



HRCSL ENGAGES COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS ON PROHIBITION OF CHILD MARRIAGE ACT 2024

The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs on Tuesday 12th November, 2024 engaged 350 stakeholders in selected communities across the country on the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2024.



With support from UNFPA, the engagements were held in Segbwema, Pujehun, Kabala, Kambia and Timbo respectively. The main goal of these engagements was to increase community stakeholders understanding of the contents of the Act and to mobilize community leaders, institutions, and the public to champion child rights issues in Sierra Leone.

Child marriage is a significant barrier to achieving gender equality and safeguarding children's rights. This has led to early or teenage pregnancy, school dropout, health implications and long-term economic and social disadvantages.



During the sessions participants expressed their willingness to popularize the Act, especially key provisions that criminalize child marriage in their communities.



Madam Mamawa Kaikai, Mammy Queen of Pujehun District thanked HRCSL for the initiative to engage them and promised to take the message to her colleagues to educate them to stay away from activities relating to child marriage.

"This engagement is an eye-opener for us. Child marriage is on the increase and unfortunately, there is no High Court in this District. We see this law as one that will stop child marriage in our communities and also help to protect the right of the girl child," she said.

She pleaded with HRCSL to help advocate for the opening of a High Court in the district to help reduce the number of child marriages.

A teacher at the Magbema Islamic Secondary School in Rokupr, Kambia District, Mariatu Mansaray promised to help educate her colleagues and children in her



school on the dangers of child marriage and the penalties prescribed in the Act for defaulters.



In Segbwema, Nurse Monica Baiom said she will use the knowledge acquired to talk about key provisions in the Act during their clinic sessions with patients.

"Many of the pregnant girls in our clinic are underage and so this information will be very useful to them. I believe that educating them about the negative impacts will save them from early marriage," she said.

Representing the Koinadugu Women's Network, Mackie Tejan commended HRCSL for involving every key stakeholder in the discussion.

"Before now, our understanding of key provisions in the Act was limited but this engagement has given us the necessary tool to engage our peers for them to know more about the document," she said.

"We have on many occasions reported matters of child marriages to the police, but the perpetrators most times walked free because of political influence. This



"has been a hindrance in the fight against child marriage," Brima Musa, Chiefdom Speaker Jaluahun Chiefdom said.



Umaru Bah, Senior Social Worker and District Officer of the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs in Kambia said "We see this law as a game- changer for the prospect and the future of the girl child in Sierra Leone. It will help to drastically reduce if not stop child marriage."

He stated that the law will serve as an instrument to protect children, especially underage girls and also reduce gender and sexual based violence in the country. He pledged the Ministry's commitment to popularising the law across the country.

At the various locations, the sessions were facilitated by Commissioners and staff on HRCSL and representatives from the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs.

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