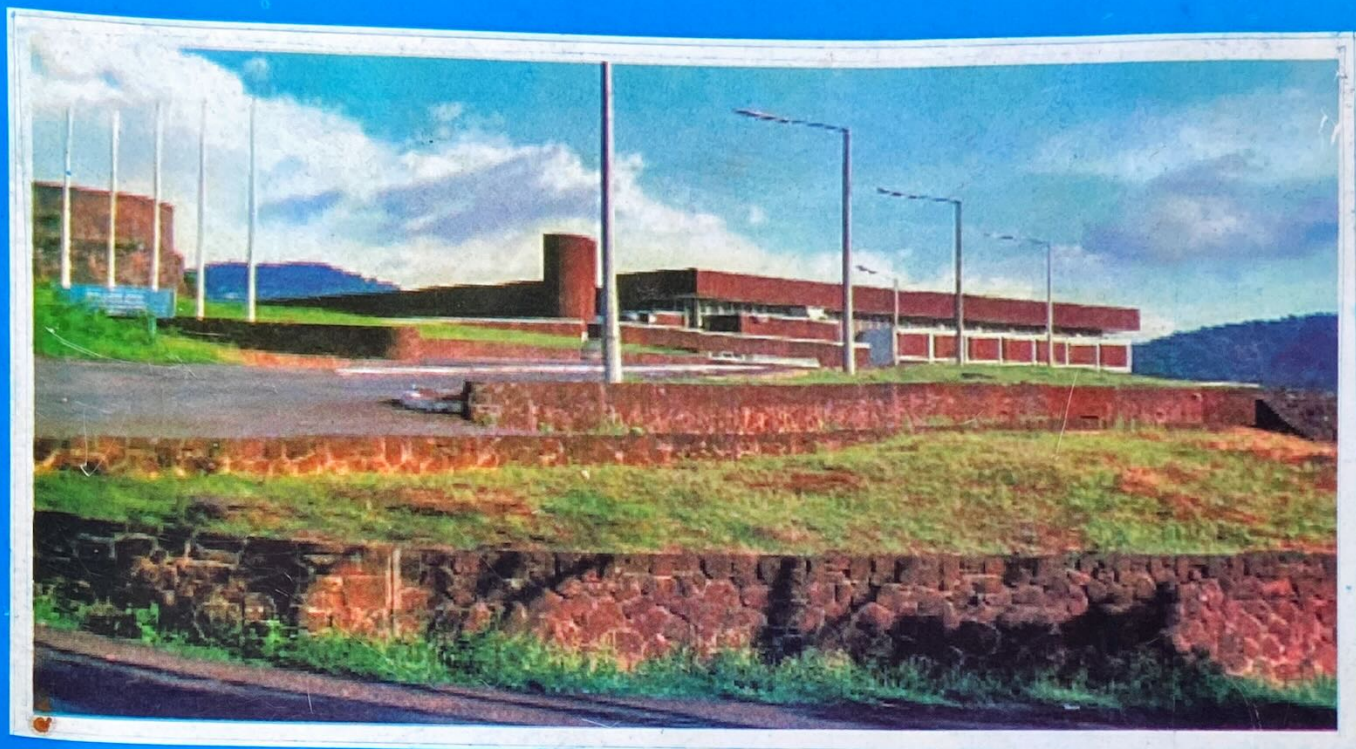




THE LAWYERS CENTRE FOR LEGAL ASSISTANCE- SIERRA LEONE



ANNUAL REPORT 2009

MISSION STATEMENT

The Lawyers Centre for Legal Assistance (LAWCLA) being a public interest Human Rights Law Centre endeavours to make the law and justice more accessible, to indigent members of the public through legal advice, impact litigation and research, with the ultimate aim of protecting and promoting Human Rights through law in Sierra Leone.



Table of contents

	Page
1. Foreword	1
2. Overview of Report	2
3. Restructuring of Centre	3
4. Research and Publications	4
5. Training of Civil Society Org.	9
6. Advisory and Referral Services	11
7. Advocacy through Radio	12
8. UNDP Project on Women's Rights	13
10. Staff Development	16
11. Internship and Fellowship	17
12 Westminster Foundation for Democracy Project	19
13. Recognition by the Media	20
12. Conclusion	24

FOREWARD

The role of donor partners in the operations of any serious non-governmental organization in society cannot be overemphasized. In the case of the Lawyers Centre for Legal Assistance (LAWCLA), the strict adherence to standards, rules, and behaviours that demonstrate accountability by the operatives may have endeared this institution to donors. However, the role being performed by this institution, in an impoverished post-conflict society as Sierra Leone, has made the outfit a sort-out-for by thousands who avail themselves for the Center's services.

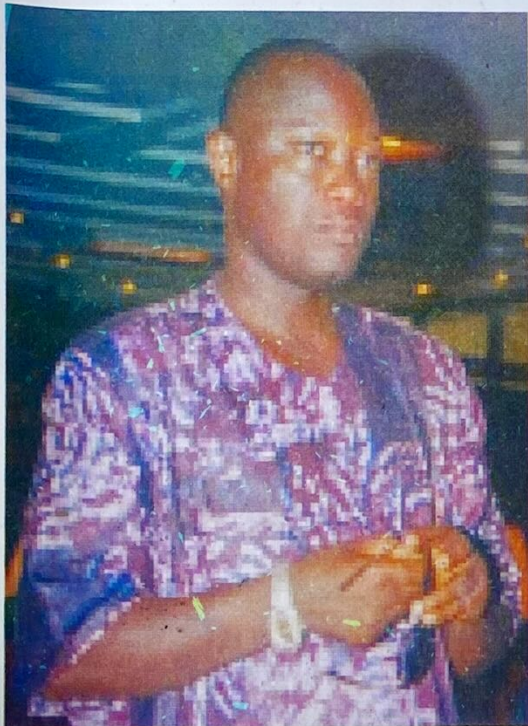
In a world of dwindling economies, LAWCLA has had to cut down on activities without a corresponding dwindling effect in standards and commitment to those hapless Sierra Leoneans who need its services most; especially those who cannot afford to pay the high cost of legal services in a society where injustice is no stranger.

In the light of the above realities, LAWCLA positively disintegrated some of its services by ceding them to two major outfits in Makeni in the north and Kenema in the east of the country. The Legal Assistance Centre (LAC) and the Legal Access Centre, in Kenema and Makeni respectively have taken some of the burden of service from the parent giant, LAWCLA, as it turns attention to the vital and much needed services in training, research, advocacy and litigation on behalf of the much marginalized of the society.

As the focus of this particular publication goes to show, LAWCLA's restructuring moves were paved by demands and encouragement from the DOEN foundation, with a view to maximizing efforts, resources and expertise so as to be able to offer to the needy, the much essentials of services to that portion of society as seen by the Centre. To that end we are much thankful to our helping partners.

The articles, opinions and research details herein published by the men and women out in the field attest to LAWCLA's commitment, vision and service to that portion of humanity the Centre has assigned itself to serve.

Have a pleasant reading.



Mr. David Tam-Baryoh

*Chairman Board of Trustee
Lawyers Centre for Legal Assistance*

OVERVIEW OF REPORT

The Lawyers Centre for Legal Assistance (LAWCLA) continues to be a powerful tool in breaking barriers, uniting people in common causes, and showing us the way to access justice in its eight years of operation in Sierra Leone. As a Public Interest Litigation Firm, LAWCLA continues to make law and justice more accessible to the majority of impoverished Sierra Leoneans by raising awareness amongst members in the judiciary that human rights are integral to the development of an effective and sound legal system accessible to all members of society thus promoting national stability and development which is essential in Sierra Leone.

During the period under review, the Centre with funding from Doen Foundation published and launched simplified versions and training manuals of the various Gender legislations recently enacted into law in 2007, to better sensitize the public. The Centre also conducted training in Makeni and Kenema on the Gender laws following the launched of the handbooks and manuals.

The Centre held series of radio discussions programmes on the recently passed Gender Laws, centred on the Domestic Violence Act, Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce Act and Devolution of Estate Act over the Cotton Tree News (CTN) radio network, Fourah Bay College Studio. Legal aid and advice were provided to over four hundred clients. The Centre hosted a Research Fellow from the University of Sweden, a summer intern from the University Of Virginia School Of Law in Charlottesville, Virginia, U.S.A and eight interns from the University of Sierra Leone.

In advancing the fight for women's equality and the elimination of discrimination and violence and to adequately educate the populace on these laws the Centre in partnership with the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) & the 50-50 Group are implementing a twelve months "Access to justice project" with funds from the United Nations Development Programme which commenced in October 2009.

There is the concern of our donor for LAWCLA's paradigm shift from legal representation in the Law Court to a holistic approach of research capacity building and advocacy on Legislations and for the Centre to be restructured and down sized.

In line with the requirement of our donor for the restructure of the Centre to operate one Central Office in Freetown, the Regional Offices in the North and South-Eastern Sierra Leone were closed down in September. LAWCLA further went on to assist in the establishment of the Legal Assistance Centre (LAC) in Kenema and the Legal Access Centre in Makeni. The Head Office continues to maintain its three major units; the Administrative and Support Services Unit, the Litigation and Legal Advisory Unit and the Research Training and Advocacy Unit.



Mrs. Salmatta Sandi

*Administrator
Lawyers Centre for Legal Assistance*

RESTRUCTURING OF CENTRE

The Lawyers Centre for Legal Assistance has embarked on a restructuring drive to meet the current challenges facing donor driven institutions.

In order to comply with the requirement of our donor for the restructuring of the Centre, moves were taken to operate one Central Office in Freetown. Our Regional Offices in Makeni in the North and Kenema in the East of Sierra Leone were closed in September 2009. LAWCLA further went on to assist in the establishment of two new autonomous Human Rights centres. These are Legal Assistance Centre (LAC) in Kenema and the Legal Access Centre in Makeni (LAC).

These establishments were done with financial and logistical support from LAWCLA in order to make sure that human right issues continue to be supported and promoted in those regions.

During the formal opening ceremony in Makeni, the Director of the Centre, Melron Nicol-Wilson said LAWCLA was the first institution to provide legal aid in Makeni immediately after the war. He said the Centre sent two lawyers there to provide free legal services for the people of the Northern Province. Melron Nicol-Wilson also said that LAWCLA has served as a torch bearer in that direction, expressing satisfaction that other human rights groups are now undertaking similar activities in Makeni and its environs. He further maintained that the issue of human rights is complex and requires dedication and sacrifice. He went on to say that human rights issues require a consensual approach coupled with honesty, commitment and selfless sacrifice for the sake of humanity.

The Chairman of the board of trustees of the Legal Access Centre in Makeni, Abdoul Samad Kamara said human rights abuse and violation is more pervasive in the provinces where those in authority infringe on the rights of the poor and innocent people with impunity.

The Chairman of the Bombali District Human Rights Committee, Abass Kamara who chaired the ceremony said that the establishment of the Legal Access Centre is timely and will help defend human right in Makeni.



Formal opening ceremony of the Legal Access Centre in Makeni
L - R (Abdul Abass Kamara, Abdul Samad Kamara, Melron . N .Wilson)

Similarly, the closure of LAWCLA's office took place in Kenema and was replaced with the Legal Assistance Centre (LAC); an independent trust establishment with aims to provide legal assistance to the people of Kenema and its environs. In her address, the Chairlady of the ceremony, Councilor Yatta Soma said the move of LAWCLA to restructure was unfortunate because of the legal support they have been rendering to the poor people in Kenema. However, she said that hope has been restored because LAWCLA is giving support to the opening of the Legal Assistance Centre to carry out similar activities.

The resident Magistrate in Kenema, Komba Kamanda esq . said the establishment of the centre will reduce the court's workload hence most of the cases are minor and can be settled amicably.



Formal opening ceremony of the Legal Assistance Centre in Kenema.
L - R ,Magistrate Komba Kamanda -Director of LAWCLA ,Melron . N . Wilson and an interpreter

RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION

INTRODUCTION

LAWCLA is an Institution working to promote rights in Sierra Leone. The Research studies that have been undertaken by the Centre and findings have proved to offer an opportunity for mapping out strategies; take practical and concrete actions to promote equity, justice and stability and to work with Government, the Judiciary, other Developmental Agencies and Civil Society Organizations to provide the right environment for equitable justice for all, poverty eradication, and development.

It has been the continued practice of the centre over the years and in the year under review to undertake researches in numerous areas on the laws of Sierra Leone that needed reform. In that direction, the centre has published a lot of articles, research papers, handbooks on simplified laws and training manuals.

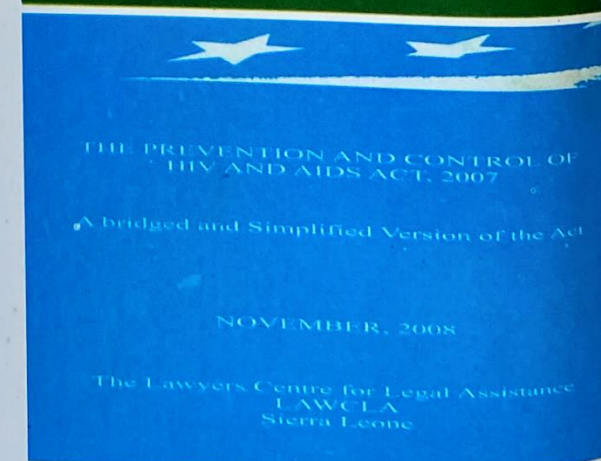
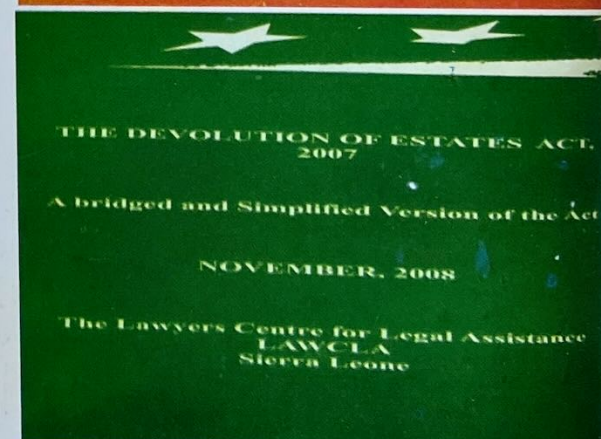
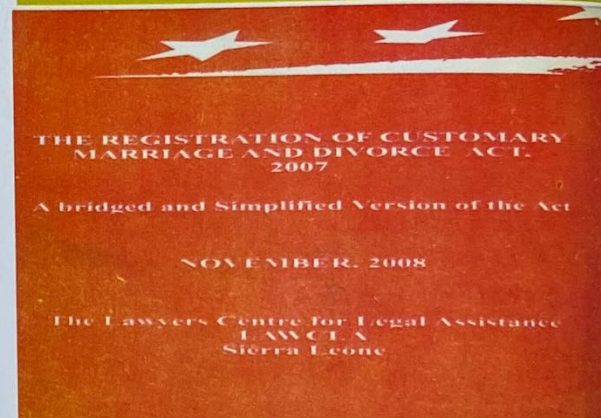
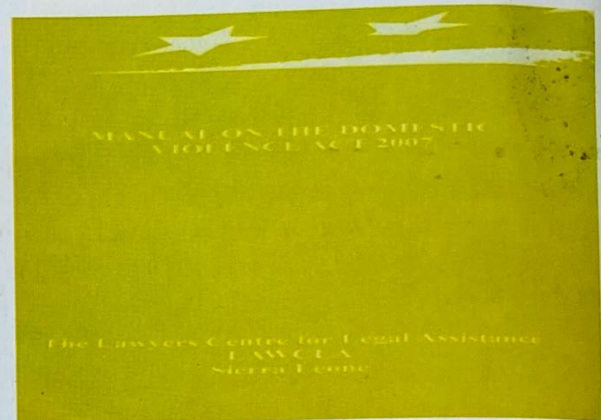
In the year under review, the centre in February this year in collaboration with the Forum Of African Women Educationalist (FAWE) and Fifty-Fifty Group formally launched five simplified hand books and training manuals on the recently passed gender laws at Santanno house, Freetown.

The purpose of the handbooks was to educate the general public about the existence of gender laws in the statute books and to galvanize support for further law reforms. The handbooks will be accessible to every Sierra Leonean.

It should be recalled that the Centre did a research on discriminatory laws against women in Sierra Leone in 2006, which culminated into the publication of a book titled: **'Unequal Rights: Discriminatory Laws against Women in Sierra Leone'**.

As a result of the above study, and the need to equitably position women in development in Sierra Leone, LAWCLA, Forum for African Women Educationalist (FAWE) and the 50-50 Group formed a consortium in consultation, and

and in collaboration with other civil society groups advocated and lobbied Parliament for the promulgation of the four gender bills into laws which were recently enacted in 2007/2009. Since this is not the end of the discriminatory laws against women in Sierra Leone's Laws, the Centre has mapped out a strategy for further researches and development of all laws in the country.



A CRITIQUE OF THE TRADITIONAL JUSTICE SYSTEM IN SIERRA LEONE

By Abdoul Samad Kamara

Traditional justice systems have existed since pre colonial days. During those days, local authorities were respected; they commanded authority and could settle disputes to maintain law and order.

However, the brutal civil conflict collapsed a dysfunctional traditional justice system. Structures failed and there was general lawlessness and anarchy. In fact, social injustice was one of the primary causes of the war.

Political patronage and imposition of section chiefs and paramount chiefs that were very unpopular led to dissent, and some of the aggrieved people joined forces with the rebels to cause unwanted destruction in many communities. Many paramount chiefs and other local authorities that were imposed on the people were either killed or maimed and the traditional justice system hit the rock.

The post-conflict Sierra Leone's traditional justice system is slowly waking from slumber, but it is suffering from a myriad of problems; seventy percent of the population lives under the jurisdiction of traditional / customary law that is practiced in the 149 chiefdoms across the country.

There is seemingly a great reliance on traditional dispute resolution methods, i.e. through paramount chiefs and section chiefs because the formal justice system is far removed from the people. The people perceive the formal justice system as expensive, time wasting, and complex. The formal justice system is hardly accessed due to its distance from the population. But the traditional justice system is facing criticism because of its excess. Local authorities are levying heavy fines on poor, innocent, and vulnerable people. Witnesses are asked to swear on very dangerous charms and accused persons are arbitrarily detained. For example, in the Northern Province, a girl was chained like a slave, for very trivial issue of failing to report to a Local Court.

Recently in Masiaka a young girl quarrelled with another girl under the traditional rite of passage to become a "sowe". She apparently removed the head tie from her head during a scuffle and hell was cut loose. When the "soweis" got wind of this, the poor young girl was severely beaten and forcefully initiated into the "bondo" society. What a cruelty. When the matter was taken to the traditional authorities, the girl's parents were fined a sum up to Le 600,000 (\$150). Additionally, they were asked to produce a sheep, a bushel of rice, five gallons of palm oil.etc

Women and girls are more vulnerable to various form of abuse in silence. These traditional leaders are becoming so powerful that they are at the mercy of their people. Whether the Ministry of Local Government monitors the activities of these traditional authorities remains a question. Another problem is the establishment of kangaroo courts in some parts of the country. The establishment of these courts is completely at variance with the Local Court Act of 1963. Such courts have no jurisdiction in civil and criminal cases and therefore their decisions do not have the force of law nor do they have statutory powers as established by parliament.

In another development, a schoolgirl unknowingly stepped into a sacred bush..She was arrested by the "sowe" and whisked off to a traditional court. The young unsuspecting girl was fined Le 500, 000 and asked to apologize to the elders in the village. The young girl maintained her innocence and narrated that she was passing through a bush path when someone accused her that she has stepped into a sacred bush.

Furthermore, a nineteen-year-old girl in the southern province was forced by her parents to marry to a 45-year-old businessman. The relationship became estranged and the lady absconded. The man took the issue to the local court and paid bribes to get his way. The local authorities asked the girl's parents to return the bride price and all the money the man has expended since he betrothed her. The girl said she is not interested in the relationship and that she was forced by the parents to marry to the businessman; who showered gifts upon the parents to win her love.

This writer hopes that the Registration of Customary Marriage Act can successfully deal with this problem of early marriage. Also, a ten-year-old boy was accused of witchcraft. The boy was detained for three days and asked to confess. The so-called chief threatened to beat the boy mercilessly because he had bewitched his court and people were no longer reporting cases in his court.

Our office wrote a warning letter asking the section chief to hand the boy over to his parents or he will be prosecuted for child cruelty. When the boy was brought to our office he denied the allegation and said he was used as a scapegoat.

The above events are pointers to the human rights abuses suffered by people in the hands of traditional authorities. The rights of the people should be upheld and protected. Although a lot of people are suffering various form of abuse in silence, we only hope the government will setup a mechanism to monitor the activities of the traditional authorities. Though the concept of human rights is slowly gaining momentum, the traditional authorities i.e. paramount chiefs, section chiefs, headmen, must be told about their limitations.

REPARATION IS THE HALLMARK TO RECONCILIATION

By Abdul D. Kposowa

Due to the eleven year rebel war that was unleashed on the people of Sierra Leone by some of our own compatriots, no man born of a woman with his or her right senses will ever dare to imagine a repeat of the destructive and terrible carnage that was inflicted on the defenceless citizens of this beloved nation. Therefore, if we as a nation are serious and very determined to say "no" to any resurgence of that sad chapter of our country, we have a task at hand to sound the early warning signals, whether there is the political will or not. But for a gentle reminder, the destructive war in Sierra Leone has not only left the country completely divested and its economy ruined, but also succeeded in inflicting pain and untold suffering on the masses.

The rebel insurgents amputated limbs, sexually molested our women folk and girls; now, most of them aimlessly parade the streets begging or are involved in one crime or another.

After a careful investigation of the plight of these women and girls who happened to be victims, the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) came up with recommendations, which if thoroughly implemented would help improve their conditions. The recommendations among others, called for reparations to be made to war victims and the setting up of a war victim's fund. The unimaginable brutality of violations committed against up to one third of Sierra Leonean women and girls has drawn this writer's attention to properly address the issue of reparation as a crucial component in bringing lasting peace and sustainable development in Sierra Leone.

The Government of Sierra Leone delegated responsibility to the National Commission for Social Action for its programs. In fact, it was only recently that the National Steering Committee of the Peace Building Fund approved around \$3 million to support the reparation program. What is not clear to many, including the war victims, is who is going to benefit from this lump sum and how soon the beneficiaries will start to claim their benefits.

Other organizations have also been wondering why the victims who suffered the brunt of the war are not treated with utmost concern. Even though in my opinion government has failed to effectively address the physical, psychological and economic impact of these crimes on the survivors, without justice, recognition of the crimes, effective programmes to ensure their rehabilitation, help to rebuild their lives or steps being taken to ensure that they are protected from future crimes, the suffering of the women and girls continues unabated.

The writer has taken the pain to interview many women and girls who were victims as to how they survive on a daily basis. For most of them, the sexual violence that they went through was not a one off event, but rather a violation that has caused them continued hardship in the absence of comprehensive measures to deal with it.

Along with the sexual violence they suffered at the hands of these rebel war bandits, some women faced stigma, isolation, and exclusion by members of their families.

Furthermore, good people that might want to come to their aid within their respective communities have been absent. As a result of this, many have had difficulty accessing food, shelter, work and healthcare. Though quite recently the intervention of a few humanitarian agencies, like Marcy Ship, the Shepard Hospice hospital at Lower Allen Town, are currently providing for these women by giving medical treatment, the majority of these victims are still languishing in suffering and pain.

The unabated discrimination they faced has become a stumbling block on their way to being reintegrated into their very society. Some of these women and girls have expressed a desire for justice and meaningful reparations; however, this is not out of revenge. They want something that can enable them to become economically independent so that they can begin to re-establish their lives free from fear, stigma, rejection, and discrimination.

However, if this is the case, then one would be tempted to ask where these concepts of reparations come from? Within the Sierra Leonean context one may be tempted to date it back to the TRC report of 2004, however, this is not the origin.

The principal of reparation dates back to the *lex talionis* of the Hebrew scripture and before the Norman Conquest, Anglo-Saxon Courts in England also contained this principal. Furthermore, under the English legal system judges must consider making a compensation order as part of the sentence for a crime. **Section 130 of The Powers of Court (Sentencing) Act 2000** requires the courts to explain their reasoning if they do not issue compensation order. This writer is not au fait with the judgment at the Special Court if the judges did make any room for the payment of compensation to the victims, especially to our women folk who suffered severely in the hands of those gun-toters.

In jurisprudence, reparation of a previously inflicted loss by the criminal to the victim in the form of monetary restitution is common. Usually, reparation is making amends for a wrong or injury done on an individual. Reparation for an injustice done to an innocent person who did not deserve to be treated the way they were treated, as was the treatment meted to the women of this nation. Up to date, no one individual has openly shown remorse for the crime they committed, nor has any single perpetrator made a public apology.

In order to address the complex social and individualistic impact of sexual abuse, the reparation must be paid for in a context that seeks to prevent future violence, address the deep seated discrimination against women, empowers them to promote equality, and improves political participation and the general status of women in our society. It has been revealed by well-placed personalities, both inside and outside the situation, that the eleven year rebel war created many more victims by reducing the dignity of mankind.

This is a human rights concern because human rights campaigners are fighting to redeem the dignity of 'man' in this global trend of improving the status of women. All victims and survivors of crimes against humanity, war crimes, and other serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian laws are entitled to justice and reparations.

However, it may not seem to be a reality for Sierra Leoneans though the Special Court has tried and convicted some of those who bear the greatest responsibility in the recently concluded rebel war. This piece is strategically directed on reparations for survivors of sexual abuse, which mainly affects women and girls from both Freetown and the more remote areas of our society.

The Lawyers Centre for Legal Assistance has carefully examined the social and individual effects of sexual violence, the failure of the government to take measures to address its impacts, and the need for the government to implement a comprehensive, effective, and efficient recommendation to the TRC as reparation is the hallmark to reconciliation.

SOCIAL REALITIES IN ACCESSING JUSTICE IN SIERRA LEONE

By Festus Robin-Taylor

This article is to highlight the concepts of succinct access to justice. It further proffers ways to address access to justice and the responsiveness of judicial and administrative processes to the needs of the litigant.

Things to be considered in understanding this discuss are for example; what are the social realities of access to justice? What are the obstacles to accessing justice?

The people themselves know best when they need justice most. There is a recurring pattern of situations in which people have needs or grievances that are translated into justifiable claims invoking substantive rights. There is still a wide gap between legal principle and the everyday reality of those who come into contact with the law and need its protection. The criminal justice system is sometimes misused to detain and prosecute social or political activists and human rights defenders. At times, people are detained on the basis of clearly flawed evidence; sometimes well beyond the legal limits allowed for pre-trial detention.

Others are denied access to adequate legal advice and representation at precisely the point when they are most at risk of torture or other ill-treatment to extract confessions. Reports of torture are routinely dismissed or ignored by magistrates and judges, reinforcing impunity for these human rights violations. All too often it is the poorest and most vulnerable who are likely to be the victims of these abuses.

The following are some of the obstacles to accessing justice in Sierra Leone:

Cost

One of the foremost barriers preventing access to Sierra Leone's justice systems, both formal and informal, is cost. The costs of accessing justice in Sierra Leone come in a variety of forms, including costs of services, fines, time, and transportation.

Sierra Leone's formal courts, where an adequate legal aid structure is yet to come into existence, makes contesting parties responsible for court fees, legal representation, and other service fees; costs are prohibitively high for all. Yet even in local courts, which are designed to be closer to the people, unnecessary costs are often too high to encourage use.

Like customary law itself, the rules for fees and fines in customary courts are unwritten and many chiefs are found to distribute arbitrary fines, often in a discriminatory manner. This is perpetuated even though the Local Courts Act, 1965 provides some guidance.

Time

Both the formal and the informal legal systems are thought to encourage long delays in the resolution of cases, especially in rural areas.

Transportation

Transportation presents a formidable obstacle to accessing the formal courts, particularly for citizens in remote areas. The limited number of functioning magistrates courts are based in district headquarters, which are distant from many communities and villages. With minimal access to adequate roads or vehicles, many inhabitants of rural communities find it physically and financially impossible to access the formal courts, especially for cases that can take several visits to provincial capitals before being resolved.

Structures

The structure of the formal and informal courts, presents a challenge. Elements of the court procedures, such as: formality, language, views of justice and the current state of the courts e.g. skills of officials, also presents a barrier to access. While the first category primarily affects access in the formal courts system, the second can be encountered across the justice system.

Formality and Language

With its basis in English law and legal procedure, the state justice system in Sierra Leone is very formal in its rules, processes, and appearances. Court proceedings are in English, which is not widely understood by people outside the urban environs; it is even not well understood by many even in Freetown, the capital.

Lack of Information

Unlike the customary courts, the formal courts maintain procedural rules that are known to court insiders such as judges and lawyers, but remain a mystery to many individuals outside the legal system. To a large extent Sierra Leoneans are not aware of what the laws – either formal or customary – are. While customary law is traditionally bound in customary practice, many chiefs pass new laws without any form of control. Citizens are less likely to know the content of formal laws and recent legislations, and court rulings are reportedly difficult for legal professionals to access.

Social Barriers and Gender Discriminations and Why access to justice matters

Access to justice matters most for women's rights, gender equality, and the rights of the child. Hundreds of women and girls – sometimes as young as three – have suffered crimes of sexual violence. The obstacles hindering justice for women are even greater. It is believed that not only is it morally right to take action by helping women to enjoy equal rights, removing the fear of sexual abuse, and safeguarding their access to justice, but that equality under the law will liberate them to make their full contribution to the development of their country and communities. Though women are afforded some degree of equality and protection in the **1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone**, and the recently passed gender related laws, these constitutional and legislative guarantees do not always translate to equal access or opportunity in the judicial or social sphere because mostly, these laws are un-tested. These social and gender barriers are those that arise from a lack of information, gender based bias, or from perceptions of the role of the justice system itself.

Juvenile Justice

Juveniles face particular social, financial, institutional and legal barriers when accessing justice. They are particularly susceptible to mistreatment and abuse by the police and other justice sector personnel. As well as interacting with the justice system in their own capacity, children and young people are also affected when parents or guardians are victims of crime or are sanctioned through the justice system.

Juveniles should be afforded the same rights as adults by the justice system. In addition, they have specific needs relative to their age and vulnerability. It must be noted that "access to justice" requires that the public have available and understandable information about the justice system, its resources, and means of access.

The justice system should promote ongoing public knowledge and understanding of the tools afforded by technology to access justice by developing and disseminating information and materials as broadly as possible in forms and by means that can reach the largest possible number and variety of people. Litigants should be treated with respect for their dignity. They are entitled to access to the mechanisms of justice and to prompt redress, as provided for by national legislation, for the harm that they have suffered. Judicial and administrative mechanisms should be established and strengthened where necessary to enable people to obtain redress through formal or informal procedures that are expeditious, fair, inexpensive and accessible. Litigants should be informed of their rights in seeking redress through such mechanisms.

TRAINING OF CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS ON GENDER LAWS

The Lawyers Centre for Legal Assistance successfully completed training of eighty civil society groups on the Gender Laws and HIV/ AIDS Act in Makeni from 24th -26th April 2009, and in Kenema from 14th -17th May 2009.

The aim of these training workshops was to help translate the technicalities of the laws into simple form. Rather than stopping at their promulgation, people will also know about their existence.

Mr. Festus Robin-Taylor, LAWCLA's Legal Officer, facilitated the training workshops. He dealt with the background of the Gender Laws and HIV/ AIDS Act 2007 and then proceeded with specific issues: the Domestic Violence Act, the Devolution of Estates Act, the Registration of Customary Marriages and Divorce Act, the

HIV/AIDS Act, a whole range of other relevant legal issues pertaining to the laws and practices in the Sierra Leone judicial system.

Speaking in Makeni, the chairman of the program Mr. Abdul D. Kposowa, Head of Research and Training, spoke of LAWCLA's passion to translate the Gender Laws into the remote areas of our society and mount up a formidable sensitization campaign of the laws. He said the promulgation of the laws is one thing but went on to stress that the effectiveness and efficient dissemination aspect is a key element that can make the people more proactive to respond and adhere to the dictates and practice of the law.

In Makeni, participants said that the training was significant which will help them to be more result oriented in the performance of their respective duties at their locations.

Similarly in Kenema, Mrs. Satta Senesie, Program Manager of Defence for Children International, who chaired the opening ceremony, spoke of the training as an initiative that the nation needs to praise LAWCLA for, stressing that it will help strengthen the capability of civil society groups that are participating in the training.

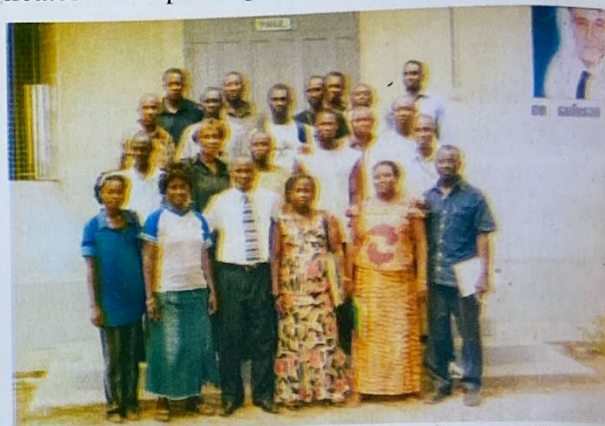
She said the training is appropriate in the area of educating service personnel and service providers on how to execute their duties more professionally and more actively bring development in the area of the Gender Laws.

In both training workshops, stakeholders gave statements as to how they will make meaningful contributions to these service providers benefiting the communities from which they were drawn from, and spoke of how they will be of help to see the implementation of these laws that are taking their right path into the statute books of our societies.

Mr. Melron Nicol-Wilson, Director of LAWCLA, expressed a passionate plea to the participants, saying that the training should be replicated to other members of their respective institutions and communities so that more people will

benefit from these training workshops. He said that the handbooks and training manuals could be used as quick reference tools when there are challenges in discharging their duties.

Finally, he made a call for human rights consciousness as he stressed that "the fight to correct society is a challenge that one needs to sacrifice self for the national good" as he put it, it "is a genuine cause". After this emotionally charged appeal, he encouraged all to keep the flame of the human rights spirit and then distributed certificates to the participants.



Facilitators and Participants during the training in Makeni



Interns and Reps. of Civic Society of Org. during the training in Kenema



Interns from Fourah Bay College. L-R Juldeh Jalloh and Alhassan Jalloh

ADVISORY AND REFFERAL SERVICES

The Lawyer's Centre for Legal Assistance (LAWCLA) has been operating an Advisory and Referral Scheme under its Litigation and Legal Advise Unit since the establishment of the Centre in March 2001 to promote and protect Human Rights through Law.

The advisory and referral services rendered by the Centre serve as a bridge between needy poor clients of the populace and the law. Many other civil society organizations; human rights stakeholders, the Ministry of Social Welfare Gender and Children Affairs, the Sierra Leone Police including Family Support Unit on the one part, and many other legal firms on the other part played huge parts in solving human rights violations, discriminations and difficult cases referred to them by LAWCLA.

Also, in the year under review, the Centre provided legal and other professional advice to it numerous clients on wide range of human right issues and guiding principles, steps to follow, their rights and wrongs and access to the justice system.

Apart from giving advice to its numerous clients, LAWCLA also, in many other instances makes interventions, legal representations, mediations and settlements for and on their behalf.

Although these advices and interventions are not binding, but they do carry strong influence on members of the public, government Ministries, departments, agencies and other related bodies are obliged to take any such advice or referrals into consideration when making decisions.

During the year under review, the Centre received a total of 436 reports. 316 of that number are on human rights violations, discriminations against women and the girl child, and sexual related cases. The remaining 120 complaints are on other legal issues including labour/employment dispute, land dispute, commercial business transaction and many more.

The 316 gender related reports were related to issues of domestic violence, devolution of estate, customary marriage and divorce, rape, child rights with heavy discrimination against the women and the girl child, rape and sexually related cases, child abuse, etc.

Cases reported to the Centre from January 2009 to December 2009 in percentage

436- TOTAL REPORTS TO THE CENTRE IN 2009

NO.	%
316- Human Rights/Gender cases-	72.5%
120- Other legal issues reported-	27.5%

DIVISION

DIVISION OF REPORTS TO THE CENTRE IN 2009

NO.	%
<u>316- Human Rights/Gender cases:</u>	
216- Domestic Related Cases-	68.4%
044- Rape and Sexual related Cases-	13.9%
055- Violation of child's Rights-	17.4%
<u>120- Other legal issues reported:</u>	
044- Property Disputes Cases-	36.7%
061- Labour/Employment Cases-	50.8%
026- Other cases-	21.7%

The Unit reviewed the needs and concerns of its numerous clients and reflects them in the broader spectrum of positioning its work plan so as to stimulate a productive package of solving problems. It also collaborate between civil society actors including relevant services of the state and employed necessary strategies for improved human rights conditions for the people of Sierra Leone.

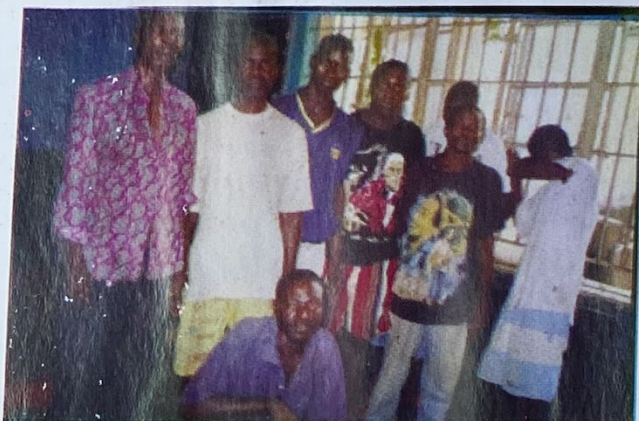
Also, the Centre focuses on more result oriented activities. The Advisory and Referral Scheme could benefit the populace from not only the expertise and experience of the Centre, but especially so, by the lawyers, and other institutions it makes referral to.

In that direction, the Centre had considered and placed into category what kind of cases to refer to particular lawyers, Ministries, Department and Agencies, Civil Society Organizations, etc.

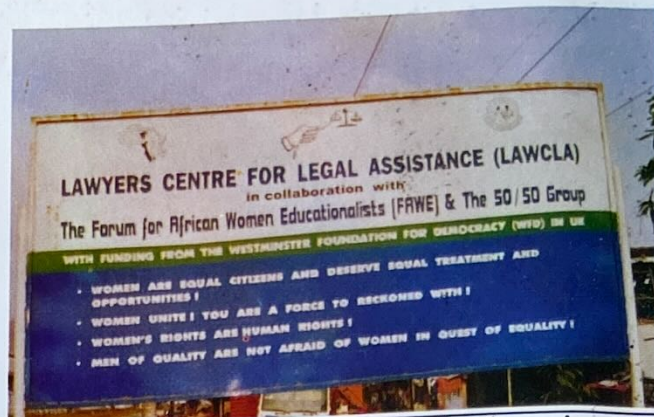
The Centre also, placed premium on cases of discrimination and violation against women and the girl child since huge number of the complaints received were in that direction.

The Advisory and Referral scheme provided by the Centre faced many challenges in the period under review and learnt numerous lessons. These experiences has positioned the Centre in a more focused direction to carry out advocacy, training, research and redesign the scheme and our strategies to meet current needs of our clients. Because of the influx of complaints into the Centre, and in support to the UNDP funded Access to Justice- Sexual gender based violence which is now rampant against women and our girl child, the Centre shall be providing free legal services to the public on all SGBV cases from January 2010 to June 2010.

In that connection, the Centre looks forward to uphold and protect human rights and justice through legal means.



Some of the Clients who visit our office regularly



Displaying bill boards in strategic places is part of advocacy



L-R Festus R Taylor, Arlene George, Ishmail Koroma and Selwya Nicol

GENDER LAWS SENSITIZATION THROUGH RADIO

On Friday 27th February 2009, The Lawyers Centre for Legal Assistance held its first radio discussion in a series on the **Five Simplified Handbooks** and **Three Training Manuals** on the recently passed Gender Laws and the Child Rights Act of 2007, at the Cotton Tree News (CTN) radio network, Fourah Bay College Studio. Mr. Ishmael Koroma of the CTN moderated the discussion and the discussants were Mr. Festus Robin-Taylor, Legal Officer, Mr. Selwyn Nicol, Legal Consultant, and Ms. Arlene George, Assistant Research Officer.

Additionally, the series on the Devolution of Estates Act 2007, Domestic Violence Act 2007, and the Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce Act 2007 were aired.

Lots of positive responses came from the public and the number of people visiting the Centre seeking legal assistance quadrupled in the months of March, April and May of 2009.

Remaining laws of the series to be discussed are the **Child's Rights Act 2007** and the **Control and Prevention of HIV/AIDS Act 2007**.

UNDP PROJECT ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS

ACCESS TO JUSTICE: SEXUAL GENDER BASED VIOLENCE ON WOMEN

It is reported that in Sierra Leone, women and girls continue to face extensive discrimination in political, economic, social, cultural and civic domains. For example, according to United Nations Development Programme Report of 2009, only 14% of Parliamentarians are women, over 65% of women have no-education, there is a rise in the reported cases of Gender based violence, 94% of women aged 15 – 49 have undergone Female Genital Cutting and 62% are married before age 18. It is further maintained that because of these reasons, the UN family through its various programmes will promote the rights of women through the accelerated implementation of the CEDAW, resolution 1325 and 1820 as well as Sierra Leone's National Gender strategic Plan.

In October this year, the Lawyers Centre For Legal Assistance (LAWCLA) in collaboration with 50-50 Group and forum For African Educationalist (FAWE) commenced implementation of a project on Access to Justice and Eradicating Violence against Women in Sierra Leone funded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). This project is centred on Sexual Gender based Violence (SGBV).

This project is based on reforming Sierra Leone's legal system by creating awareness among members of the society that sexual and domestic violence, traditional harmful practices and other abuses against women and girls are illegal and perpetrators should be prosecuted and punished.

The project also aims at influencing government's decision that women's right is an integral part to the development of an effective and sound legal system accessible to victims of domestic and sexual violence. Also, it aims to enhance access to justice.

The said project spans for twelve months with the following specific strategic objectives to be achieved:

1. To Strengthening institutional accountability and access to justice.
2. Advocacy and awareness to change public attitudes.
3. Strengthened social support services
3. Community mobilization and support.
4. Capacity building initiatives to strengthen community structures in providing information to women on their rights under existing laws.

These include their rights under existing laws, domestic and sexual abuse; how to obtain free legal advice and representation and access to justice and protect women's rights

5. Education and sensitization on the elimination of discriminatory provisions in national laws governing marriage and family relations, violence against women, property and ownership rights, women's political and labour rights.

6. Develop and strengthen partnerships of NGO's with similar objectives.

Violence against women is the most common human right violation and it cuts across ethnicity and economic status. In Sierra Leone sexual harassment and other forms of violence against women are major contributing factors in women's continued lower socio-economic status. Gender poverty and political disadvantage are entrenched in policies, practices and beliefs relating to the position of women in political and public life.

Women are more likely victims of domestic violence than men ranging from homelessness to unemployed and their physical, mental and health conditions are usually threatened because of their inability and capacity to access justice which is quite expensive in Sierra Leone.

Domestic violence is widely accepted by both men and women as a way of exercising control and resolving disputes in the home in Sierra Leone, and thus; not recognized as a societal problem. Women are often reluctant to report sexual and domestic violence cases involving their spouse because they provide them with some degree of financial security.

Lawyers Centre for Legal Assistance has vast experience in advocating for women's rights. The Centre has carried out extensive research leading to the publication of Discriminatory Laws against Women.

In February this year, LAWCLA formally launched the publication of handbooks on Devolution of Estate Act, Domestic Violence Act, Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce Act and the Control and Prevention of HIV/AIDS Act which are commonly referred to as gender laws. The centre also conducted training in Kenema and Makeni on the simplified laws for the civil society organizations to be knowledgeable and fully comprehend the technicalities of the laws.

Currently the UNDP SGBV project is being implemented by LAWCLA together with Forum for African Women Educationalists, (FAWE) and 50-50 Group. The first phase of implementing the aforesaid project comprising

(a) Radio discussions on the following twelve themes for radio discussions on the Access to Justice SGBV programme of the UNDP spanning from second week in October 2009 to the end of January 2010:

1. INTRODUCTION: The importance of developing and strengthening partnership among CSO/NGO with minded interests. This would be done in line with the ACCESS TO JUSTICE SGBV FUNDED programme of UNDP and mode of implementation in stages. Definitions, concepts and other related matters.
2. The impact of SGBV on women/ the girl child and the importance of existing Gender Laws, loop holes and recommendations on the way forward.

3. SGBV in the homes, schools, colleges and other possible places where it may be committed and things to be done to prevent same.
4. Social and political exclusion of women in Sierra Leone and poverty reduction. (Must be noted that women and youth especially the girl child are mostly the major excluded group in Sierra Leone.) They should be empowered for sustainable development.
5. Access to Justice in line with SGBV: what they entails, causes, how they can be processed and expected results. (Particularly the victim).
6. The dangers of SGBV against women/ girl child. (Considering issues like harmful traditional practices and all other forms of abuses).
7. Legal processes under the law to process and prosecution of SGBV cases in the Justice system. (take a diagnostic approach IRO the existing Gender Laws, from when an offence may be committed, to reporting stage at the Police (the processes), when the matter is charged to court what should be known and procedures/processes up to end of trial, and result.
8. Public perception(s) to SGBV against women, the girl child and sex workers.
9. SGBV and the role of Traditional Leaders and neighbourhood/community watch/associations.
10. SGBV and the role of Religious Leaders and faith based groups.
11. Institutional accountability (This focuses on existing institutions as provided for in the gender laws, data, and what still need to be accomplished including recommendations).

12. END: Recap on all the key issues in our previous SGBV discussions, concluding messages on sensitive areas and recommendations.

(b) Erection of Bill Boards in three major cities carrying the under mentioned message:

“STOP SEXUAL AND GENDER VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: Women are valuable Asset for a Nations’ Sustainable Development, Peace and security.”

(With a picture of a man either trying to hit or rape a woman – to tell meaning depicting what is written)

(c) Four television discussion programmes on the four topics amongst those of the radio discussions:

Already, the radio discussions have yielded a positive and challenging outcome. The consortium comprising LAWCLA, FAWE and the 50-50 Group have been able to reshape the discussions to meet more difficult social and religious diversities contrary to moving SGBV.

Further, it has helped to strengthen institutional accountability and access to justice for the greater good and has expanded advocacy and awareness to change public attitude on sexual gender based violence. Many listeners out there are commending LAWCLA for taking the initiative and visitation of clients to the office has increased tremendously.

LAWCLA'S work is geared towards reforming Sierra Leone's Legal System by creating awareness among members of the society that sexual gender based violence, harmful traditional practices and other abuses against women and girls are criminal; and that violators of human rights will be prosecuted and punished.

LAWCLA is seeking to raise awareness amongst members of the Judiciary that human rights are integral to the development of an effective and sound legal system accessible to all in society, facilitate meaningful access to justice and ensure that a vibrant and friendly Legal System be enhanced.

It must be noted here that LAWCLA intends to reproduce copies of the abridged versions of the three gender laws it launched earlier this year in order to carry out capacity building/training and dissemination exercise, education/awareness campaign for the general public through training workshops, consultative meetings, radio/TV discussions, jingles, flyers, stickers and school wall art/painting competition that would depict messages of women and child's rights on school fences and other strategic locations. This will be geared to strengthening the capacity of women, children and legal personnel design in a way to eliminate all forms of discriminations, and with the aim of educating the Sierra Leone populace on sexual gender based violence and women's rights.

In concluding, LAWCLA reiterate its stands as provided in its mission to protect and promote human rights through Law. LAWCLA's activism and responsibility is to expose and denounce all practices and policies that silence and subordinate women.

LAWCLA frowns at all legal, cultural and religious practices that systematically discriminated against women, excluded from political participation and public life, segregation in their daily activities, raped in armed conflict, beaten in their homes, denied equal divorce or inheritance rights, forced marriage, etc. The realization of women's rights is a global struggle based on universal human rights and the rule of law.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

In its quest for greater gender representation within its administrative set up, the Lawyers Centre for Legal Assistance (LAWCLA) has recruited Ms. Arlene George as its Assistant Research Officer.

Ms. George holds a Bachelor's Degree in Arts from Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone and is a vibrant women's rights activist. She is attached to the Research, Training and Advocacy Unit and has been working on research and training programs implemented by the Centre, especially on the Gender Laws and Child Rights Act.

Ms. George has maintained that she saw it as a challenge to work with LAWCLA, one of the prominent human rights organizations in the country, and that she would do all in her power to champion gender and child's rights, which are not only a current concern in Sierra Leone, but the world over.

Ms. George assisted in the facilitation of training on the Gender Laws in Makeni and Kenema where she told participants about the importance of promoting and protecting the rights of women and children.

To reiterate LAWCLA's determination and commitment in the campaign on the rights of the woman and the child, it has recruited Ms. George among other things to maintain a balance in its administration, gender and child rights training, and advocacy projects.



Ms Arlene George

The Lawyer's Centre for Legal Assistance has also recruited Mr. Saidu M. Conteh as its Project Assistant for the Westminster Foundation for Democracy Project which is centred around the Training of fifty Members of Parliament in the East, South and Northern regions across three political parties on the concept and application of representation, project proposal writing and development of inclusive constituency development planning programmes. This project has commenced in November 2009.

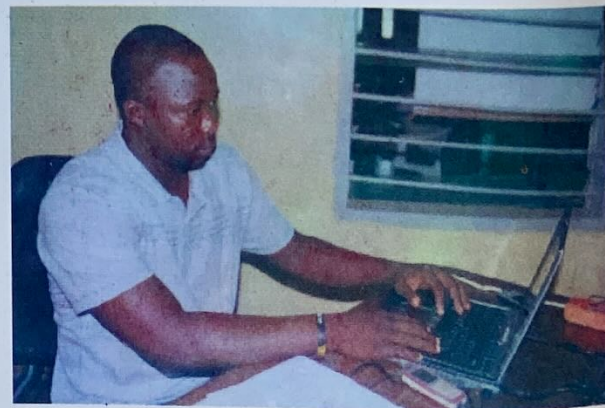
Mr Conteh holds a Bachelor's Degree in Arts in Linguistics and Sociology from Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone. He has wealth of experience as Survey's officer in the Ministry of Finance on the PET survey and also from the Sierra Leone Statistics on census survey.

His responsibilities includes; providing assistance to co-ordinate the project activities.

This project further seeks to enhance parliamentarians to be more effective in their roles and responsibilities. The role of parliamentarians is primarily to represent their constituents, law-making and to check on (oversight) the executive arm of government with the key aim to champion the interests of their constituents and seek to intervene in cases where those interests are being curtailed or restricted.

Mr Conteh is also tasked with providing assistance for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on Access to Justice: Sexual Gender based Violence (SGBV). He will also be providing support to both the Litigation and Advisory Unit and Administration.

Mr. Conteh has a passion for human rights protection and development. He has vouched to do all within his intellect and power to give his best in not only the implementation of the Westminster foundation for Democracy project, assistance to the UNDP Access to Justice project but also to the development of LAWCLA's objectives.



Mr. Saidu Conteh

INTERNS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF SIERRA LEONE

Prior to this year's internship, the Lawyers Centre for Legal Assistance (LAWCLA) received many applications from various university under/post-graduate students both from within and outside the country. The Centre was able to host eight interns from the University of Sierra Leone. These interns include: Mariama Seray-Lee, Pamfordina Beckley; Neneh Abie Bah, Emmanuel Olu-Williams; Rachael Kargbo, Gberrah Roy-Kargbo; Diana Scott and Emmanuel King from the Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone.

Their internships with LAWCLA occur within a span of three months which commenced on the 1st April, 2009 and ended in the last week in June, 2009. During the course of their internships, the interns went through an in-house training programme on the Gender Laws, Juvenile Justice, the Child Rights Act and on the procedures and processes of LAWCLA's operations, and the justice system.

The interns worked in various departments located in Freetown and the provinces on attachments, including: the Sierra Leone Police with regards the rights of detained persons, monitored Court proceedings, the Family Support Unit (FSU), the Prisons department, the Kingtom Remand Home in Freetown, where they trained the inmates on the Child Rights Act 2007, and other human rights laws.



L-R Emmanuel Olu-Williams, Rachael, Pamfordina, Neneh, Serray, Gberrah, and Emmanuel King

INTERN FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA, SCHOOL OF LAW, USA

Estelle Hebron-Jones was a summer intern at the Lawyers Centre for Legal Assistance (LAWCLA) from the University Of Virginia School Of Law in Charlottesville, Virginia, U.S.A. where she is reading for a Juris Doctor in law. This past May, she completed her first year. Prior to this internship, she had taken part in a variety of legal and non-legal projects and has been a member of various organizations.

She is most active in her school's chapter of the Black Law Students Association (BLSA) where she is currently the Alumni Relations Chairperson. Through BLSA, she participated in a campaign to make parents aware of their children's education rights. This entailed the creation of pamphlets that summarized Virginia state law and contained contact details for parents needing assistance on these matters. She was also involved in a pro bono Alternative Dispute Resolution Clinic. With the assistance of the local mediation centre, she has been trained to co-mediate family law disputes. The training consisted of over 20 hours of class time, role-playing, and observation. Though she is still observing, she is anticipating the conclusion of this so that she can actively assist mediations.

Prior to the law school, she developed an interest in public interest work and did volunteer projects whilst she obtained her Bachelor of Arts degree from University College London. The most notable project she did was with an organization called Reminiscence at Home. Through this, she conducted hours of interviews with an elderly Londoner and created a short biography of her life which was put in the Kensington and Chelsea archives. This was a highly rewarding experience for both the participant and Estelle and through this; she developed a great interest in social work.

Estelle chose to do her internship at LAWCLA because her parents are Sierra Leoneans. She has lived in the US and UK for most of her life and desires to do something which can positively impact Sierra Leonean society.

Additionally, she wants to become more familiar with current human rights issues and develop a basic understanding of Sierra Leonean law. With this knowledge, she is hoping to narrow her interests and have a better idea of how to utilize her law degree at its completion.

RESEARCH FELLOW FROM SWEDEN

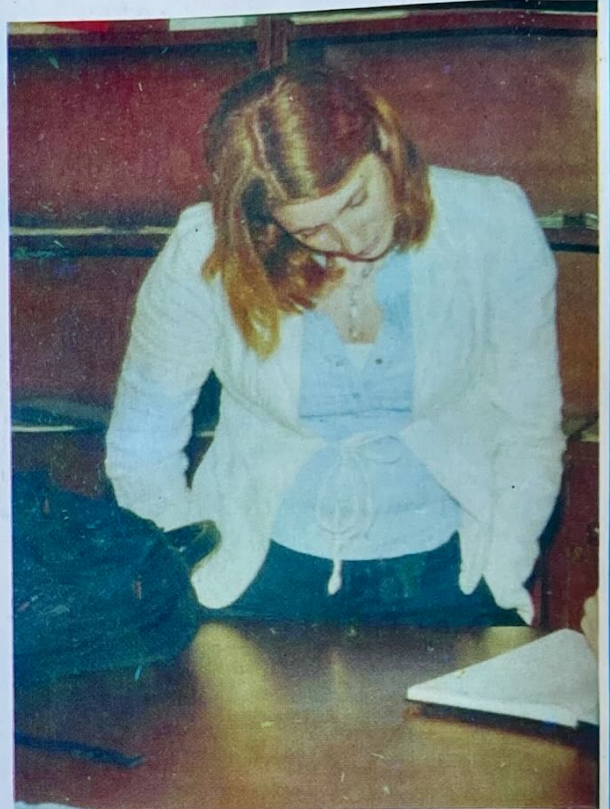
Karin Lindgren is pursuing a Master's Degree in Peace-Building and Conflict Management at the Umeå University, Sweden and is conducting a study on the rebuilding of the justice sector in Sierra Leone, and specifically on what actions have been taken to manage the problems of sexual violence after the conflict.

The thesis is built on the theory of state-building, arguing for the importance of strengthening government institutions, contrary to the theory of liberal marketing as a solution for development. When it comes to post-conflict countries with a culture of impunity, the justice sector becomes one of the most important building blocks in order for development to prosper.

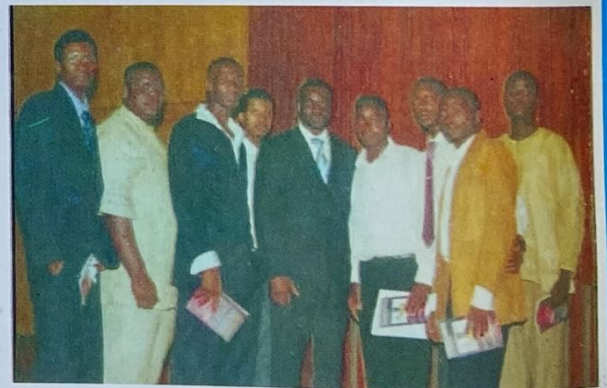
However, solely putting the structures in place would not be sufficient. In order for it to function well, the institutions need the legitimization of the population.

In other words, the justice system has to be constructed in a way that makes people willing to use and finding it fulfilling their needs. If this is not the case, alternative structures to deal with crimes and disputes will follow and chances to develop and stabilize the peace will decrease.

Since women are most vulnerable and exposed group in society, their perception of the justice system is therefore the specific focus in the study. This is done by studying how they are able to use the system if being the victim of sexual violence and what is still lacking in order for the justice sector to be perceived as a well functioning institution.



Karin Lindgren



*Director of LAWCLA Melron . N. Wilson
sandwiched by interns from Fourah
Bay College*

WESTMINSTER FOUNDATION FOR DEMOCRACY PROJECT

This project is centred around the Training of fifty Members of Parliament in the East, South and Northern regions across three political parties: **All People Congress (APC)-21, Sierra Leone People Party (SLPP)-22 & Peoples Movement for Democratic Change (PMDC)-7** on the concept and application of representation, project proposal writing and development of inclusive constituency development planning programmes.

It further seeks to enhance parliamentarians to be more effective in their roles and responsibilities. The role of parliamentarians is primarily to represent their constituents, lawmaking and to check on (oversight) the executive arm of government.

In representing their people, members of parliament are expected to champion the interests of their constituents and seek to intervene in cases where those interests are being curtailed or restricted.

The following areas could serve as issues of concern for members of parliament to effectively represent the interests of their constituents. These criteria are:

Accountability: - does the Parliamentarian give feedback and explain decisions and actions to their constituents?

Autonomy: - does the Parliamentarian able to make independent decisions without fear of rebuke or punishment from the Executive, his/her party or powerful individuals?

Authority: - Are Parliamentarians legally empowered to do their work effectively and efficiently?

Attributes: - How does the Parliamentarian's individual character, for example; background as a democracy proponent, strategist, education etc, influence a representative's actions and decisions. It is believed that there should be an ongoing dialogue between parliamentarians and the members of their constituencies on all aspects of developments and all other issues within or affecting the constituency.

In a drive to prepare the Parliamentarians in that direction, the Lawyers Centre for Legal Assistance (LAWCLA) in partnership with Conflict Management and Development Associate (CMDA), the 50-50 group and the Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Reform (CHRDR) have started developing training manuals for Parliamentarians and also would be organising joint sessions/meetings between MPs and their constituents spanning from November 2009, to April 2010, in the East, South and Northern regions.

Also, LAWCLA with its partners CMDA, 50-50 group and CHRDR would subsequently implement the following activities: Creation of Constituency Development Action Plan and implementation, and overseeing of further joint sessions/meetings between Parliamentarians and their constituents from May 2010, to April 2011.

The expected outcomes in implementing this project are to improve understanding of the barriers and challenges that obstruct communities interface with Parliamentarians. This would be identified and circumvented and a well structured and coordinated informed democratic principles and guidelines be established and channelled to provide greater clarity on the roles and responsibilities of Parliamentarians, local councillors; traditional authorities and members of the constituency.

LAWCLA wishes to extend its thanks and appreciation to the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), UK for their financial support in strengthening democratic values of fifty Parliamentarians in Sierra Leone.



Members of Parliament during the training in Bo- Southern Province

RECOGNITION BY THE MEDIA

During the year under review, the electronics media played a significant role by airing the activities of LAWCLA. The discussion programs on sexual and domestic violence were a multi-media mix targeting the grass root people or multiple audiences to create the desired impact on the lives of many people especially women and girls. The main purpose of the program is to raise the level of awareness and educate the masses about the legal dynamics of human rights including sexual and gender based violence.

The program which brought together a consortium of LAWCLA, 50-50 Group and FAWE commenced at Premier Talk Radio 104.1. Three weeks later, it was broadcasted and televised at the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service.

The discussion program continued at Cotton Tree News (C.T.N) for three weeks linking up U.N Radio, Radio Mount Aureol and other community radio stations in the provinces. The discussion programs continued at Star Radio for three weeks so that the message will filter down to the people.

To a large extent, the print media also covered the centre's activities extensively. The formal launching ceremony of five handbooks and three training manuals at Santanno House was covered by 14 newspapers. The programme was also televised by the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service.

Awareness Times on Thursday February 12th 2009 carried a story with the headline "LAWCLA launches five handbooks and three training manuals."

Standard Times also published an article on February 12th 2009 titled; "LAWCLA on forefront to make law accessible" The article gave a comprehensive and systematic coverage of the event that took place during

the formal launching ceremony of the handbooks and training manuals.

During the year under review, certain newspapers also published articles with regards the training of civil society in the provinces. The centre embarked on the training to simplify the technicalities of the laws so that the people will comprehend the issues.

We Yone newspaper on Monday 11th May 2009 published an article titled, "LAWCLA trains forty in Makeni." The article summarizes the training programme organized by the centre in Makeni which benefited forty participants.

Weekend Spark also published a front page story in relation to the same programme titled, "LAWCLA holds workshop on gender laws, HIV/AIDS in Makeni."

During the year under review, Standard Times on Thursday 25th June 2009, chronicled the academic and professional achievement of the Director, Melron Nicol-Wilson. The article which was titled "Melron Nicol-Wilson and the struggle for human rights in Sierra Leone" analyzed the Director's unwavering commitment and sacrifice towards the promotion of Human Rights. The publication also mentioned the awards that have been bestowed on the Director of the Centre.

The print media also reproduced articles from the Centre's periodical magazine LAWCLA NEWS. Several articles were culled on different newspapers. Standard Times on Thursday February 12th culled, "Critique of the recently passed gender laws." Another article reproduced was "The Present Situation of Juvenile Justice in Sierra Leone." Peep Magazine in its February 13th 2009 edition published an article titled, "LAWCLA marks eight years of service." The article mentioned about the Centres' strives to make law accessible to all through legal education, advocacy and research.

ISSUES

Melron Nicol-Wilson and the struggle for Human Rights in Sierra Leone

Melron Nicol-Wilson long workdays begin at 8 a.m. As many as 20 people are often waiting outside the small office of the Lawyers Centre for Legal Assistance (LAWCLA) in Sierra Leone's Capital, Freetown. They are refugees and war-displaced Sierra Leoneans, young victims of child abuse and the elder, disabled and the unemployed. Word of mouth brought them to Sierra Leone's first Legal Aid Centre dedicated to protecting the rights of the poor. LAWCLA finds many more clients in the holding cells in Freetown, overcrowded Central Prisons across the Country.

Demands for legal representation among the poor and largely illiterate population is enormous. But needs are virtually everywhere in a country emerging from a brutal 10-year civil war and decades of misrule. Donor nations, international organizations, and the country's Civil Society Groups have focused legal efforts and funding on the Special Court for Sierra Leone and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which is the key to providing accountability for past abuses and respect for the rule of law during Sierra Leone's transition from war to peace. LAWCLA is deeply concerned with transitional justice, but remains best known as one of the few places where the poor can turn for tangible legal help. "One cannot talk about human rights without the legal means to protect them," said Nicol-Wilson. Born and bred in Freetown, Melron Nicol-Wilson committed himself to human rights issues as a University Undergraduate. Those were the days when the human rights concept was a complete novelty as we were gradually moving towards the multi part democratic dispensation. As a student, he wrote his final thesis for the conferment of the Bachelor of Law with Honours Degree in Law on how detainees were largely denied their Constitutional Rights. At a time when the democratically elected government was in exile, Nicol-Wilson was one of the few Sierra Leonean intellectuals who placated the human rights abuses of these military officers to captivate the urgent attention of the International Community. His Qualifications include a Masters Degree in International Human Rights Law, a Masters Degree in International Criminal Justice from the University of Nottingham in the United Kingdom and several postgraduate qualifications from the University of Lund in Sweden and the International Institute of Human Rights in Strasbourg, France. In 2001, he resigned his job as a

Lawyer for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) a sacrifice very few Sierra Leoneans could make, to establish the non-profit making Lawyers Centre for Legal Assistance (LAWCLA) together with three other colleagues. This office, which has now been established countrywide, with Regional Offices in Bo, Kenema and Makeni, started with an office in a single room let to them by a Firm in Freetown's downtown. At this make shift office, were four units which broadly set out LAWCLA's priorities for research and advocacy, Litigation, Transitional Justice, Juvenile Justice, Advocacy, Gender Research and Advocacy as the Centre's hasten to promote and protect human rights through Law with virtually no financial support.

As a fastidious person when it comes to academia, in 2001, shortly after the establishment of the Centre, he was also invited for a one (1) Semester Teaching Fellowship at the Human Rights Institute, Columbia Law School in New York. With his experience from the war in Sierra Leone, his students benefited immensely from his myriad of knowledge in the law. After his teaching fellowship, he returned home to continue with the struggle in promoting human rights. From his personal fund, Nicol-Wilson and his colleagues won their first case, which was a matter involving a Security Guard of the Sierra Leone Port Authority who was fired when he refused to take part in a theft orchestrated by his superiors. With his intervention, this poor man who was only able to seek redress with the coming of a pro bono institution received Six Thousand Dollars as compensation. This victory in April 2002 attracted the attention of the print and electronic media who extolled the virtues of Nicol-Wilson and his team for addressing the rights of the poor.

Notwithstanding these successes, some members of the public were critical of his initiative in representing clients free of legal cost, viewing such a venture as a recipe for encouraging crime. These words were not enough to discourage this martyr and his team, who in 2002 and 2003 established Regional Offices in

Kenema (Eastern Sierra Leone), Bo (Southern Sierra Leone) and Makeni (Northern Sierra Leone) to complement the work of the Centre's Head Office in Freetown. In 2003 with interns from the Law Department at Fourah Bay College (who are now Magistrates and Private Legal Practitioners) Melron Nicol-Wilson and his team carried out a survey on the status of detainees and Prisoners throughout Sierra Leone. He went to every Prison and Police Station in Sierra Leone interviewing Detainees and Prisoners and provided them with an on-the-spot legal advice and latter Legal Representation for those who cannot afford to pay the services of Lawyers.

In December 2003, the All Works of Life (AWOL) bequeathed him with the coveted and prestigious award of "Lawyer of the Year" in recognition of his work and on behalf of poor Sierra Leoneans which included provision of free legal services throughout Sierra Leone and lecturing of Human Rights and International Law free of cost at the University of Sierra Leone.

In 2004 LAWCLA in collaboration with Global Rights trained paralegals in Kailahun, Kambia and Kono and produced a handbook for paralegals in Sierra Leone, and in that same year, as Director of the Centre he was given two awards for his services to children by the Children's Forum Network and took up the case of an indigent Indictée of the Special Court of Sierra Leone, which signaled the start of his career in the International practice of Law. This case was to have a significant impact on the Director as he became interested on issues of International Criminal Justice in addition to human rights.

In 2005 a property at 28 Old Railway Line, Tengbeh Town valued about \$200,000 was donated to LAWCLA by the Menah Pratt Family in recognition and in appreciation of the work of the Centre, and in 2006 to celebrate its Five Years of existence, LAWCLA produced an Abridged and Simplified version of a Handbook on Discriminatory Laws against Women thereby advocating for reform of laws that discriminate against Women in Sierra Leone: Time for Change thereby



Melron Nicol-Wilson

stating its position and arguments for the abolition of the Death Penalty in Sierra Leone. The centre also produced a documentary entitled the Struggle for Human Rights in which it produced graphic materials of its work in promoting and protecting human rights through Law in Sierra Leone for over a period of five years. In 2006 also, Melron was invited on a speaking tour of the United States of America and did presentations on Human Rights and the Rule of Law at the University of Tennessee, University of Vanderbilt and the Fisk Centre in Tennessee.

On the 25th May 2007, The Africa Day he was presented with the Prestigious Award of African Human Rights Lawyer for 2007 by the University of Pretoria in South Africa. This was an Award given to one Lawyer in the African Continent every year for Human Rights work.

The impressive Ceremony in Pretoria was attended by hundreds of people from across the African continent. In January 2008 he co-authored a Handbook entitled "The Criminalization of Freedom of Expression in Sierra Leone: Time for Change" in which he advocated for the reform of part five of the Public Order Act of 1965 which makes Libel and Seditious a Criminal Offence. He maintained that Journalists should not

be sent to Jail for injuring the reputation of individuals but should rather pay monetary compensation.

In November 2008, he produced a Simplified and Abridged versions of the HIV/AIDS Act of 2007, The Domestic Violence Act of 2007, The Devolution of Estate Act of 2007, The Child Rights Act of 2007 and the Registration of Customary and Divorce Act of 2007.

He is presently conducting Training Programs on these Laws using the simplified Handbooks in Bo, Kenema, Makeni and Freetown. Further, in November 2008 he established a Private International Legal Practice and Legal Consultancy Firm called Maljeka Chambers in Freetown with associate offices in London and the United States and took his first Pupil Barrister in Chambers in April 2009.

In May 2008, Melron Nicol-Wilson conducted a study tour on National Legal Aid Schemes in Ghana, Malawi, Namibia and South Africa during which he studied the operation, legislations, and successes and failures of the schemes in those Countries in a bid to assist with work in Sierra Leone for the establishment of a National Legal Aid Scheme.

He continues to lecture International Humanitarian Law and International Law at Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone free of cost, a national assignment he had commenced in September 2003. He said his free lectureship at his Alma-mata is part of his contribution to the promotion of Human Rights in Sierra Leone. Mr. Nicol-Wilson's contribution to the promotion of human rights in Sierra Leone is enormous and his example is worthy of emulation by Sierra Leoneans at home and abroad.

Mr. Nicol-Wilson's contribution to the promotion of human rights in Sierra Leone is enormous and his example is worthy of emulation by Sierra Leoneans at home and abroad...

Who Authorized the Demolition of Councillor Margaret Kargbo's House?

By Sarah Kabbu

It is not surprising that the demolition of Councillor Margaret Kargbo's house in Kargbo Village, Kono District, has become a topic of discussion. The house, which was built by Kargbo, was demolished by the Kono District Council (KDC) on Monday, 11th May 2009.

The KDC, which is the local government authority for Kono District, has a long history of demolishing houses that are in poor condition or that are in the way of public works. In this case, the house was demolished because it was in the way of a new road that was being built by the Kono District Council.

The KDC has a policy of demolishing houses that are in the way of public works. This policy is based on the fact that houses that are in the way of public works are a danger to the public and they are also a nuisance to the community. The KDC has a duty to ensure that the public is safe and that the community is not a nuisance.

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Congratulations
Mr. and Mrs. Solomon Mawu
Best Wishes on your Wedding Day
which took place on Saturday, 2nd May, 2009
From the Editor and Staff of
We Yone Press.

Critique of the recently passed gender legislation

Phoin tok

The new gender legislation passed by the Sierra Leone Parliament on 11th May 2009 has been widely praised. However, there are some concerns about the legislation, particularly regarding the rights of women and the role of the state.

The legislation is a landmark achievement for women in Sierra Leone. It provides for equal rights for men and women in all areas of life, including employment, education, and the family. It also provides for the protection of women's rights in the workplace and in the family.

However, there are some concerns about the legislation. One concern is that the legislation does not provide for the protection of women's rights in the workplace. Another concern is that the legislation does not provide for the protection of women's rights in the family.

The legislation is a landmark achievement for women in Sierra Leone. It provides for equal rights for men and women in all areas of life, including employment, education, and the family. It also provides for the protection of women's rights in the workplace and in the family.

LAWCLA holds workshop on Gender Laws, HIV/AIDS in Makeni

By Sarah Kabbu

The Law Centre for Legal Assistance (LAWCLA) has held a workshop on Gender Laws, HIV/AIDS in Makeni. The workshop was held on Monday, 11th May 2009, and was attended by a number of people, including lawyers, judges, and community leaders.

The workshop was a success. It provided an opportunity for people to learn about the law and to discuss the issues of gender, HIV/AIDS, and the role of the state. The workshop was also a chance for people to share their experiences and to learn from each other.

CORDAID poised to promote quality health service

By Sarah Kabbu

The Cordaid project, which is a partnership between the Government of Sierra Leone and the Dutch government, is poised to promote quality health service. The project is a five-year project that will focus on improving the quality of health services in Sierra Leone.

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Parliament sensitized on NASHI

By Sarah Kabbu

The National Assembly for Sierra Leone (NASHI) has been sensitized on the issues of gender, HIV/AIDS, and the role of the state. The sensitization was held on Monday, 11th May 2009, and was attended by a number of people, including members of the NASHI, lawyers, judges, and community leaders.

The sensitization was a success. It provided an opportunity for people to learn about the law and to discuss the issues of gender, HIV/AIDS, and the role of the state. The sensitization was also a chance for people to share their experiences and to learn from each other.

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PEOPLE AND EVENTS

LAWCLA MARKS 8 YEARS OF SERVICE TO THE PUBLIC

The Law Centre for Legal Assistance (LAWCLA) has marked its 8th anniversary. The centre was founded in 2001 and has since then been providing legal assistance to the public in Sierra Leone. The centre has a long history of providing legal assistance to the public and has been a success in many ways.

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SALHOC BOARD INSPECTS OAU VILLAGE AND FACILITIES

The Salihon Housing Corporation (SALHOC) Board has inspected the OAU Village and its facilities. The inspection was held on Monday, 11th May 2009, and was attended by a number of people, including members of the SALHOC Board, lawyers, judges, and community leaders.

The inspection was a success. It provided an opportunity for people to learn about the law and to discuss the issues of gender, HIV/AIDS, and the role of the state. The inspection was also a chance for people to share their experiences and to learn from each other.

Man drowns on a rescue mission

By Sarah Kabbu

A man has drowned while on a rescue mission. The man was a member of the Sierra Leone Armed Forces and was on a mission to rescue a group of people who were in danger. The man was killed while on the mission and his body was recovered from the water.

The man was a member of the Sierra Leone Armed Forces and was on a mission to rescue a group of people who were in danger. The man was killed while on the mission and his body was recovered from the water.

Prisoners Escaped

By Sarah Kabbu

A group of prisoners has escaped from a prison in Sierra Leone. The prisoners were from the Sierra Leone Armed Forces and were on a mission to rescue a group of people who were in danger. The prisoners escaped from the prison and are now on the run.

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LAWCL
23

CONCLUSION

The Centre was able to achieve completion of most of its programmes during the year 2009, in spite of limited Funding. In March, the Centre launched gender simplified laws and training manuals. The launching was followed by training on the Domestic Violence Act 2007, Devolution of Estate Act 2007, Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce Act 2007 and the Control and Prevention of HIV/AIDS Act 2007 in Makeni and Kenema in April and May 2009, respectively. The Centre has now commenced implementation of a United Nations Development Programme Access to Justice: Sexual and Gender Based Violence pilot project in October 2009. This project would span over twelve months. The Centre is also implementing three (3) years Westminster Foundation for Democracy project targeting fifty (50) parliamentarians across the country which commenced in November 2009. The Centre is midway in an increased funding of a new three year grant from the Doen Foundation, in the Netherlands.

The Centre had undergone major restructuring to meet the new challenges and development within our Legal System, and in order to consolidate its achievement over the last seven years; the Centre now conducts its operations from a strong focal point in Freetown after closing down its offices both in Makeni and Kenema.

It is projected that this restructuring will lead to more accessibility of our services by the poor on a pro bono basis with high impact.

This we can only achieve with your support.

SUPPORT LAWCLA

The Lawyers Centre for Legal Assistance – Sierra Leone is presently one hundred percent dependent on donors, for its operational and staffing costs. We believe that this dependence threatens the existence of the Centre, in the absence of continuing and new funding from donors. In order to complement funds received from donors, and to ensure the Centre's financial sustainability, the Centre undertakes the under mentioned tasks for modest costs:

1. Solicitors work including setting up of Companies and other Business Entities, Conveyance , Lease/ Tenancy and other forms of Agreement
2. Human Rights Trainings.
3. Human Rights and Legal Research
4. Consultancy and Retainership
5. Commercial adverts in our Newsletters and Reports

Our ability to continue and expand the work of the Centre depends on your support.

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The Lawyers Centre for Legal Assistance (LAWCLA) is grateful to the DOEN Foundation in the Netherlands for funding the Publication of their Report. LAWCLA is also grateful to the DOEN Foundation in the Netherlands, UNDP, Sierra Leone and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy in the United Kingdom for funding its activities in 2009.

ABOUT THE LAWYERS CENTRE FOR LEGAL ASSISTANCE (LAWCLA)

The Lawyers Centre for Legal Assistance (**LAWCLA**) is one of Sierra Leone's newest but promising Human Rights Institution. **LAWCLA** was established in March 2001 partly due to a concern by the founders about the deplorable human rights situation in the country, and the limited access to justice and the law by the majority of victims of human rights abuses and violations especially indigent members of the society.

LAWCLA is an independent, non-political, non-profit making, Public Interest Human Rights Law Centre which among other things provides free Legal services to poor members of the public, undertakes research and facilitates the training of Law Enforcement and other officials in Human Rights Standards.

LAWCLA's mission is "to make the Law and Justice more accessible to indigent members of the public through Legal Advice, Impact Litigation and Research".

LAWCLA's human rights work is unique in one respect that, it is Sierra Leone's first Pro Bono Legal Aid institution, undertaking research and Training in addition to Legal Aid. This is appreciated against the fact that human rights work done by the vast majority of local groups in the country is limited to monitoring, reporting and community education and sensitization.

As a non-profit making Institution, the Centre is dependent upon donation and grants from wide variety of sources.

The Centre welcomes your Technical, Financial and Moral Support.

WHERE TO FIND US :

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**Brookfields
FREETOWN**