Centre for Accountability and Rule of Law – Sierra Leone (CARL-SL)

CARL-SL strengthens stakeholder collaboration to improve survivor-centered SGBV Case Management across three districts

The Centre for Accountability and Rule of Law – Sierra Leone (CARL-SL), with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)-funded Spotlight Initiative 2.0 Response, is strengthening institutional collaboration and coordination among justice, security and protection actors to improve the management of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) cases across Falaba, Kailahun and Moyamba districts.

The initiative forms part of CARL-SL's broader commitment to promoting access to justice, strengthening accountability within justice and protection institutions, and ensuring that survivors of sexual and gender-based violence receive appropriate, timely and dignified responses throughout the justice process. It recognizes that addressing SGBV requires more than the existence of laws and institutional structures; it demands effective coordination, consistent case-management procedures, appropriate documentation, functional referral systems and a survivor-centered approach that places the rights, safety and wellbeing of survivors at the heart of every intervention.

As part of this intervention, CARL-SL has convened stakeholder consultative engagements across the three target districts and facilitated discussions on existing SGBV case-management practices and support the development of standardised tools that will guide relevant institutions in handling cases more effectively. The consultations brought together key actors from the justice, security and protection sectors, providing an opportunity for institutions and frontline practitioners to examine their respective roles, share practical experiences and collectively identified challenges that affect the effective management and prosecution of SGBV cases.

The engagements are particularly important in addressing some of the persistent challenges associated with SGBV case management, including gaps in case documentation, inconsistencies in the preparation and handling of case files, weaknesses in referral pathways, limited coordination among relevant institutions, and challenges relating to case follow-up. These gaps can undermine the quality of institutional responses, delay access to justice and expose survivors to additional risks, including unnecessary delays, repeated questioning, and breaches of confidentiality and experiences that may further compound their trauma.

Through these consultative processes, CARL-SL has created space for stakeholders in each district to critically assess existing practices and contribute practical recommendations towards developing standardised case-management tools that are responsive to institutional realities and the needs of survivors. The proposed tools are intended to provide clearer guidance on the handling, documentation, referral, preparation and follow-up of SGBV cases, while promoting greater consistency and accountability among the institutions responsible for responding to such cases.

Participants were drawn from different stakeholders, including the Sierra Leone Police/family Support Units, local authorities, pupils, Civil Society organizations, Ministry of Social Welfare,

Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs, Rainbow Initiatives, Media, etc. the activities were held in Mongo-Falaba district, Kailahun town, Kailahun district and in Moyamba town, Moyamba district.

A central consideration throughout the process is the need to strengthen a survivor-centered approach to SGBV case management. Such an approach requires that survivors are treated with dignity, respect and sensitivity, and that their safety, privacy, confidentiality and informed choices are protected at every stage of the response process. It also requires institutions and service providers to minimise practices that may expose survivors to further harm or discourage them from pursuing justice. By incorporating these principles into the proposed tools, CARL-SL seeks to contribute to a more responsive and supportive institutional environment for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.

Beyond identifying operational gaps, the consultations are also intended to strengthen inter-agency relationships and promote a shared understanding of the responsibilities of different actors within the SGBV response chain. Effective case management depends on the ability of justice, security and protection institutions to communicate, collaborate and coordinate their interventions without compromising the rights and interests of survivors. Strengthening these relationships is therefore essential to ensuring that cases are handled systematically, referrals are appropriately managed, and necessary actions are taken to advance investigations and access to justice.

The recommendations and technical inputs generated through the stakeholder consultations across Falaba, Kailahun and Moyamba districts will inform the preparation of draft standardised SGBV case-management tools. These draft tools will subsequently undergo further technical review and validation involving relevant stakeholders to ensure that they are practical, contextually appropriate and capable of supporting improved institutional performance. The review and validation process will also provide an opportunity to refine the proposed guidelines and strengthen stakeholder ownership of the tools before their eventual application.

For CARL-SL, this intervention represents an important step towards addressing institutional and coordination challenges that affect access to justice for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. It reflects the organisation's continued commitment to working with relevant state and non-state actors to promote accountability, strengthen justice delivery systems and advance the protection of vulnerable groups, particularly women and girls who are disproportionately affected by SGBV.

With support from the UNDP-funded Spotlight Initiative 2.0 Response, CARL-SL remains committed to facilitating constructive engagement among relevant institutions and supporting the development of practical mechanisms that can contribute to more effective, coordinated and survivor-centred responses to SGBV across the three target districts.

Ultimately, the success of efforts to address sexual and gender-based violence depends not only on the availability of legal and policy frameworks but also on the capacity, commitment and coordination of the institutions responsible for implementing them. By bringing key stakeholders together to identify gaps, develop common standards and strengthen institutional collaboration, CARL-SL is contributing to the broader effort to ensuring that survivors are treated with dignity, their rights are protected, and access to justice is strengthened.