



# Defence for Girls

## The issue

Girls and young women (GYW) in Sierra Leone face many barriers and are at high risk of gender-based violence in their homes, communities, at school and in their workplace. Sexual violence and harmful traditional practices are major causes for concern, especially as impunity remains the norm and the provision of services for the protection, rehabilitation and reintegration of survivors leave much to be desired.

**!** **90%** of women have been subjected to Female Genital Mutilation  
**48%** of girls are married before age 18

In addition, teenage pregnancy, which is often a cause or consequence of child marriage, affect 1 out of every 3 adolescent girls and leads to maternal mortality and high rates of school dropout. Intersecting forms of gender-based discrimination, violence and exclusion, both in law and in practice, continue to contravene girls' equal enjoyment of their right to education and access to productive assets and/or economic opportunities. In a country where the youth employment rate stands at 70%, the economic inclusion of girls and young women is often more an aspiration than a reality.

## Programme focus

We recognize the inextricable interconnectedness between Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Economic Exclusion (EE) and therefore base our programmatic approach on the necessity to addressing them together.



**Defence for  
Children International  
Sierra Leone**

## Marina's Story

Marina\* always dreamed of becoming a teacher. Yet, when she was 12 years old, her dad became seriously ill and her family fell into debt to cover all the medical expenses. Desperate to find money, Marina's parents sold her away into a forced marriage with an older man. After being pulled out of school, Marina suffered constant physical and sexual abuse from her husband. One day, she heard about the Defence for Girls group in her community where she eventually ended up meeting with some of the girl advocates. The group quickly mobilized, and with the support of DCI-SL's child justice team, Marina was able to break out of her marriage. For the past 3 years, Marina has benefited from counselling and educational support. Today, Marina is back in school, where she has become one of the best student in her class. She has also joined the Defence for Girls Group and emerged as a powerful advocate against child marriage in her community.

\* Replacement to protect the child's identity

DCI-Sierra Leone is an independent child rights non-governmental organization. We consult with children and youths, communities, and other key stakeholders to design our programmes and bring the most appropriate and sustainable solutions at all levels.

## How do we bring change?

Building on the success of the Girl Power Programme (2011-15), we currently implement the Girls Advocacy Alliance programme (2016-20). Through strategic engagement and partnerships, we aim to set GBV and EE issues, and their interrelatedness, higher on the agenda of both public and private actors and stimulate gender-transformative policy and practice changes at all levels. We therefore follow a holistic approach that addresses the root cause of GBV and EE and sparks innovative solutions for the effective, sustainable empowerment of GYW.

## Our strategies

lead

We lead advocacy initiatives and strengthen the capacities of other civil society organisations and networks – in particular, GYW organisations – to influence and stimulate government, private and social actors in sparking policy and practice change. Special emphasis is put on schools, communities and private companies to step up their efforts against GBV through the establishment and/or reinforcement of effective protection mechanisms and to proactively put in place gender-transformative measures that increase educational and economic opportunities for GYW.

mobilize

We mobilize men, boys, women and girls across Sierra Leone, particularly at community level, to challenge and change patriarchal social norms and behaviours that sustain gender inequality, discrimination and violence.

respond

We respond to the specific needs of girls and young women victims and at risk of (sexual) gender-based violence through the provision of socio-legal services, and work closely with the police and justice sector to ensure access to justice for victims and increase the prosecution and punishment of offenders to deter further acts of GBV.

## Our most recent achievements

In recent years, we have sparked change at both in policy and in practice, and have particularly achieved the following:

### Sparked and provide technical expertise

in the on-going review of the Teachers' Code of Conduct and the Law Reform on Child Marriage, and played an instrumental role in the development of the National Protocol on Sexual Gender-Based Violence against Children (2007) and the Sexual Offences Act (2012).

### 16 Girls Groups established

in Western Area and Moyamba districts that gave girls the ability to monitor and respond to issues in their communities. One group, Hope Girl Sierra Leone, is now officially registered as a civil society organisation and partners directly with us.

### Efficient and sustainable prevention

and response to GBV issues in 10 schools, 5 communities and 5 chiefdoms through the establishment of solid child protection mechanisms.

### 400 survivors of gender-based violence

are provided with direct socio-legal support, on a yearly average. In addition, we provide life skills training and have established a mentorship programme to build survivors' resilience.



please supply



23276661184 confirm



dcisierraleone.org



DCI Sierra Leone



@DCISierraLeone

### HEAD OFFICE

No. 4 Old Railway Line, Tengbeh Town, Western Area Freetown – Sierra Leone, West Africa

### DISTRICT OFFICES

Bo City, Kenema City, Makeni City, Moyamba Town



Defence for  
Children International  
Sierra Leone