development Assistants and Social Workers, with the exception of the institutions, which are directly under the Chief Social Development Officer as Professional Head, with the day-to-day functions assigned to officers on location.

The Gender and Children's Affairs Division nominally has three main sections namely, Gender mainstreaming, the Department for the Advancement of Women, and Children's Affairs, with supporting units including, an HIV Aids Desk, one on Sexual and Gender Based Violence and an Information and Documentation Centre actually serving both divisions.

The professional head is a Director assisted by a Deputy Director, two Programme Officers, Social Development Officers, Advisers and Experts as necessary and support staff. For national effectiveness the Ministry has offices at Regional and District levels with Principal Social Development Officers as Regional Heads and Social Development Officers as District Heads. All the Districts have Social Development Assistants and Social Development Workers as field staff. The Regional Heads work directly through the Administrative and Political heads for financial and other matters. Each of the two Division of the Ministry has its own distinct administrative and accounting machinery with a Deputy Secretary, Senior Assistant Secretary, Assistant Secretary, Accountant, Executive Officer, Sub Accountant, Clerical and Auxiliary Staff.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The following are the broad goals and objectives of the ministry as a whole:

1. Assess, evaluate and address the welfare situation generally in the country in so far as it affects vulnerable groups.
2. Register, trace, reunify and reintegrate unaccompanied children and children associated with the fighting forces with their families and communities.

3. Ensure the rights of children in accordance with Government's current policies based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights (CRC) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC).
4. Assist and reconcile feuding families and with special reference to the protection and welfare of their children.
5. Monitor and coordinate the activities of all voluntary/community-based organizations and non-governmental organisations in this sector for effective welfare services to the people.
6. Promote consensus on the conceptual framework that guides the identification of gender disparity in society and analyze the causes, on the basis of current national policy on gender mainstreaming.
7. Raise awareness and recognition of gender disparity in all sectors of society using electronics and print media, as well as interpersonal communication channels.
8. Train development planners and policy makers to use gender analysis tools to develop and orientate pictorial projects, programmes and policies in the public sectors.
9. Establish a resource base for the collection, analysis and dissemination of information and statistical data on Gender specific indicators for various ages and socio-economic categories, with a view to impact on policy formulation and programming in related Ministries.
10. Advocate for the allocation of adequate technical, financial and organizational resources within the line Ministries in order to re-orientate human development policies and programmes of managers, educators, health workers other and decision makers, in so far as they affect the closing of the Gender gap.
11. Mobilize additional resources, through UN Agencies, Embassies and Foreign Government establishments, like the British Council and the Commonwealth Secretariat, NGOs, the private sector and other civic groups to support programmes on Gender, Women, Children, the Disabled and the Aged.

12. Advocate for the integration of women into the development process at all levels through programmes and policies.
13. Work closely in collaboration with all Government Ministries and Establishments and with all national advocacy and welfare groups like the Women's Forum, the Network of Women Ministers and Parliamentarians, the 50/50 group, Sierra Leone Union of Disability Issues (SLUDI), Friendship Society of the Elderly and the Retired and the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE).
14. Facilitate the work of the Child Protection Committee (CPC), National Commission for War Affected Children (NACWAC), the Children's Forum Network (CFN) and the Women's Helpline.

This last point is specifically related to objectives then in 2002, and parts of it have changed since. For example the Women's Helpline is now a full pledged registered NGO with the MODEP.

15. Formulate policies as guidelines to meet these objectives.

ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2002

We will now report to you how the ministry kept its mandate to the nation in the year 2002 within those terms and objectives, as we quickly examine work within each section of the ministry.

1. Child Welfare Secretariat

The Child Welfare Secretariat was established in 1995 mainly to coordinate child protection activities implemented by this Ministry and the child protection agencies/NGOs throughout the country. It was because of the numerous problems affecting children in this country at the time, but more especially the resulting proliferation of NGOs, both national and international, in the name of helping these

children that the Ministry decided to establish the Child Welfare Secretariat with the help of UNICEF. The Secretariat's mandate is to put systems in place for the protection of Children in Especially Difficult Circumstances (CEDC's) and to coordinate the activities of all credible Child Protection Agencies (CPA's) in the country. For this purpose the Secretariat is serving as the central child protection database.

During the period under review (2002) the following short-term goals were set:

- To provide emergency/alternative care to 1,000 separated children, including children from the former fighting forces.
- To support the tracing and reunification of 1,600 separated children.
- To ensure the successful reintegration of 3,800 separated children, street children and the children from the former fighting forces.

The Child Welfare Secretariat and its Child Protection Partners achieved the following:

With respect to the 3,800 separated children, street children and child ex-combatants targetted, far more than that number received attention. Infact 5,552 children received support in the Community Reintegration Programme within the period. Of this numbers,

- 1682 separated children were documented and tracing done for their families.
- 882 children went through the interim care centres (ICCs). These included 404 child ex-combatants made up of 372 males and 32 females, and 478 Sierra Leone refugee children from Guinea and Liberia including 310 males and 168 females.
- 477 children from ICCs were moved to alternative care (foster care, group homes and independent living)
- 408 Liberian separated children (29% girls among them) were identified and provided with alternative care namely, emergency transit booth care, foster care and independent living within refugee camps and of this group 131 were reunified with their families.

- 2788 children, mostly child ex-combatants and some extremely vulnerable and significantly disabled children accessed formal schooling through the Community Education Investments Programmes (CEIP)
- 1259 older child ex-combatants (15 – 19 yrs) were referred to NCDDR Training and Empowerment Programme (TEP) for skills training.
- 719 street children were provided with emergency shelter and of these 215 were reunified with their families, 525 received non-formal education being enrolled in skills training programmes and 36 attended formal school.
- 12 monthly national and 12 regional Child Protection Committee and Family Tracing and Reunification information shearing meetings were conducted to arrive at these figures.

We also achieved short and medium term goals in this section, which included support and capacity building of the child protection network, to facilitate the prevention child of rights abuses, and specifically to provide care and protection to 1,000 survivors of sexual violence, 300 child mothers, and 300 commercial sex workers.

The progress on this covered essential field training and logistics for the deployment of

- 28 Social Development Workers in the Kono and Kailahun districts
- 171 Social Workers working in the Ministry or with NGO's, 27 foster parents and 24 caregivers were provided with fundamental skills for working with children in psychological distress situations.
- School teachers received training on the CRC.
- Work commenced on the development of guidelines for the protection of children involved with the TRC and Special Court.
- 1,444 gross child rights violations were documented (28% rape and sexual assault, 13% neglect/ abandonment, 11% drug abuse and 10% violence related injury.

- 366 of the children who had their rights violated received counseling, 312 received medical care, 143 family and community mediation carried out, 44 children were released from detention and 94 children were provided with legal services.
- 640 survivors of sexual and gender based violence, 250 child mothers and 420 commercial sex workers, were provided with various services (counseling, medical treatment, legal advocacy, family/community mediation, day care formal school, income generating activities, skills/vocational training and HIV/Aids education.
- 20 community workshops were held on sexual exploitation/abuse, prevention and support in which about 3,000 community members participated.
- 40 workshops were held on sexual and domestic violence.
- 16 Social Development Workers (SDW's) received training in HIV/Aids counseling techniques.

2. Disability Issues

The Disability Issues Section of the Ministry is charged with the responsibility of coordinating, supervising and monitoring of all activities and programmes for and on behalf of the disabled. In view of this, it seeks to promote the affairs of the disabled community in which the disabled could strive to function effectively within their families and their communities at large.

Working on our short term goals during the period under review, the Ministry collaborated with the Ministry of Health and Sanitation, other line Ministries and Non Governmental Organizations including WHO to put in place certain modalities for a National Policy including a working committee to commence work on the framework for such a policy on the Disabled, to be formulated before the end of the current year, 2003. The ministry has also actively collaborated with some NGOs particularly CAUSE Canada, in the rehabilitation of Amputees and War Wounded for the provision of counseling and skill training services. In this regard there were sixty-five job placements

provided to various categories of disabled persons nationwide, with referrals for placement of disabled persons into institutions such as Milton Margai School for the Blind, School for Deaf and Dumb, Cheshire Home Bo, School for the Mentally Retarded, Disabled Rights Movement Organization, and Cherith International. Over 1,336 disabled persons were provided with counseling services nationwide.

Medium term goals were with an aim:-

- To create an environment that would enable disabled persons to be self reliant.
- Ensure that the National Rehabilitation Committee for the Disabled attains its set aims and objectives.
- Provide skills training facility centers for self-reliance for the Disabled.
- Rehabilitate existing centers for disabled persons, including the Kenema Farm Craft Center and the Makomp Agricultural Rehabilitation Centers respectively.

With these goals a Project of Community Integrated Rehabilitation of the Blind in Sierra Leone was established through the support of Sight Savers, Sierra Leone, and Social Development Workers were trained in and out of the country to enable them carryout Community Integrated Rehabilitation Programmes. In the meantime the monitoring and coordinating of the activities of NGOs dealing with Disability Issues continued, and guidelines were developed for NGOs engaged in rehabilitation and reintegration activities for the Disabled.

To effectively implement these programmes related to disability issues, the Ministry embarked on minimizing and therefore discouraging the emergence of splinter disabled organizations by supporting one central unit, the Sierra Leone Union for Disabled Issues. (SLUDI).

3. Audio Visual Aids Unit

The Audio Visual Aids Section which has been dormant over the years, was reactivated, although within the period under review with limited equipment. The short term goal of this unit in 2002 was the production of signboards for all Ministry offices, at the headquarters, regional and districts. This goal was partially achieved. The unit produced banners, posters, and photographs for the Ministry workshops, seminars, rallies and matchpasts during the year under review.

4. Community Based Organisations and Religious Affairs Unit

The Government of Sierra Leone have recognized the role of Community Based Organisations as a vital and reliable medium to the long term development approach in reversing the social and economic decline of Sierra Leone. Most communities at grassroots level do not have access to professional guidelines in the identification and the implementation of development programmes but greatly rely on the supplementary efforts of Community Based Organisations (CBO). The Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs therefore registers all known CBOs to facilitate the coordination and monitoring of their activities. In this regard during the period under review (January – December 2002) 120 Community Based Organisations received temporary registration certificates. Which last for a period of 6 months until the CBO is cleared as effective by constant monitoring over the period, and 52 received Permanent Certificates. The distribution by type was as follows:

Types of Reg. Organisations	No. Registered	Activities		Issued with Temporary Certificates	Issued with Permanent Certificates
Christian Organisation	35	Religious		20	15
Muslim Organisation	33	Religious		20	13
Voluntary Organisation	27	Developmental Social	–	12	15
Women's Group	30	Skill Training		13	2
Orphanages	5	Developmental Social	&	3	2
Total	120	-		68	52

The cost in 2002 for Temporary registration was a mere Le5,000 and Le10,000 for Permanent Certificates. It will be so until June 30th this year. With effect from 1st July the fees change to Le15,000 for Temporary registration and Le35,000 for Permanent Certificates with annual renewal set at Le15,000.

The short to medium term goals of the Ministry here included the following for the period under review:-

- Collection of quarterly reports and programme plans of activities from Community Based Organisations registered with the Ministry.
- Regular supervision and monitoring of the CBO's.
- Attending their meetings.
- Connecting them with other line ministries and relevant NGO's for institutional support for those well meaning CBO's who need it.
- Granting of loans and duty free concessions on welfare items to those CBO's with current Permanent Certificates.

- Settlement of disputes between members of Community Based Organisations.
- Renewing registration certificate for performing organisations and retrieving of registration certificates from those Community Based Organisations not working in the interest of the people or in accordance with Government Policies.
- Encouraging community-based organisations to undertake income-generating activities/fund raising activities.
- Building community rehabilitation centres for counseling and recreation.

All of these goals were attained within the period with the exception of the loan scheme which did not operate for reasons we are now examining and the building of the centres which remain a long term goal even as at today, except in so far as those being put up by NaCWAC for children in the districts could serve the joint purpose. It was not the case in 2002. There has been an effective monitoring and evaluation of the activities of registered Community Based Organizations, with frequent attendance at meetings with them in relation to their activities. Results show that generally CBO's are effectively engaged in developmental programmes aimed at alleviating poverty in their communities.

The annual Hajj pilgrimage undertaken by Muslims and coordinated by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs in accordance with government's current policy was very successful in the period under review. A total of 216 pilgrims made the pilgrimage, through the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs in 2002 with no reported problems whatsoever.

5. Probation Section

Within the period the Ministry in this area achieved the following short and medium term goals with some limitation in a few cases:

- Provide interim care for abandoned, destitute and neglected children until they are placed with foster families.
- Reform and rehabilitate the minds of delinquent juveniles and keep them within an institution, providing counseling, skills training informal teaching and recreational facilities at the Remand Home and Approved School.
- Collaborate with and encourage child welfare agencies to include in their programmes principles concerning child protection and take measures to stop the abuse of children.
- Collaborating with NGO's like Defense for Children International to advocate for the release of juveniles and representing them in Court.
- Identification of areas where minors are abused as child labourers and provide proper placement for them or reunite them with their families.
- Continuous sensitization of families with foster children to make them fully aware of their responsibilities in the care and protection such children.
- Keep a track record on the background of juvenile offenders and assess the rate of juvenile delinquency.
- Rehabilitation of existing structures at Remand Home to ensure a safe and secure environment for juveniles in remand.

The Probation Section is responsible for helping especially children in conflict with the law and the generally delinquent, destitute, abandoned and neglected children. Probation services therefore covers the area of fostering and adoption of children and works in the interest of juveniles appearing before Juvenile Court on criminal and civil offences. This court meets everyday except Sundays to try children who have violated or are in conflict with the law. These young offenders are generally not brought into regular courts nor

are they treated necessary as criminals, but as children who need special care and protection as referred to in Cap 44 Section 27 (1) (c) of the Laws of Sierra Leone. Disposal of a juvenile charged to court is by the order of this Court which comprises of a Magistrate and two Justices of the Peace, the Probation Officer from the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, Police Prosecutors and a Warden to await trial. The order can vary from sending juveniles to the Remand Home or to the Approved School on conviction for reformation.

Within the reporting period the short term goal of attending juvenile courts for the purpose of monitoring, advocacy, and counseling services to juvenile offenders was achieved with five hundred and thirty-six (536) juveniles caught in conflict with the law during the reporting period, 2002. Out of these 150 were advocated for and released from Police Cells. 135 of these juveniles were female. The prisons and Police Cells were checked to ensure that juveniles are not placed together with adult offenders and four (4) juveniles were transferred from Pademba Road Prisons to the Remand Home in Kingtom. This proved difficult in the provinces sometimes because of the absence of Remand Homes and Approved Schools in some areas and the status of these institutions even where we have them. Counselling sessions were carried out for juvenile offenders at the Remand Home and Approved School. Sixty foster families received 'Aid' for the upkeep of their foster children and 10 destitute children were placed into foster care at the SOS. We collaborated with Child Rights Violation Monitoring (CRIVMON) and other interested NGO's to ensure that rape and other cases of gross child rights violations are monitored and prosecuted.

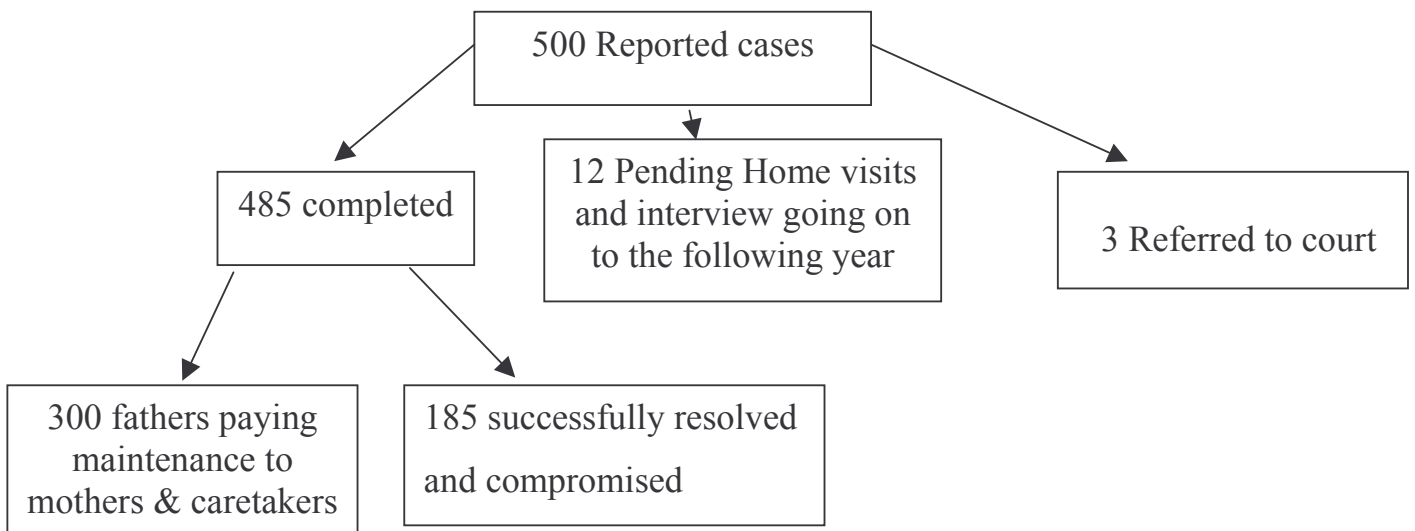
Within the period under review also, a brochure was prepared and circulated by the Ministry in order to inform the public about the activities in this part of its work. Three abnormal abandoned children were placed into institutions and the Ministry has continued to monitor their welfare. Out of thirty-two children who were brought in by

their families for being “beyond control” 22 were counseled and successfully reunited with their families. With the collaboration of Goal Ireland and Government funding the Remand Home was refurbished and is now serving the children.

6. Family Casework Section

The Family Casework Section deals with complaints in families and especially those that could be threatening to children such as parents abandoning homes or starving their families. This section also addresses claims of death gratuities to beneficiaries of deceased Civil Servants and financial support to destitute women and their families.

During the period under review, counseling and mediation services were done for 500 families involving home visits and with the results that 485 were completed, 12 were pending on the outcome of more home visits and interviews spilling on to the following year and 3 were referred to court. In this lot of 500 families, 300 fathers are paying maintenance to mothers for their children, and 185 cases were successfully resolved with families staying together or united.



- One objective of this section included mediating in family squabbles for the children’s sake and get women to participate in income generating activities and

learn how to manage their homes and become economically productive. We achieved this objective with a few women who were faithful and efficient in handling the micro-credit given through this Ministry, but sometime in the middle of the reporting the exercise failed for reason we are still examining. Outside of business renters financial assistance was given to 300 hundred families under the Care to the Needy programme at a very limited rate within our means.

7. Gender Mainstreaming

Continuing the programmes initiated during 2001, the Ministry working through Gender Focal Points (GFPs) embarked on implementing programmes that ensured the integration of women into the development process at all levels through programmes and policies. The policy on the Advancement of Women provided for the nomination of Gender Focal Points (GFP) in line Ministries and other Gender related Organisations and institutions. The GFPs are important as they represent to some extent the government credibility in its policy to recognize the importance of women in development at all levels and to stay committed to it. Thus there are GFP's in the following areas of Governments with more than one representative from some areas depending on their sections and divisions:

Ministry of Education Science and Technology
The Establishment Secretary's Office
Ministry of Information and Broadcasting
Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security
Ministry of Marine Resources
Network of Women Ministers and Parliamentarians (NEWMAP)
Sierra Leone Association of University Women (SLAUW)
Council of Churches in Sierra Leone (CCSL)
Grassroots Gender Empowerment Movement Services (GGEMS)
Forum of African Women Educationalists (FAWE)
Gender Research and Documentation (GRADOC)
Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government
Cabinet Secretariat
Ministry of Parliamentary and Political Affairs
Ministry of Works and Technical Maintenance

Campaign for Good Governance (CGG)
Women's Forum SL
Ministry of Development and Economic Development
Ministry of Trade, Industry and State Enterprises
Ministry of Health and Sanitation
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation
Sierra Leone Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (SLANGO)
Ministry of Youth and Sport
Ministry of Finance
Bank of Sierra Leone

The Gender Focal Points (GFP's) are there to advocate for the inclusion of women's interests in all programmes, activities and policies initiated by their respective Ministries/Organizations or Institutions. They are to ensure that development plans take cognizance of women's role in the economy and that these roles are reflected in programmes and also ensure that they contain well designed projects that will increase women's productive capacities and development.

They are also to initiate appropriate and pioneering development projects with and for women. In addition, they are to work to influence other staff members of their Ministries/Institutions to consider the important role of women as these affect or are affected by the various sections in which they work. GFPs have a duty to ensure that programmes and projects of their Ministries/Institutions do not adversely affect the activities and conditions of women. For all this the committee of GFP's met several times in 2002 with the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs and other partners in workshops for gender skills training to facilitate their role.

One such training of trainers workshop by the Ministry with the help, the Commonwealth Secretariat in collaboration with the UNDP covered a five days period in September, 2002 on Gender Awareness and Planning. More than 30 (thirty) Gender

Focal Points attended the first training workshop from line Ministries and Gender related Organizations and Institutions.

Within the period under review the Ministry also carried-out more training workshops for Principal Social Development Officers (PSDOs) and Permanent Secretaries and established a Parliamentary Gender Caucus at the policy level. This led to the formulation of a Gender Management System (GMS), which would from then on coordinate the formulation, implementation, and monitoring of all gender concerns.

This was all in addition to frequent community sensitization campaigns around the country with the aim of deepening our people's understanding of gender issues including women's role in decision making at community and national levels, all aimed at strengthening the capacity of women.

These one-day training sessions took place over a four week period, and in addition to Permanent Secretaries they also involved heads of Parastatals, Professional heads in Government Ministries and Departments, Parliamentarians and women's groups.

The training workshop focused on gender awareness, analysis and planning tools to decision makers, senior managers and others for understanding the importance of women and men working together, and know how to integrate gender issue and concerns in their work. The Gender and development trainings also aimed to forge linkage between government, the private sector, civil society and other stakeholders to ensure a coordination of efforts and resources. All of this was with an aim to gradually break those cultural and traditional barriers that hinder the advancement of women in our society, and to do through sustained and well-organized sensitization meetings with the people. Consequently in 2002 such meetings and training seminars also focused on traditional, religious and women's group leaders.

8. Advancement of women

In line with the policy on the Advancement of Women, the Ministry in collaboration with the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the British Council and NDI held a workshop on Women in Parliament in February, 2002. This workshop brought together female political aspirants and parliamentarians from Sierra Leone and other Commonwealth countries, leaders of political parties who had registered for general elections, as well as NGO's.

The Women's Helpline Project in the Ministry, at the time, in 2002 having been launched in July, 2001 as a project designed to promote women's advancement, commenced a regional training of women's organization on Micro-Credit Management. The first regional workshop was held in Kenema also in February, 2002. This project was funded by the Ministry to set up centers around the country for children and women who have been raped, sexually abused or assaulted and battered, to seek and receive counseling, medical care and legal aid. These centers were to be operational in Freetown and the regional head quarter towns of Makeni, Kenema, Bo and also in Kambia respectively and were set up in collaboration with the Sierra Leone Police Force, the Ministry of Health and Sanitation and the Law Officers Department.

As I said earlier, the project is now graduated out of the Ministry to become a full-fledged Non-Governmental Organisation on its own and registered since with the Ministry of Development and Economic Planning.

Within the reporting period also, the Ministry's achievements in this area included work with our partners on the advocacy especially of Article 7 of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), according to which states partners "shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and in particular shall

ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right to vote in elections and public referenda and to be eligible for elections to all public bodies”.

We wasted no time also in an election year to draw attention to our mandate as a Commonwealth country to the 1991 Head of State recommendation of that body that Commonwealth Ministries responsible for Women’s Affairs should work towards achieving a target of not less than thirty percent (30%) of women in decision making by the year 2005.

To address the strategic and practical needs of women in post-war Sierra Leone, the Ministry joined forces with the UNDP, Commonwealth Secretariat, British Council, the 50/50 Group, Network for Women Ministers and Parliamentarians (NEWMAP), other Ministries in a Taskforce for Women in Politics (TAFWIP), and with the National Commission for Social Action (NACSA), among many partner organizations and Institutions, to initiate various activities aimed at enhancing women’s role in decision making and increasing their productivity through access to financial and other resources before the May 2002 elections. Those efforts bore fruit. In the May 14, 2002 polls women’s share of Parliamentary seats increased from 9 in the previous Parliament (1992 – 2002) to 18 seats in the current Parliament. The number of women ministers and Deputy Ministers also increased slightly from 4 to 6, with 3 full Cabinet and 3 Deputy Ministers, up from 2 each before 2002.

Further to decision making matters and the political empowerment of women other sensitization meetings were held across the country on the policies of the Ministry including one on the Advancement of Women. These covered workshops by the Ministry’s TAFWIP on economic empowerment, including some on locally initiated technologies that ease women’s house hold chores and enhance their productive capacities. This led to a national exhibition of samples of appropriate technologies such

as the Alphas Cooker, the Wonder Stove and others that are highly effective in cooking with an economic use of coal.

The International Women's Day 2002 was held on the theme: "Women celebrate for sustainable peace and development" and activities included:-

- Sensitization visits to the three regions of Makeni, Kenema and Bo on the 4th, 5th, and 6th March, 2002.
by the Minister, Mrs. Shirley Gbujama and entourage to educate the populace about the significance of the celebration.
- Inter faith thanksgiving service by the Women's Forum, Sierra Leone - 8th and 10th March, 2002.
- Exhibition and Trade fair of New Technology products made from local materials which women had identified as useful for easing the burden they face in their daily household activities, and which will enhance their ability to contribute to national development – 8th and 9th March, 2002.
- Workshops were conducted in the regional towns of Makeni, Kenema and Bo on the 4th, 5th, and the 6th March 2002, and during these workshops, political parties were sensitized to include more women on their district block lists, in order to raise women's representation in Parliament to at least 30 percent. This was not achieved.
- A series of sensitization meetings were also organized by TAFWIP for various internally Displaced Camps in the Western Area, which sent a clear message that women have an equal right to political participation and representation, beginning from voter registration to balloting and standing in the May 2002 general elections.
- The TAFWIP in collaboration with the 50 – 50 group and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) also conducted training programmes on campaign skills nationwide for potential women aspirants on various dates preceding the IWD.

In working towards Women's economic empowerment, work in this section also ensured that women's groups in the country that are registered with us and which are engaged in poverty reduction activities continue to benefit from Micro Credit. It came to a stand still just before the elections in May 2002. Most of the supports were directed at short term income generating activities including small-scale crop and livestock production and marketing, fishing and fish processing, soap making, petty trading and gara dying.

Intervention by the Ministry and its partners later specifically focused on the provision of skills training in business including the vital areas of constructions, transportation and manufacturing. These were all measures for promoting women's economic empowerment for greater wages and employment opportunities in order to enhance their self-esteem.

9. Children's Affairs and Policies

In commemoration of the 2002 Day of the African Child (DAC) on June 16th, the Minister of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, Mrs. Shirley Y. Gbujama, gave a nationwide broadcast in which she announced the creation of an HIV/AIDS Desk which would design programmes for women, children and young people to become aware of the risks of HIV/AIDS and show measures for avoiding such risks. In particular, the HIV/AIDS Desk would seek to reduce the risk of the disease especially among women and children.

A major discovery was the impact of Aids on children, which led to the chosen theme for the 2002 DAC: WORKING WITH CHILDREN TO FIGHT AIDS. A main feature of the Day of the African Child 2002 commemoration therefore was the involvement of the Children's Forum Network (CFN) as an advocacy organization of school and out of school children between ages ranging from 10 – 17 years. They launched an advocacy

campaign to adequately sensitize their members and colleague children on the dangers of this killer disease and how it can be avoided and prevented.

It may be recalled that the CFN was established by the MSWGCA in November, 2001 and launched by the Minister, Mrs. Shirley Y. Gbujama, on 16th June, 2001 to serve as a strategy to give children a voice on their rights and welfare generally and as a way to ensure that the views and concerns of children are included in the policies programmes and process of Government and its partner organizations and Institutions.

Sensitization started with a Press Conference at which the President of the Children's Forum Network participated. Children were also given an opportunity at two-day communication workshop, which was attended by 50 school and out of school children to freely discuss issues of HIV/AIDS and reproductive health, and were able to related issues, from which they developed messages which are still being, used today in children's Radio/TV discussions.

10. The Information and Documentation Desk

This Desk successfully produced the First Social Agenda, a magazine on the work of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs. This is available at our Documentation Centre for information to our friends and partners in the work we do in this part of Government business.

CONSTRAINTS

Amid whatever achievements were reached in the year 2002, the fact remains that the Ministry was faced with a lot of constraints. Admittedly the situation of the Ministry in 2002 was far ahead from the first period of reporting to you with respect to such constraints. For example while at the 1998 reporting period the Ministry had 2 vehicles, one provided by UNICEF before May 1997 and the other provided again by UNICEF, on our return. During this reporting period we had 6, made of an additional 3 from

UNICEF, one of which is a 30-seater bus for taking children to and from court, and one from Government, a far cry from the minimum requirement of 16 vehicles for effective work. Also in 1998 all our offices and institutions throughout the country were in very bad shape. In 2002 however attention to some of them commenced, so that the Remand Home for example put on a new look. Finally, while our percentage share of total Government and international funding did not increase, from one per cent or less, the actual quantum did in 2002.

Yet constraints in general loomed large enough to restrict the level of achievements by the Ministry. These include the absence of:

1. Transportation facilities in all sections to carryout fieldwork co-ordination and monitoring which are the bases of the work in this Ministry - For example none of the Provincial/Regional Headquarters office can boast of a single vehicle. Yet they must chair and coordinate Child Protection activities and monitor Child Protection agencies, community based organisations and NGO's some of which can boast of 10 - 12 vehicles in one district. These could give rise to compromise situations by Ministry officials in their monitoring exercise.
2. Adequate and trained staff through out the Ministry but more especially in the professional areas of the Gender Division, Disability Issues, and Religious Affairs, and administrative duty areas like Filing Clerks, Computer Typists or even Short Hand Typists.
3. Regular training facilities for Senior Professional staff to keep them abreast of modem approaches.
4. Logistics including public information equipment for rural sensitization, computers and related gargets for data storage in all sections.
5. Funds to service the Ministry's many varied welfare programmes, including, the interim care of the often abandoned children or abnormal children they bring to us and for whom we do not always readily find help. Against the "Help to the

Needy” vote for example, we receive requests for college fees, school fees, examination fees, food, clothing, CI sheets, temporary housing, hospital or doctors fees - a lot more. Of course we can never hope to meet it all. But with proper funding, we can dare to be seen as a welfare Ministry especially during emergencies.

6. There was difficulty in reaching out to more HIV/Aids and rape victims, especially in the provinces because they shyed away from reporting their cases for fear of stigmatization. The same was true of victims of gender-based violence.
7. We were unable to assist many children in difficult situations through the Save for A Child Fund put together with participation public in 1998. The funds have been deflated since, and there has been no further response from the public. The fund was launched during the 1998 Day of the African Child activities and the expectation was that members of the public would continue to donate towards the fund.
8. In addition to all the above constraints during the period under review, the Child Welfare Secretariat and its Child Protection partners were faced with special none logistical, constraints. For example,
 - Child rights are seen as a threat to parental and community control and there are in some places a family/community misconception of some child protection programmes on Child Rights and Child Participation.
 - Cultural and structural impediments to the prosecution of certain violations like Rape.
 - Limited strategies and methods in disseminating CRC messages.
 - Delay by the Police/Magistrates in the prosecution of cases relating to children e.g. rape cases, seeming like a weakness in the juvenile justice system.
 - Inadequate knowledge on Child Rights by some police personnel.
 - Family and Community rejection of children especially some child ex-combatants for reunification.

- High costs involved in securing medical report for rape cases taken to Court.
- A large number of children missed out in the DDR exercise and therefore could not get on board the reintegration programmes designed by NCDDR for child ex-combatants.
- A new war namely, HIV/Aids, the world greatest killer disease was found to be on the increase, with children also doomed for misery. Pasing additional challenge for child protection partners.
- Most Child Protection Services are located in the city and bigger towns leaving the vast majority of vulnerable children in the more rural areas or villages without attention.
- The conflict in Liberia led to the influx of refugee children whose needs also had to be adequately addressed and the issue of Street Children continued to constitute great concern to the Child Protection Network, especially in absence of national a survey to assess the correct situation of Street Children. This led to some CPAs conducting their own individual assessment at local level in their areas of operation, and very few agencies were actually able to offer specialized services for Street Children outside Freetown.
- There was also an absence of a clear and organized reporting structure for child abuse and exploitation in most of the country.

9. During this period under review, the Disability Issues Unit and other areas encountered problems relating to the lack of information and data storage systems.

FUTURE PLANS

In the year 2003 the Ministry has plans to work further on the broad areas outlined in this report, and with the specific goals:

1. Ensuring the recruitment and training of professional staff especially in the area of disability issues, Gender Mainstreaming, the advancement of women and the rights and well being of children.
2. A spacious office accommodation for the Gender Division of the Ministry at the head office.
3. Construction and rehabilitation of Provincial and District Offices and with appropriate staff and equipment.
4. To continue to work with the newly established National Commission for War Affected Children in Sierra Leone, to design and implement programmes for the speedy rehabilitation and reintegration of all categories of children.
5. Ensure that the CRC is incorporated into the Laws of Sierra Leone in the form of Child Rights Bill and distributed at community level to continue community sensitization on Child Rights.
6. Associating very closely with the current exercise of examining the laws of the land with a view to revising or removing practices that are considered prejudicial to the marginalized groups including women and children and ensure that changes are actually made to the laws.
7. Promote appropriate technologies to ease women's household chores, raise income and provide time for self-employment through exhibitions and experience sharing sessions.
8. Organize the Day of the African Child and International Women's Day on specific themes of concern on the right and well being of children and women as advocacy events.
9. Undertake periodic materials development workshops or seminars for the production and dissemination of appropriate messages pertaining to gender

mainstreaming, the advancement of women and the rights and well being of children.

10. To facilitate the popularization of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and prepare Sierra Leone's first report to the UN on the implementation of CEDAW.
11. Formulate four new written policies on Children, the Aged, the Disabled and Community Based Organisation.
12. Reactivate the Special Fund for Children in a big way to attract response both nationally and internationally.
13. Ensure that the Regional Offices at least, and District Offices where possible have a Desk for the effective mainstreaming of gender out the advancement.
14. Construction of Remand Homes and Approved School at Regional level.
15. Rehabilitation of all existing welfare institutions, in particular the National Training Centre for Social Workers, the Farm Craft Centre.
16. Set up centres for Children's Forum Network with Internet and other facilities.
17. Construction and equipping of skills training centres for the Disabled.
18. Strengthen the national groups for the aged to enable more care to them.
19. Set up a Planning and Programmes Unit within the structure of the Ministry and strengthen the Documentation Centre.
20. Expand the HIV Desk into a full section of the Ministry with the help of the National HIV/AIDs Secretariat.
21. Ensuring that a clear reporting structure for child abuse and exploitation at the sub sectoral national and regional levels need to be better organized, developed and supported. For example, we will take steps to have the National Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Committee decentratized, and with this must go a lot of sensitization drive to put away the fear of stigmatization which has always affected the reporting process.

RECOMMENDATIONS OUTSIDE THE PURVIEW OF THE MINISTRY

1. The Juvenile Justice system should be strengthened with more court sittings throughout the country and one legal personnel provided with adequate logistic support.
2. Child Rights Training be incorporated into the normal police training so that every police personnel will have knowledge on the care and protection of children.
3. Appropriate and adequate training be provided for staff of both the government and NGOs who are implementing programmes for children.
4. An increase of senior professional staff in the Ministry especially at the Regional Offices, with appropriate and adequate logistics in the areas of transportation (vehicles, motorbikes and bicycles), Communication (HF Radio sets, telephones), other office materials and equipment including computers, photocopiers, and stationery.
5. Efforts be made to quickly track down the child ex-combatants who missed out on the DDR process and incorporate them into the existing reintegration programmes or others to be set up by the Child Protection Network.
6. All Child Protection agencies should include in their programmes HIV/Aids sensitization, targeting different sectors of the population e.g. children, women and the youth.
7. Efforts be made by Child Protection agencies to target more areas where vast majority of vulnerable children live.
8. Funding for a national survey of Street Children be given priority and for continued advocacy to direct the attention of interested child protection agencies to this great concern.