



MAKING RIGHTS REAL: HRCSL TAKES MOBILE COMPLAINTS HEARING TO REMOTE COMMUNITIES



The enjoyment of human rights for everyone is determined by citizens' accessibility to redress mechanism and knowledge of their rights and responsibilities in society. The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone, being the national institution empowered to take the lead role in building a culture of human rights and human dignity for all in Sierra Leone, is mindful of the fact that people in remote communities are unlikely to access its offices in the regional headquarters towns to file complaints of human rights violations and abuses when they occur. The Commission therefore devised a strategy of taking the operations of the Commission to the people in remote communities through Mobile Complaints Hearing and community awareness raising introduced in 2017.

According to the Director of Complaints, Investigation and Legal Services Doris Sonsiama, the Mobile Complaints Hearing has made the Commission now accessible by people living in remote areas who previously find it very difficult to access its services. Unfortunately, the Mobile Complaints Hearing exercise was affected by the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020 and GoSL



declaration of State of Emergency’ as a public health and social measures in an attempt to prevent transmission and minimize the impact of COVID-19 across the country. However, in July 2021, the Commission with support from UNDP/Irish Aid hosted two Mobile Complaints Hearing in Mile 91 and Lunsar both in the Northern region of Sierra Leone.

The events brought together community stakeholders including traditional authorities, Police, Civil Society Representatives, youth, women’s representatives and others to a public education meeting where the mandate of the Commission was discussed to give the community people a clear view of its work. The meeting set the foundation for the people to know what kind of complaints should be brought before the Commission.



According to the Director, the Mobile Complaints had been successful for the past years because they have reached out to communities that never knew of the Commission and hence had lots of human rights issues—“looking at the prevailing complaints brought before the Commission, the team educates the community on relevant laws and redress mechanisms in case of abuse”, she said.

The complaints brought before the Commission included: property deprivation, breach of contract, unfair hearing, child maintenance, workers’ rights, and unequal protection before the law.