



HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION OF SIERRA LEONE



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HUMAN RIGHTS BEHIND BARS: A REPORT ON THE SITUATION OF CORRECTIONAL CENTRES IN SIERRA LEONE 2025





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HUMAN RIGHTS BEHIND BARS: REPORT ON THE SITUATION OF CORRECTIONAL CENTRES IN SIERRALEONE

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HRCSL would appreciate receiving a copy of any materials in which information from this report is used.

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Acronyms

ACHPR	African Charter on Human and People's Rights
CAT	Convention Against Torture
CC	Correctional Centre
CID	Criminal Investigation Department
CPA	Criminal Procedure Act
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DHRC	District Human Rights Committee
DPP	Director of Public Prosecution
GVWC	Guma Valley Water Company
GoSL	Government of Sierra Leone
HRCSL	Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
JSCO	Justice Sector Coordination Office
LAB	Legal Aid Board
MDAs	Ministries Departments and Agencies
MIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs
MoF	Ministry of Finance
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MRC	Male Reintegration Centre
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NMR	Nelson Mandela Rules
PTDSC	Pre-Trial Detention and Simulation Centre
SALWACO	Sierra Leone Water Company
SLCS	Sierra Leone Correctional Service
UDHR	Universal Declaration on Human Rights
UNCAT	United Nations Convention Against Torture
UN	United Nations
UNIMAK	University of Makeni

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CHAIRPERSON'S FOREWORD



This Report on Human Rights Behind Bars has been produced by the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) in fulfillment of Sections 7 (2) (f) of the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone Act (No. 9) 2004 which states thus: “*monitor and document violations of human rights in Sierra Leone*”.

Since the inception of the Commission, it has made every effort to deliver on its monitoring and research functions. It has published several thematic reports including the State of Children in Sierra Leone Report 2017, Special Election Report 2018, Human Rights and Elections Report 2023 and the Climate Change and Human Rights in Sierra Leone Report 2025.

It is gratifying to note that this report now adds to the list of such thematic reports compiled and published by the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone.

Apart from HRCSL's regular monitoring of correctional centres nationwide, this is the first time HRCSL has conducted nationwide research on the conditions under which inmates are kept in correctional centres in Sierra Leone and an examination of the operations and welfare of corrections officers.

During the course of the research, HRCSL observed that the conditions under which persons behind bars are kept are appalling. Perennial issues in relation to overcrowding, lack of beddings, lack of lifelong learning opportunities and poor sanitary conditions were raised as serious human rights concerns. HRCSL has been part of the advocacy drive leading to the gradual reforms in detention facilities in Sierra Leone.

HRCSL notes the efforts made by government and other state and nonstate actors to ensure the rights and welfare of inmates are upheld in compliance with international good practices and standards such as the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules), the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non- Custodial Measures for Women Offenders with their Commentary (Bangkok Rules) and the United Nations Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty (Havana Rules).

HRCSL is aware of the steps taken by government to improve the situation of inmates in correctional centres in Sierra Leone. The enactment of the Sierra Leone Correctional Service Act 2014 is a major step in transforming the centres from a punitive role to focus on correction. These steps also include increased budgetary allocation to the Sierra Leone Correctional Service (SLCS), decongestion of the centres through judicial week or circuit courts within the centres and improving the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) facilities in correctional centres.

However, eleven years since the enactment of the SLCS Act, the conditions in detention facilities remain unfavourable for inmates and even the Corrections Officers.

As a grade A National Human Rights Institution, HRCSL has the responsibility to protect and promote the rights of every individual in Sierra Leone irrespective of status or background. Every effort should be made to ensure the human rights and dignity of all is upheld.

HRCSL therefore embarked on this study in order to assess the conditions under which persons behind bars are kept. Noting the fact that while in detention, inmates' rights must be respected regardless of their status. The protection of their human rights is essential for upholding their dignity and wellbeing.

HRCSL recognises and appreciates the financial support provided by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Irish Aid that enabled it to conduct the research and publish this report. We appreciate and commend the Management of the Sierra Leone Correctional Service for their support and

cooperation during the data collection process.

HRCSL will engage government and other key state actors on the Findings and Recommendations of this Report for future implementation.

HRCSL remains committed to ensuring that the rights and dignity of all is upheld in conformity with local, regional and international human rights standards.



.....

Patricia Narsu Ndanema
Chairperson

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT



Between 2nd -24th September, Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) embarked on a nationwide research to understand the human rights concerns and implications on inmates behind bars. This research is the result of a project supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Irish Aid. HRCSL appreciates UNDP for providing the relevant financial support that enabled it to undertake this valuable research.

Data was collected from twenty (20) out of the twenty-one (21) correctional centres in the country. This effort would not have been possible without the support of the Director-General and Senior Management of the Sierra Leone Correctional Service (SLCS) and its officers across the correctional centres. It is worth noting that feedbacks from inmates in all the centres visited provided the needed information and corroboration of information that made this work very enlightening. HRCSL is grateful to the management and staff of SLCS and the inmates within their custody for the critical information they provided. HRCSL is also appreciative of the support provided by the State Counsel in Makeni in the conduct of this research.

Special appreciation is accorded to the Commissioners for their leadership during the course of this research and for undertaking the final editing that resulted in the production of this report.

I wish to appreciate the entirety of the editorial team especially the Oversight Commissioner of the Directorate of Monitoring and Research (DMR), Simitie Lavalay Esq, Director Josephine Thompson-Shaw, Deputy Executive Secretary Mr. Frederick Ibrahim Kamara, Directors Tiamieu Fofanah and Mohamed Kuyateh, Manager Emmanuel Edward Sesay, Senior Human Rights Officers Sheku Alaka Tijan Mansaray, Assistant Human Rights Officers, Arthur Olu-Jones, Aminata Lamin and Fatmata Haja Koroma. Also, Sylvanus Cole, a volunteer, for his dedication and commitment in collecting and analyzing the data. I am grateful for the technical support provided by Human Rights Officer, Paul Anthony.

Finally, I wish to extend sincere thanks and appreciation to all members of staff especially at Headquarters and the regional offices for their tremendous support in making this research a success.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Joseph Benjamin Manking Kamara'. The signature is written over a dotted line.

Joseph Benjamin Manking Kamara
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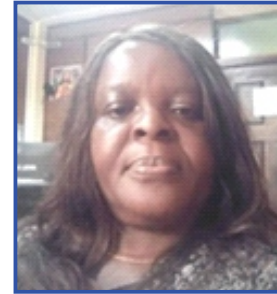
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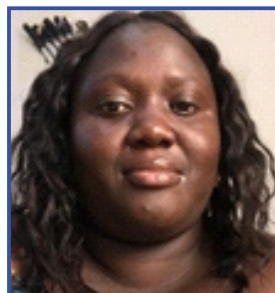
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents an analysis of research conducted by the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) titled: “**Human Rights Behind Bars**”. It highlights observations and findings by the HRCSL on the status of inmates and the operations and welfare of corrections officers from a national monitoring exercise conducted across twenty (20) out of twenty-one (21) correctional centres (CCs) throughout the five (5) regions in Sierra Leone managed by the Sierra Leone Correctional Service (SLCS). The general goal of the study was to assess the extent to which human rights are upheld in correctional centres with regards to compliance with national, regional and international instruments and best practices.

The research was conducted in stages. The first stage was dedicated to the review and finalisation of the Monitoring Checklist. At this stage, the Draft Monitoring Checklist was presented at a plenary comprising Commissioners and selected staff for scrutiny and validation in order to get it ready for field work.

The second stage was undertaken from 2nd – 24th September, 2025, during which the Commission did a full-blown field monitoring and observation in 20 correctional detention centres in all five regions. Four teams were deployed during the data collection process.

This report has been organised into six chapters:

Chapter 1 presents a background to the concept of human rights behind bars/or in detention. It highlights the rationale of the study, the scope and the methods of data collection.

Chapter 2 examines the existing Legal, Policies, Institutional frameworks and the roles of Oversight Bodies established for the protection of prisoners' rights. The study outlines the national laws, regional and international human rights standards that must be complied with these are the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules) and the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non- Custodial Measures for Women Offenders with their Commentary (Bangkok Rules) with a focus on dignity, health, and access to justice for persons behind bars. It also mentions the various institutions within the justice sector that are responsible for the protection of inmate's rights in Sierra Leone.

Chapter 3 discusses the operations of the Sierra Leone Correctional Service with a focus on human, financial, infrastructural, personnel and logistical management. It is worth noting that the operations of the SLCS are guided mainly by the SLCS Act 2014. However, there are no clear or updated internal policies in relation to staff terms and conditions of service or human resource management.

Chapter 4 explains the observations and findings of the monitoring exercise. Some of the findings and observations include: overcrowding, inadequate beddings for inmates, inadequate healthcare service, and poor sanitation. Prolonged pre-trial detention – sometimes exceeding three years – and the inability of inmates to meet bail conditions further compounded the crisis. The study found that while the SLCS Act 2014 marked a shift from punishment to rehabilitation, the reality behind bars remains worrying. Facilities originally built to hold 2,009 inmates now detain more than 5,476, close to three times their capacities.

Courts continue to have backlog of cases and irregular sittings, leaving many persons languishing in custody. Infrastructure is dilapidated, logistics and staffing remain critically low, and essential supplies such as medical drugs and toiletries are insufficient and irregular.

Chapter 5 is a presentation of the human rights situational analysis in correctional centres, with a focus on the root causes and impact of overcrowding.

Chapter 6 offers recommendations and conclusions based on the HRCSL’s findings/observations in the field that should be implemented collaboratively by the SLCS, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Justice and the Judiciary.

CHAPTER 1

1. Introduction

1.1 Concept of Human Rights in Detention

According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) 1948, all human beings are entitled to fundamental rights and freedoms. These rights are inalienable, indivisible, interrelated and must be protected by law. Upholding human rights is essential for the dignity of human beings. No one should be deprived of his or her rights except by law. These laws are enshrined in national legislation, regional and international treaties to which state parties are signatories.

When laid down laws, rules and norms are not complied with by individuals, several forms of punishments are meted out. There are legal channels through which persons must account for their actions and this can mainly be through trial in a court of law. While undergoing trial in criminal matters, people can either be granted bail or detained in a correctional centre. Also, persons that have been convicted are required to serve their sentences in correctional centres.

This research focuses on the rights of inmates detained in correctional centres. While in detention, inmates' rights must be respected regardless of their status. The protection of their human rights is essential for upholding their dignity and well-being. Inmates should enjoy fundamental rights such as the right to life, freedom from torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. The enjoyment of the right to health, education as well as access to clean and safe water must not be limited or restricted but must be enjoyed in the same manner as persons not held in detention. Restrictions should mostly be limited to the rights to privacy, liberty, movement, association and assembly. However, the restrictions imposed by law, on the enjoyment of these rights should not take away inmates' rights to dignity.

The treatment of persons behind bars has been topical in the human rights discourse, highlighting concerns of overcrowding, lack of beddings, lack of formal education and poor sanitary conditions in these facilities as violations of human rights. Increasing advocacy by human rights groups across the world have been ongoing leading to gradual reforms in detention facilities.

1.2. Background to the Research

In Sierra Leone, four main institutions are responsible for the custody of persons in conflict with the law;. The Sierra Leone Correctional Service (formerly the Sierra Leone Prisons), the Sierra Leone Police, Ministry of Social Welfare (the juvenile detention facilities) and the Local Courts.

Several studies that have been conducted revealed the dire conditions in correctional centres nationwide. In 2007, an assessment report entitled “Behind Walls: An Inventory Assessment of Prisons in Sierra Leone”, was published by the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone. The recommendations contained in the report were implemented through funding support from the United Nations to the Prison Service.

In 2012, the United Nations Integrated Peace building Office in Sierra Leone did a follow up study on the 2007 report and produced a report titled “Opening minds to Right Behind Bars: Report on the situation of detention in Sierra Leone 2012”. The 2012 report assessed the extent of implementation of the 2007 recommendations and noted that although a number of interventions had taken place, generally there was no substantial improvement of the material, logistical and infrastructural condition in the Prison Service. According to the 2012 report, the Prison Service and other detention facilities still faced financial and capacity constraints that did not meet international standards. The Report further highlighted the harsh conditions of detention such as overcrowding, inadequate provision of food and poor levels of hygiene encountered by persons behind bars in the Sierra Leone Prison, the Sierra Leone Police, juvenile

detention facilities and the Local Courts as well as the administrative challenges faced by these institutions.

The recommendations of the 2011, 2016 and 2021 Universal Periodic Review to Sierra Leone called for improvements in the prison conditions particularly for efforts to be made to address overcrowding.

HRCSL has the responsibility to ensure that government protects, respects and fulfills its human rights obligations at all times and for all categories of people. Pursuant to Section 7(1) and 7(2)(f) of the HRCSL Act 2004, which is to protect and promote human rights of all in Sierra Leone, HRCSL conducts routine monitoring at correctional centres and other places of detention to generally assess the level of compliance with national, regional and international standards.

Its monitoring findings are well catalogued in its Annual Report on the “State of Human Rights in Sierra Leone.” HRCSL has repeatedly since 2007 raised concern on the problems encountered by persons deprived of their liberty and the need for action to be taken to improve the situation. HRCSL is also aware of the steps taken by government to address the situation of inmates including the enactment of the Sierra Leone Correctional Service Act 2014. Efforts have also been made by government to embark on reforms that will transform the lives of persons behind bars. Despite these efforts, the conditions in correctional centres remain unfavourable for inmates.

Owing to all of these observations above, HRCSL embarked on a nationwide monitoring of correctional centres to unearth and delineate the root causes undermining the effectiveness of correctional centres and to also obtain comprehensive data to assist government develop clear and implementable and sustainable strategies to improve the situation in correctional centres.

1.3 Scope

The monitoring exercise focused on correctional centres of the Sierra Leone Correctional Service. Twenty (20) Correctional Centres across the five (5) regions in Sierra Leone as listed below were monitored between 2nd and 24th September, 2025.

A. Western Area

- I. Freetown Male Correctional Centre
- II. Freetown Female Correctional Centre
- III. Male Reintegration Centre
- IV. Pre-trial Detention and Simulation Centre

B. Eastern Region

- V. Kailahun Correctional Centre
- VI. Kenema Male Correctional Centre
- VII. Kenema Female Correctional Centre
- VIII. Sefadu Correctional Centre

C. North West Region

- IX. Port Loko Correctional Centre
- X. Kambia Correctional Centre

D. Northern Region

- XI. Makeni Male Correctional Centre
- XII. Makeni Female Correctional Centre
- XIII. Magburaka Correctional Centre
- XIV. Mafanta Correctional Centre

XV. Kabala Correctional Centre

E- Southern Region

- XVI. Bo Male Correctional Centre
- XVII. Bo Female Correctional Centre
- XVIII. Pujehun Correctional Centre
- XIX. Moyamba Correctional Centre
- XX. Matru Jong Correctional Centre

The Bonthe Correctional Centre which is located on the Bonthe Island could not be monitored due to adverse weather conditions during the monitoring period (as the research was conducted during the rainy season). However, HRCSL is certain that it will in no way affect the overall research findings.

1.4 Methodology

Desk research was conducted to collect information on the existing laws that guarantee the rights of inmates and institutions that should work to protect and promote inmates' rights while behind bars.

HRCSL's Monitoring Checklist for Correctional Centres was reviewed and updated in accordance with local, regional and international frameworks and guidelines relevant to the study in particular the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules) and the Sierra Leone Correctional Service Act 2014.

Field Monitoring was conducted at 20 correctional centres across the country, during which HRCSL monitors interacted with and had frank discussions with staff and inmates of correctional centres. Four (4) teams comprising Commissioners and staff of HRCSL engaged authorities and inmates at the Correctional Centres.

The teams first engaged the centre staff which comprised mainly of the heads of various units that were present at the time of visit. This was followed by discussions with the inmates. Inmates were interviewed in groups and individually. Particular attention was given to those inmates whose responses were contrary to their fellow inmates and who thought that their matters required the urgent intervention of HRCSL.



Commissioner Simitie and HRCSL staff engage Corrections Officers in Moyamba Correctional Centre



Executive Secretary and HRCSL staff engage Corrections officers at the Correctional Centre

After the findings were collated, a validation workshop was held on 16th October 2025, where senior management from each correctional centre visited was represented.

1.5 Time frame and Limitations of the study

The implementation time frame for the field work was only 2 weeks, which was insufficient for HRCSL to gather all relevant information from corrections officers and inmates and also to engage other actors in the justice sector.

Furthermore, HRCSL could not capture data from the Bonthe Correctional Centre due to inclement weather, as the team could not go across to the island in the rainy season.

CHAPTER 2

2.1 Legal and Institutional Frameworks

This chapter outlines the existing national regional and international, laws and policies dealing with inmates and the institutions established for the protection of inmate's rights in Sierra Leone.

The legal and institutional framework for the protection of persons behind bars in Sierra Leone is grounded in both national legislation and international human rights standards. Central to the framework is the Sierra Leone Correctional Service Act, 2014, which redefined the country's approach to incarceration by shifting from a punitive model to one focused on rehabilitation, reintegration, and the humane treatment of inmates. Complemented by the Constitution of Sierra Leone 1991, as well as regional and international instruments and best practices such as the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) and the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules), these frameworks outline and guarantee the rights of prisoners and the obligations of the state.

The SLCS is tasked with the implementation of the provisions of the SLCS Act whilst institutions such as HRCSL, the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights and various oversight bodies play a critical role in ensuring compliance and accountability within the correctional system.

2.1.1 National

National laws establish the grundnorm and primary legal structures for the protection and promotion of the rights of persons behind bars. Efforts have been made by the Sierra Leone Government to align its domestic laws through constitutional and other legal processes with international standards. Consequently, numerous legal reforms and policies that reinforce the rights of persons behind bars have taken place, especially the reformation from the prison service to a Correctional Service.

The 1991 Constitution

Parts 2 and 3 of the Constitution of Sierra Leone 1991, which aligns with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), provide for the protection of the fundamental rights of all citizens, including those in detention. Section 17 gives the right to be represented by legal Counsel and prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, ensuring people are only deprived of liberty through due process of the law. The Constitution further makes specific provisions for the protection of the rights of persons deprived of their liberty. Section 20 prohibits any form of torture and cruel or inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment. Section 23 (1) (2) & (4) provides as follows:

(1) *“Whenever any person is charged with a criminal offence he shall unless the charge is withdrawn, be afforded a fair hearing within a reasonable time by an independent and impartial court established by law”.*

(2) *“Any court or other authority prescribed by law for the determination of the existence or extent of civil rights or obligations shall be independent and impartial; and where proceedings for such determination are instituted by or against any person or authority or the Government before such court or authority, the case shall be given fair hearing within a reasonable time”.*

(4) *“Every person who is charged with a criminal offence shall be presumed to be innocent until he is proved, or has pleaded guilty”.*

Also, Sections 8 and 9 of the Constitution of Sierra Leone 1991 provide that government should mobilize resources for health and adequate educational opportunities for all.

The Sierra Leone Correctional Service Act 2014

The Sierra Leone Correctional Service Act 2014 replaced the Prison Ordinance Act 1960, aiming at shifting the focus from punitive to a more rehabilitative approach. This new law changed the nomenclature of the institution from the Sierra Leone State Prisons to the SLCS and emphasized rehabilitation, reintegration and reformation of inmates and not just punishment. It governs the operation

of the institution and aims to ensure safe and caring conditions for inmates.

Section 39 (1) of the Act states that “ *Every inmate shall be deemed to be in the lawful custody of the officer in charge and, subject to this Act, shall remain in such lawful custody and be subject to correctional centre discipline and to all laws, orders and directives relating to correctional centres and inmates during the whole period of the inmate's imprisonment or detention, whether the inmate is or is not within the precincts of a correctional centre* ”.

The Act was enacted to primarily to reform and modernize the prison system in Sierra Leone and conform with best practices in the maintenance and upkeep of its inmates and the detention centres. It also provides for safe custody and humane treatment of inmates, gives protection from torture and discrimination.

Prison Rules (1961)

The Prison Rules was derived from the former Prison Ordinance Cap. 237. These Rules guide the internal administration of the SLCS, detailing aspects like prisoners' rights, officer's conduct, and the right to dignity before being superseded by the Correctional Service Act, 2014. The Rules still remains in existence until it will be replaced by new Rules. It is significant to note that current efforts are underway to review the Prison Rules 1961. The Prison Rules largely addresses treatment of Prisoners, including their health and welfare.

Legal Aid Act, 2012

The Legal Aid Act of 2012 established the Legal Aid Board (LAB) as a statutory, non-profit government institution with the object to “*provide accessible, affordable, credible and sustainable legal aid services to indigent persons and for other related matters*”. This Act has provided an opportunity for pro bono services for inmates and other vulnerable people who cannot afford legal representation.

Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone Act 2004

The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone was established by an Act of Parliament (No. 9) of 2004. Section 7(1) of HRCSL's Act gives the mandate to protect and promote human rights for all in Sierra Leone. Section 7(2) (a) & (f) mandates the HRCSL to;

- (a) “*investigate or inquire into on its own or on complaint by any person any allegations of human rights violations and to report thereon in writing*”; and
- (f) “*monitor and document violations of human rights in Sierra Leone;*”

Under Section 9(1) of the HRCSL Act 2004 “*A member of the Commission or any person authorized in that behalf by such member, shall have access to all government offices, facilities and places of detention, including prisons, police cells, remand homes and probation facilities, in order to investigate a human rights matter initiated by the Commission or brought to the attention of the Commission as well as access to any non-classified information in government documents*”.

The institution does regular monitoring of detention facilities nationwide and engages the relevant authorities on its findings and makes recommendations for implementation by corrections authorities. Inmates also make complaints to HRCSL on inhuman and degrading treatment meted out to them while in detention. HRCSL has on many occasions engaged corrections authorities as a way of providing redress and reach amicable resolution.

Ombudsman Act 1997

Section 146 of the Constitution of Sierra Leone 1991 provides for the establishment of the Office of the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman Act 1997 further provides for the establishment and defines the functions of the Office of the Ombudsman. Among its functions is to investigate any complaints by person who claimed to have suffered injustice as a result of any action taken or omitted by any Ministry, Department, or Agency. In particular the Ombudsman is authorized to visit correctional centres to receive complaints from inmates under Section 9 of the Ombudsman Act 1997.

2.1.2 Regional Instruments

African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights 1981

This Charter was adopted in 1981 and became effective in 1986. Sierra Leone became a signatory to the Charter on 27th August 1981 and ratified it on 21st September 1983. The Charter promotes and protects human rights, including the rights of prisoners, within African nations.

Articles 4 – 7 of the Charter provide that individuals rights to life, dignity, liberty and security of persons and due process under the law should be guaranteed by the State.

2.1.3 International Instruments

Sierra Leone is a signatory to several international treaties that guarantee the right of detainees to equal protection before the law. It has signed and ratified key human rights conventions and treaties which address human rights and is also a state party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948

Sierra Leone became a member of the United Nations (UN) on September 27, 1961. The Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) is a soft law as well as a non-binding resolution of the UN (General Resolution 217A) whose principles have been universally accepted as guiding provisions to the development of national Constitution and other related human rights standards including the ICCPR and ICESCR.

Articles 3-11 provide standards for the treatment of persons deprived of their liberty and due process under the law.

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966

Sierra Leone became a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political rights (ICCPR) on 23rd August 1996. The ICCPR is also a principal international human rights instrument which provides for the protection of inmates that are incarcerated.

Article 7 states that: *“No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. In particular, no one shall be subjected without his free consent to medical or scientific experimentation*

Article 10 (1) mandates that *“All persons deprived of their liberty shall be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person”*.

Article 10 (3) requires that *“the reform and social re-adaptation of prisoners”* be an *“essential aim”* of imprisonment.

The ICCPR provided the basis for Part 3 of the Constitution of Sierra Leone 1991 which specifically speaks to the protection of fundamental human rights and freedoms.

The Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment 1985

This Convention was signed by Sierra Leone on 18th March 1985 and ratified on 25th April 2001. **Article 7** prohibits all forms of torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, without exception or derogation. Sierra Leone is yet to ratify the Optional Protocol on the Convention Against Torture (OP-CAT) and to establish the National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) which monitors detention facilities to prevent torture and other inhuman and degrading treatment of inmates in incarceration.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2007

This convention was signed by Sierra Leone on 30th March 2007 and later ratified on 4th October 2010.

Article 14 (2) states that State Parties “*shall ensure that if persons with disabilities are deprived of their liberty through any process, they are, on an equal basis with others, entitled to guarantees in accordance with international human rights law and shall be treated in compliance with the objectives and principles of this Convention, including by provision of reasonable accommodation*”.

Article 15 (2) provides that: “*States Parties shall take all effective legislative, administrative, judicial or other measures to prevent persons with disabilities, on an equal basis with others, from being subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment*”.

This Convention was domesticated in 2011 through the Persons with Disability Act 2011, which established the National Commission for Persons with Disability. The Persons with Disability Act 2011 provides for the protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities and requires that public institutions be made accessible to persons with disabilities.

United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners 2015 (also known as the Nelson Mandela Rules)

The Nelson Mandela Rules (NMR) which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015, is the revised version of the former Standard Minimum Rules (SMR), 1957. Sierra Leone adopted the NMR in 2015. The NMR is a non-binding instrument that sets out the minimum standards for the treatment of prisoners and prison management.

Rule 1 states that: “*All prisoners shall be treated with the respect due to their inherent dignity and value as human beings. No prisoner shall be subjected to, and all prisoners shall be protected from, torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, for which no circumstances whatsoever may be invoked as a justification*”.

The NMR is the most comprehensive set of guidelines that outlines how state parties should manage correctional centres and treat inmates, focusing on humane treatment, non-discrimination, and the promotion of inmates' rights.

The United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-Custodial Measures for Women Offenders

The United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-Custodial Measures for Women Offenders (Bangkok Rules) was adopted in 2010. It addresses the specific needs of women in the criminal justice system focusing on alternatives to imprisonment, appropriate health care, support for incarcerated mothers and their children and protection from abuse.

Rule 2(1) states that “*Adequate attention shall be paid to the admission procedures for women and children, due to their particular vulnerability at this time. Newly arrived women prisoners shall be provided with facilities to contact their relatives; access to legal advice; information about prison rules and regulations, the prison regime and where to seek help when in need in a language that they understand; and, in the case of foreign nationals, access to consular representatives as well*”.

Rule 2(2) states that “*Prior to or on admission, women with caretaking responsibilities for children shall be permitted to make arrangements for those children, including the possibility of a reasonable suspension of detention, taking into account the best interests of the children*”.

The SLCS has incorporated these rules into its training programmes for its personnel which is now being used in management and care of female inmates and their children.

2.2 Structural and Institutional Arrangements

This section examines the statutory organizational and institutional structures in place to guarantee the rights of persons detained in correctional centres.

Sierra Leone Correctional Service

The Sierra Leone Correctional Service (SLCS) formerly called the Sierra Leone Prisons Service (SLPS) was established in 1914 and reformed in 2014 through the enactment of the SLCS Act 2014. The institution serves as the main institutional structure for the detention, rehabilitation, reformation and reintegration of inmates in Sierra Leone.

Under the supervision of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) and the Sierra Leone Correctional Service Council, the SLCS presently manages the twenty-one (21) Correctional Centres throughout the country.

The SLCS is headed by the Director-General and supported by Regional and Facility-level administrators. The general staff is composed of trained Corrections Officers, focusing on both security and inmate welfare.

Ministry of Internal Affairs

This Ministry is responsible to oversee the Sierra Leone Police, the Sierra Leone Correctional Service and other internal security agencies.

Sections 1(3)(4)&(5) of the SLCS Act of 2014 detail the powers of the Minister in the operations of the Correctional Service. The Ministry supervises the SLCS and ensures that correctional centres operate in line with national laws and policy directives.

Justice Sector Coordination Office

The Justice Sector Coordination Office (JSCO) is a government entity responsible for coordinating justice sector reforms, including the protection of inmates' rights. It promotes collaboration among institutions like the SLCS, Judiciary and Ministry of Justice, while supporting law reforms, policy implementation, and capacity building to align with international human rights standards. It also supports the promotion of inmates' rights through alignment with international standards (e.g., Mandela Rules, Bangkok Rules), supporting improvements in prison conditions and infrastructure and enhancing transparency and accountability through coordinated tracking systems.

Parliamentary Committees

Parliament is responsible for law making, representation and oversight of State institutions. Parliamentary Committees are special Committees set up by Parliament to provide oversight of MDAs and advocate for increase in budgetary allocations to their respective MDAs.

The Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights is responsible for monitoring places of detention to assess the level of compliance with national, regional and international standards and best practices and report to Parliament.

The Parliamentary Committee may summon corrections officers to respond to any queries or matter of concerns raised from the public or through their own findings.

Other Institutions

The Legal Aid Board and the HRCSL also exist to guarantee the rights of inmates and their functions are detailed in section 2.1.1 above

CHAPTER 3

3.1 The Operations of the Sierra Leone Correctional Service

This chapter reviews the effectiveness and efficiency of the SLCS in carrying out their functions as provided for in the SLCS Act 2014 and in accordance with international best practices.

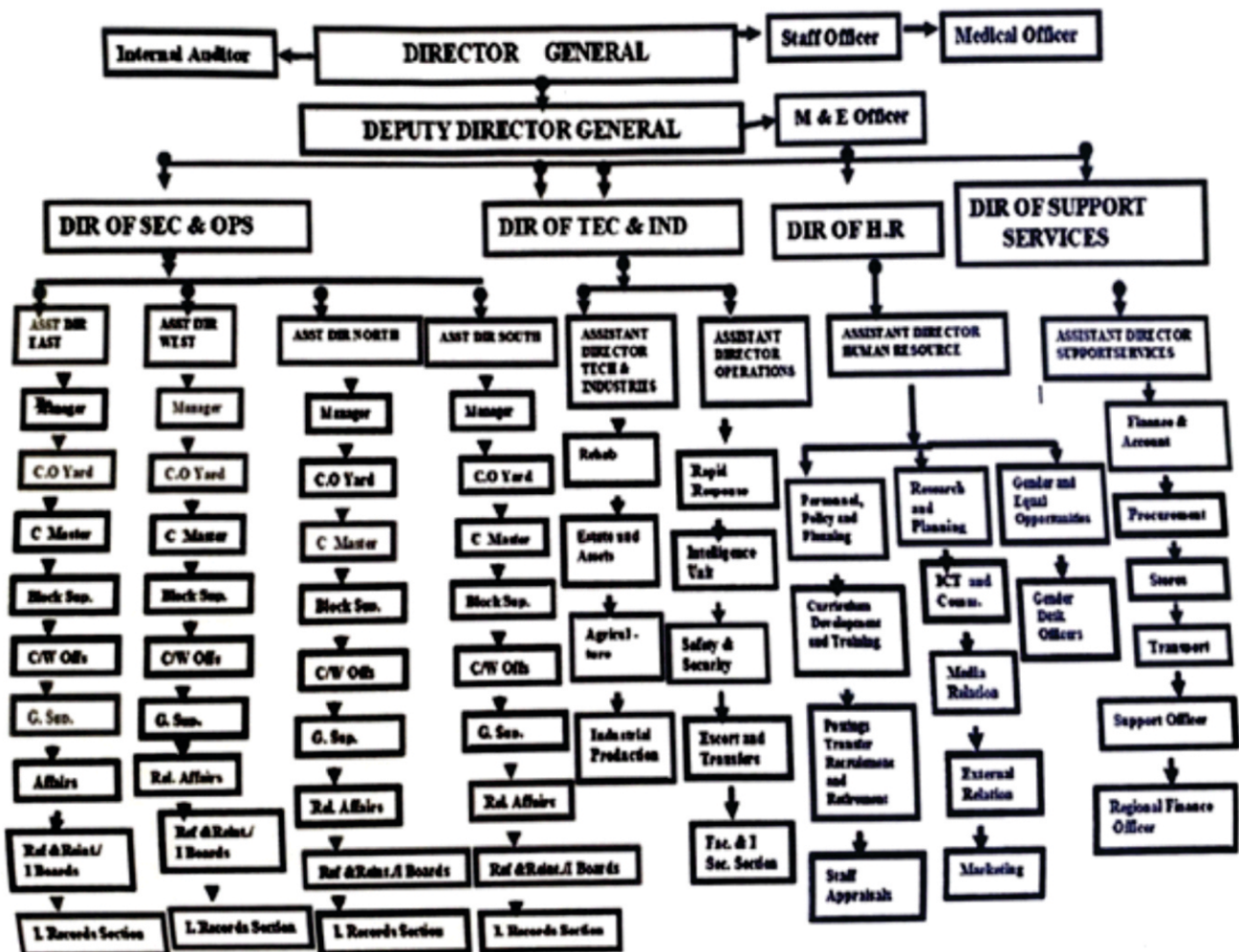
3.1.1 Hierarchical Structure of the SLCS

The head of the SLCS is the Director-General (DG), currently Mr. Joseph John Sennesie, who is supported by the Deputy Director-General (DDG) and other administrative and support staff. The DG is in charge of the overall operational control, administration, and supervision of all correctional centres. Both DG and DDG have executive appointments in accordance with Section 4(2) of the SLCS Act, 2014. For the first time in history of the institution the DDG is a female, Susan B. Koker who was appointed by the President and approved by Parliament on 31st January, 2025.

The organizational structure of the SLCS extends from its headquarters in Freetown to other correctional centres across the country. Regional Commanders oversee correctional centres within specific geographic areas. At the local level, correctional centres are managed by Officers-in-Charge, supported by corrections officers responsible for the custody, control, and rehabilitation of inmates.

Figure 3.1 sets out the current structure of the SLCS whilst Figure 3.2 sets out the proposed structure after the management function review.

Figure 3.1 Current Organogram of the SLCS



3.1.2 Personnel strength and Conditions of Service

According to the Management and Functional Review of the Sierra Leone Correctional Services Report published by the Public Sector Reform Unit in November 2024, the SLCS should have a total staff strength of 3,550. However, the report mentioned that the staff strength was only 2,030. HRCSL was informed that less than half of this number manage the correctional centres and that the last recruitment was done in 2017. As at the time of visit on 1st October, HRCSL was informed that the staff strength of the SLCS was approximately 2,000 with recruitment processes underway for general and specialized professionals.

Many personnel informed HRCSL that their conditions of service were grossly unsatisfactory and revealed persistent challenges. They complained that the salary was meagre, below their counterparts in the security sector and was barely enough to meet their needs.

One of the most pressing problems is the delay in the supply of essential provisions for staff. For instance, rice supplies often arrive months late and have a direct impact on staff morale. In 2023, there was a backlog of rice for 5 months and 3 months in 2024 which had still not been supplied as at the time of research visit. The Corrections Officers informed HRCSL that uniforms supply is seldom and inadequate and had not been supplied for over ten years, resulting in staff purchasing for themselves. The DG informed HRCSL that consignment of new uniforms had been procured and would be available within the year.

The staff accommodation is reported to be inadequate in space and insufficient in number in all of the regions and headquarters. The DG informed HRCSL that none of the Directors in Freetown have accommodation in the barracks. In most of the barracks in the regions, officers and their families are only allocated a single room in shared blocks. Corrections Officers who are unable to secure accommodation within the SLCS barracks use their meagre salaries to rent accommodation, in some cases several miles away from the centres. For instance, at the Mafanta CC, officers without staff accommodation travel at least three miles to work, because each of the three nearest villages to the centre are three miles away. The problem of accommodation is compounded by the fact that rent allowances are not paid as part of the conditions of service of the SLCS. Also, there is a security risk associated with the limited number of barracks for corrections officers which exposes them to personal security risk while residing within the community where hardcore criminals may target them. Further, it prevents corrections officers from prompt response to crisis situations at the centres.

The SLCS has no medical policy for its staff and no dedicated hospital as in the case for the Police and Military. Even corrections officers who work in correctional centres where basic healthcare services are provided for inmates are not entitled to benefit from the medical services provided therein.

Manpower shortage represents another major challenge for the SLCS. Most centres operate below recommended personnel levels, which is 4 inmates to 1 officer. For instance, as of the time of visit, HRCSL was informed that it was approximately 20 inmates to 1 officer, compelling officers to manage large inmate populations with limited support. This results in excessive workloads, long hours, and compromised supervision standards. Although officers receive leave allowances and are entitled to proceed on leave, they informed HRCSL that they volunteer their services during their leave periods to ensure there is enough manpower to provide the needed services.

Article 7(d) of the ICESCR “*recognizes the rights of everyone to the enjoyment of just and favourable conditions of which ensure rest, leisure, and reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay ...*”.

Rule 74 (3) of the NMR states that;

3. “... *personnel shall be appointed on a full time basis as professional prison staff and have civil service status with security of tenure ... Salaries shall be adequate to attract and retain suitable men and women; employment benefits and conditions of service shall be favourable in view of the exacting nature of the work*”.

Another shortcoming is that the SLCS does not pay risk allowances to its personnel considering the inmate to personnel ratio per correctional centre and the nature of the job which involves sometimes dealing with hard core criminals.

The absence of clear human resource policies and guidelines for recruitment, promotions, training, and welfare adds to the institutional challenges. Internal training for staff is irregular and external training opportunities are limited.

3.2 Finances of the SLCS

The SLCS, though supervised by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, gets its budgetary allocation directly from the government through the Ministry of Finance (MoF). For the fiscal year 2025, the SLCS proposed a budget of One Hundred and Ninety-Three Million, One hundred and Fifty Thousand and Three Hundred Leones (NLe 193,150,300) for its operations, salaries and emoluments. However, as of the time of writing this report, only Twelve Million, Eight Hundred Thousand Leones (NLe 12,800,000) had been received for operations.

Delays in the disbursement of funds by the MoF and the inadequate allocation of funds undermine operational effectiveness and the SLCS ability to pay contractors on time, leading to arrears.

Apart from the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL), the SLCS does not currently receive financial support from any other source. However, donations in the form of training materials and food items are sometimes made by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and philanthropists.

3.3 Infrastructure and Logistical challenges

The SLCS has its headquarters office located in Freetown and regional offices that oversee the operations of correctional centres within the regions. It has a total of 21 correctional centres across the country where adult male and female inmates are detained when undergoing pre-trial detention or serving jail terms.

It has barracks in 14 out of 16 districts (except in Karene and Falaba Districts) providing accommodation for some of its personnel. Some of these centres and barracks have vast land areas that will enable expansion of its infrastructure.

The SLCS has structures under construction; in Freetown, a 4 storey new administrative headquarters is almost completed whilst in Moyamba CC and the Male Reintegration Centre (MRC) in Freetown new structures are being constructed to expand the facilities. In Kamakwei in the Karene District, a correctional centre is also under construction. A block containing five cells has been completed at the Pre-Trial Detention and Simulation Centre (PTDSC) at Waterloo and is yet to be commissioned.

The challenges highlighted earlier are further compounded by inadequate logistical support, poor and inadequate infrastructure that is not well maintained. The headquarters of the SLCS does not have enough space to accommodate all of its officers. The SLCS does not have a structure for the North-West regional Office and so they share with the Port Loko CC. Further to that the working environments were observed not to be conducive.

All of the old facilities need facelifts. HRCSL observed that most of the walls of the cells were an eyesore, particularly male cells which indicates that attention is not paid to the maintenance of the correctional centres.

Some of the offices in the regions do not have computers, printers, fingerprint scanners, air conditioners or fans and adequate stationaries.

The Kambia CC and the PTDSC face heightened security risks due to their low perimeter fences. The outer perimeter of the Pujehun CC is only demarcated with barbed wires leaving the compound exposed and vulnerable. The barracks in all regions are not fenced and are prone to encroachment by community

residents as observed in the PTDSC.

Transportation remains a critical issue to convey inmates to and from court sittings, transfer them between facilities, or respond to emergencies. According to the DG, the SLCS has only six (6) functional utility vehicles to serve the twenty-one (21) CCs across the country. HRCSL noted that 45% of the CCs visited (Kambia, Pujehun, Mafanta, Kabala, Kenema Female, Sefadu, Moyamba, Magburaka and Makeni Male CCs) suffer from acute transportation challenges, with no dedicated vehicles. The absence of a vehicle at Kenema Female CC forces reliance on the Kenema Male CC to assist in transporting female inmates to court. The Sefadu and Moyamba CCs rely on their administrative vehicles which are unsuitable for conveying inmates, creating safety and security risks. The Matru Jong CC vehicle had a breakdown 2 weeks prior to HRCSL's visit and inmates were being transported to court using public transportation; the vehicle has now been maintenance and is in service.

While these systemic challenges affect all correctional centres, some facilities face unique difficulties that exacerbate the smooth operations of the facilities. Kailahun, Kambia, Pujehun and Kabala CCs lack electricity connection to the main government power supply and have no backup generators. HRCSL observed that some CCs relied on solar powered energy which generated limited energy during the rainy season. As a result, the CCs environment becomes dark during the night posing serious operational and security challenges.

CHAPTER 4

4. Human Rights in Correctional Centres

This chapter examines the conditions under which inmates are kept in correctional centres and to ascertain whether they are in compliance with human rights standards and best practices.

4.1 Admission and Accommodation

Rule 7 of the NMR states that

“No person shall be received in a prison without a valid commitment order. The following information shall be entered in the prisoner file management system upon admission of every prisoner: (a) precise information enabling determination of his or her unique identity, respecting his or her self-perceived gender;

(b) The reasons for his or her commitment and the responsible authority, in addition to the date, time and place of arrest;

(c) The day and hour of his or her admission and release as well as of any transfer;

(d) Any visible injuries and complaints about prior ill-treatment;

(e) An inventory of his or her personal property;

(f) The names of his or her family members, including, where applicable, his or her children, the children's ages, location and custody or guardianship status;

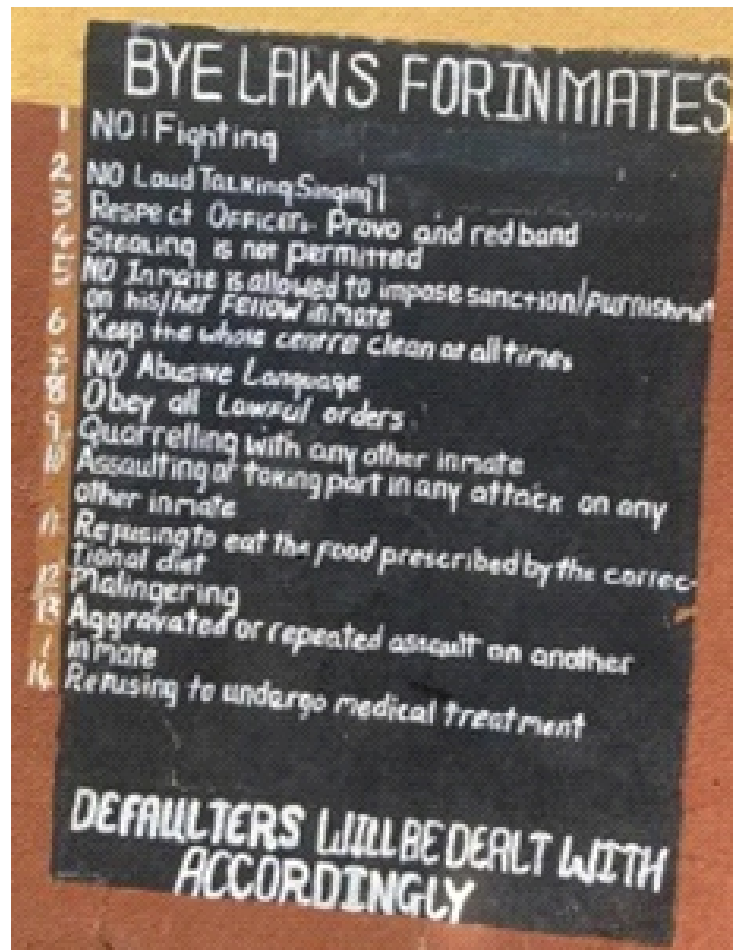
(g) Emergency contact details and information on the prisoner's next of kin”.

Across correctional centres, HRCSL was informed that inmates were mainly admitted based on valid court warrants and were aged 18 years and above. In some instances, particularly in Freetown, inmates were admitted directly from Police Stations on police orders for their safe custody.

HRCSL observed that at the Bo Male, Port Loko, Kabala and Moyamba CCs, some of the male inmates appeared to be below the age of 18 years. This was refuted by the corrections officers who stated that they relied on the age displayed on the warrant issued by the courts.

Upon admission, personal details, medical history and alleged offences or conviction of each inmate is recorded. Inmates then undergo basic medical screening to determine their general well-being, detect communicable diseases and HIV/AIDS status. A pregnancy test is also conducted on each female inmate.

The centre managers also stated that, orientation is provided on the bye-laws, inmates rights in detention and complaints handling mechanisms. These are displayed on walls in each CC.



Bye-laws on display at the Kambia CC

Personal items brought in by inmates are documented in the Inmate Property Register and stored as per CC procedures.

The centre managers in all the correctional facilities informed HRCSL that an inmate's gender is determined based on the warrant issue by the court and also through physical observation but not by his/her self-perceived gender.

Each inmate is supplied with toiletries (soap, toothpaste, toothbrush) towels and jumper(s) (if available) and asked to take a shower. Male inmates are given a haircut. They are then allocated to the various holding cells irrespective of their status. The colour of the jumper given represents the category of detention and the level of court in which their matters were being heard. In male CC, blue is for male inmates on Remand and undergoing trial at the Magistrate's Court; grey for Trial inmates whose matters have been referred to or being heard in the High Court and brown for Convicted inmates serving jail terms. In female CCs, blue and white check is used by Remand inmates, green and white check for Trial inmates and pink/red and white check for Convicted inmates.



Male Inmates at the Kambia CC



Female inmates, corrections officers and HRCSL staff at the Port Loko CC

Psycho-social services are provided for new inmates and this continues throughout their stay in the facilities.

4.2 Separation of categories

Rule 11 of the NMRs requires correctional centres to keep different categories of prisoners

“in separate institutions or parts of institutions, taking account of their sex, age, criminal record, the legal reason for their detention and the necessities of their treatment;

(a) Men and women shall so far as possible be detained in separate institutions; in an institution which receives both men and women, the whole of the premises allocated to women shall be entirely separate;

(b) Untried prisoners shall be kept separate from convicted prisoners”

HRCSL noted that in all CCs women and men are separated. In Freetown and the regional headquarter towns of Makeni, Bo and Kenema, the SLCS has separate structures for male and female inmates which are located in different areas. In others, male and female inmates are housed within the same precincts but in different sections, and they do not come in contact with each other. Female officers manage female inmates.

In addition, the SLCS has two male CCs solely for housing convicted inmates: one in Mafanta in the Tonkolili District and the other in Freetown, in the Western Area.

Table 4.1: Correctional Centres and the Category of Inmates

Region	District	Correctional Centre	Location	Type	Inmate category / classification
Western Area	Western Area Urban	Freetown Male	Pademba Road, Freetown	Exclusively male	All
		Freetown Female	Jomo Kenyata Road, Freetown	Exclusively female	All
		Male Reintegration		Exclusively male	Convicted only
	Western Area Rural	Pre-Trial and Simulation	Waterloo	Mixed in separate structures	All
Northern	Bombali	Makeni Male	Makeni City	Exclusively male	All
		Makeni Female		Exclusively female	All
	Tonkolili	Magburaka	Magburaka Town	Mixed in separate structures	All
		Mafanta	Mafanta Village	Exclusively male	Convicted only
	Koinadugu	Kabala	Kabala Town	Mixed in separate structures	All
North West	Port Loko	Port Loko	Port Loko Town	Mixed in separate structures	All
	Kambia	Kambia	Kambia Town	Mixed in separate structures	All
Southern	Bo	Bo Male	Bo City	Exclusively Male	All
		Bo Female		Exclusively Female	All
	Pujehun	Pujehun	Pujehun Town	Mixed	All
	Moyamba	Moyamba	Moyamba Town	Mixed	All
	Bonthe	Matru Jong	Matru Jong	Mixed	All
Eastern	Kenema	Kenema Male	Kenema City	Exclusively male	All
		Kenema Female		Exclusively Female	All
	Kailahun	Kailahun	Kailahun Town	Mixed	All
	Kono	Sefadu	Koidu Town	Mixed in separate structures	All

While the SLCS complies fully with Rule 11(a), compliance with Rule 11(b) is far from satisfactory. With the exception of the MRC and the Mafanta CC, tried and untried inmates share same cells. Classification is also not considered when allocating inmates to cells regardless of the risk levels. According to the Centre Managers, the non-separation was due to security considerations as well as inadequate space.

4.3 Right to food

Rule 22(1) of the NMR states that

"Every Prisoner shall be provided by the prison administration at the usual hours with food of nutritional value adequate for health and strength, of wholesome quality and well prepared and served".

Authorities across CCs reported that each inmate is provided three meals daily which comprise breakfast,

lunch and dinner. However, the meals are served twice a day: breakfast in the mornings and lunch combined with dinner in the afternoons. Correctional centres combined lunch with dinner because inmates should be locked up in their respective cells before dinner time. Inmates are therefore expected to eat part of the meal at lunch time and the other at dinner time, while in their cells.

For breakfast, each inmate is served a loaf of bread with butter or mayonnaise in it and a cup of tea. In Sefadu, Pujehun, Mattru Jong and Moyamba CCs, when flour runs out cassava or garri is provided for breakfast as an alternative. The combined meal, which is lunch and dinner is always rice and sauce. Different sauces are prepared daily.

The centres also take cognizance of the dietary needs of inmates with medical conditions or taking special medication. This information is communicated to the kitchen staff by the medical staff through the Centre Managers. For instance, at the MRC authorities informed the team that when cassava leaves, which is a local sauce is cooked, another sauce is prepared for inmates who are diagnosed with ulcer. Inmates at the Kenema Female CC are given raw condiments to prepare food of their choice.

The SLCS has only one nutritionist based in Freetown who supervises the kitchen staff in the correctional centres.



Combined meal: lunch and dinner, ready to be served to inmates at the Pre-Trial and Simulation Centre in Waterloo.

The correctional centres ensure that inmates are provided with food daily even when supplies are delayed. At the PTDSC, Mafanta, Magburaka, Kabala and Makeni CCs, when food supplies run out, based on request from corrections officers, business people who are members of these communities assist by providing the items needed on loan. The items are returned when the centres receive their supplies from the contractor(s). In the Pujehun CC, HRCSL was informed that market women sometimes provide condiments after the inmates have helped to clean their markets. According to the SLCS, the delay in supply of food items was due to the late payment to the contractors, as a result of the late disbursement of subvention by the MoF

Inmates confirmed that they were served food twice a day: breakfast (tea and bread) and lunch combined with the dinner. At the MRC, inmates explained that there had been an improvement in the quality of food served since the new management took up office, two weeks before HRCSL visited. However, inmates at the Freetown Male, Kenema Male, Pujehun, Bo, Moyamba and Kailahun CCs informed HRCSL that they

were not satisfied with the quantity of food provided and requested for an increase. Inmates at the Pujehun CC further complained of the poor quality of food given to them and requested that the quality be improved upon.

At PTDSC, inmates complained that the quantity of food provided for lunch and dinner was small such that they would be very hungry before going to bed. The inmates also recommended for an improvement in the quality.

Also, at the Sefadu and Kenema Female CCs, inmates informed HRCSL that they had been receiving just tea and bread (without any other condiments) and tea, for breakfast since April and August respectively. Inmates at the PTDSC had been receiving tea without bread since August. At the Pujehun and Moyamba Ccs inmates stated that from November 2024 to August 2025, their breakfast was only tea as there was no flour supply available.

Majority of CCs allow relatives to prepare and take food to inmates. For security reasons, a thorough search is conducted on the food for hidden contrabands, after which the relatives are required to eat a portion of it, wait for a while after eating the food, before handing same over to the inmates. Canned foods are turn into plastic containers by the corrections officers in the presence of the inmates. The Mattru Jong CC does not allow any food that is in Powder form

The strides taken by the SLCS to provide food daily for inmates are noted despite the challenges of late supply of food items. Allowing relatives to provide food for inmates also helps to give variety and compliment the dietary and nutritional requirement of inmates. However, the absence of qualified nutritionists at regional level, the inadequate quantity and the poor quality of food (as complained by inmates) do not comply with the requirements of Rule 22(1) of the NMR.

4.4 Access to clean and safe water for drinking and other sanitary needs

Rule 20(2) of the NMR states that

“Drinking water shall be available to every prisoner whenever he needs it”.

Efforts have been made by the SLCS to ensure that water is available at all times, through the availability of boreholes and installation of water storage tanks.

HRCSL observed that in all the CC monitored, there was at least one bore hole for water supply. In addition, CCs in the regional headquarter towns and in Freetown have access to pipe-borne water supplied by the Sierra Leone Water Company (SALWACO) and the Guma Valley Water Company (GVWC) respectively.

The Freetown Male, Kailahun and Sefadu CCs each have solar powered boreholes. The Pujehun CC does not have its own independent source of water within. However, the centre gets water supply from the Pujehun Government Hospital borehole through a dedicated pipeline that is installed in the centre.



A borehole at the Mafanta CC

The PTDSC has pipe-borne water and 2 water storage tanks (10,000 litres each) ensuring that inmates have access to sufficient supply of water for drinking and sanitary purposes. The Kenema Male and

Kenema Female CCs have pipe-borne water that is supplied by SALWACO and treated bore holes. The water from both sources is used for drinking, bathing and other hygiene purposes. However, the 2 water storage tanks at the Kenema Female CC were not in good condition. The bore hole at the Magburaka CC dries up during the dry season, posing a challenge to access water during this period. Inmates have to fetch water from the nearby community which is not only a security risk for the officers, but also affects the dignity of inmates.

The Kenema Female, Kailahun and Moyamba CCs and the new blocks at the PTDSC have running taps within the cells. In other CCs and the old blocks at the PTDSC, water is stored in huge containers and buckets. Each cell has at least one bucket for storing drinking water to be used when inmates have been locked up. Each inmate is provided with a cup for drinking. The huge containers are placed within the toilets in the cells, for storing water for personal hygiene needs.

4.5 Right to health, hygiene and sanitation

The right to health is fundamental and intrinsically linked to the right to life. Rule 24 (1) & (2) of the NMR states that:

(1) "The provision of health care for prisoners is a state responsibility. Prisoners should enjoy the same standards of health care that are available in the community, and should have access to necessary health-care services free of charge without discrimination on the grounds of their legal status".

(2). Health-care services should be organized in close relationship to the general public health administration and in a way that ensures continuity of treatment and care, including for HIV, tuberculosis and other infectious diseases, as well as for drug dependence".

Rule 28 of the NMR also states that:

"In women's prisons, there shall be special accommodation for all necessary prenatal and postnatal care and treatment. Arrangements shall be made wherever practicable for children to be born in a hospital outside the prison. If a child is born in prison, this fact shall not be mentioned in the birth certificate".

All centres visited have a health clinic which caters for the basic medical and health care needs of inmates. With the exception of the Freetown Male CC, Freetown Female CC and PTDSC which have assigned medical doctors who visit on special days and on call, all other clinics are run / managed by nurses who are either corrections officers or staff of the Ministry of Health (MoH).



The health clinic at the Makeni CC

Malaria, general body pains, cold, fever, high blood pressure, infections (genitals), typhoid, body rash and head ache are the commonly reported ailments. Severe cases that require surgeries, tooth extraction or eye ailments are referred to the government hospitals in the respective districts. Pregnant women are also referred for pre and post-natal care and for deliveries. In Matru Jong CC, where there is no government hospital, inmates are referred to the United Brethen in Christ Hospital based on a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), between the two institutions.

Medical drugs are supplied to the clinics by contractors through the SLCS on quarterly basis. When supplies of certain drugs run out or delivery is delayed, the nurses make requests to the SLCS regional offices or to the government hospitals. Inmates do not pay for their treatment. Generally, treatment for referral cases is paid for by a contracted medical

officer. Heads of the respective correctional centres sometimes assist in buying drugs for inmates when the supplies run out. Also, NGOs sometimes assist in paying medical bills. For example, at the Sefadu CC, Partners in Health (an international NGO) assist in paying medical bills for sick inmates who are referred to the government hospital or to their own facility.

Inmates with HIV/AIDS are provided with retro-viral drugs daily and confidentiality is maintained throughout their stay. At the Freetown Female CC, HRCSL was informed that the facility had run out of HIV/AIDS test kits for over two months prior to HRCSL's visit. During this period, no test was carried out on new inmates.

However, during interaction with inmates, some stated that they had never received medical attention. An inmate at the Pujehun CC, informed the team that he suffers from asthma and had notified the nurse but nothing has been done about it. He has to purchase his salbutamol inhaler every time he runs out of it. Also, 10 inmates suffering from ulcer, 3 from hernia and 1 from pile at the same CC, informed HRCSL that they had not received any medical help from the centre. However, the Centre Manager informed HRCSL that they were aware of the pressing medical needs and a roving medical team was enroute to the centre to address their medical needs.

Bed and Beddings

Rule 21 of the NMR clearly states that:

“Every prisoner shall, in accordance with local or national standards, be provided with a separate bed and with separate and sufficient bedding which shall be clean when issued, kept in good order and changed often enough to ensure its cleanliness”.

Majority of male and female inmates do not have access to individual beds. However, some inmates at the Freetown Female CC and MRC had access to either metal or wooden beds. The remaining inmates are provided with foam mattresses that are spread on the bare floor. According to the officers, this lack of metal or wooden beds was mainly due to security reasons, as inmates could use the bed parts to harm themselves or other inmates.

HRCSL observed that the foam mattresses in most of the male CCs were insufficient in number and completely worn out. Mattresses are joined together and inmates sleep two or three to a mattress. A cell at the PTDSC with over 70 inmates had only 16 worn out mattresses. A cell at the Moyamba CC with 24 inmates had only 5 mattresses. In the Mattru Jong CC, a cell with 17 inmates had 6 mattresses and another with 21 inmates had only 5 mattresses. A cell in the Mafanta CC had 50 inmates with 15 mattresses. Another cell at KMCC had 18 inmates and 2 worn out mattresses. A cell at the Makeni Male CC had 45 inmates and 15 mattresses. As a result, many inmates sleep on the bare floors due to the overcrowding.



Worn-out mattresses in a male cell at the PTDSC



Metal beds at the medical unit (Left) and a cell at the Freetown Female CC (Right)

According to Corrections Officers, at the PTDSC, Port Loko, Freetown Female, Mattru Jong and Kailahun CCs, the facilities last received beddings two years ago. The Kenema Male and Makeni Male CCs received the last supplies in 2022.

When bedsheets are unavailable, inmates in Moyamba CC use bath towels sewn together as bedsheets whilst inmates in the Pujehun CC spread their towels on the floor to sleep on. All cells in Female CCs or female sections within CCs had mattresses although in some centres these mattresses were observed to be worn-out.

HRCSL observed that there were no mosquito nets hanging over the mattresses in many of the cells across the CCs monitored. Mosquito nets were only seen in few cells at the Freetown Female and Kenema Female CCs. The Centre Managers explained that mosquito nets are not supplied to inmates in order to prevent inmates from using the nets to commit suicide or strangulation. In some centres, mosquito nets were instead used as mesh to cover the cell windows.

Inmates in all CCs monitored informed HRCSL that their cells were infested with bedbugs resulting to them being infected by various ailments/ skin infections.

Clothing

Rule 19 (1)&(2) of the NMR states that

“Every prisoner who is not allowed to wear his or her own clothing shall be provided with an outfit of clothing suitable for the climate and adequate to keep him or her in good health. Such clothing shall in no manner be degrading or humiliating.

2. All clothing shall be clean and kept in proper condition. Underclothing shall be changed and washed as often as necessary for the maintenance of hygiene”.

Corrections officers informed HRCSL that upon admission, each male inmate is provided with at least a set of jumper (if available). The number of jumpers provided to an inmate varies from one centre to another. Officers at the Bo Male CC, informed HRCSL that inmates are given 2 sets of jumpers while those at the Pujehun CC explained that only one set of jumpers are given to inmates due to inadequate supply.

Some CCs do not provide jumpers for all the inmates. This was particularly observed in the male CCs with the exception of the Kambia and Kabala CCs where all inmates were seen wearing the jumpers for their

respective categories. HRCSL further noted that 80% of inmates at the Mattru Jong and Moyamba CCs had jumpers, although they were worn out. Many of the inmates in other CCs particularly MRC, Pujehun, Freetown Male and Kenema Male CCs wore plain/civilian attire due to limited supply of jumpers. Female inmates in all CCs monitored wore clean uniforms, although some of the uniforms were old and worn out.



Male inmates at the Kabala CC



Inmates at the Kenema Male CC without jumpers



HRCSL staff engaging inmates at the Kenema Female CC

Sanitation

Rule 15 of the NMR states that:

“The sanitary installations shall be adequate to enable every prisoner to comply with the needs of nature when necessary and in a clean and decent manner”.

Access to toilet and bathing facilities vary from one CC to another and sometimes from one cell to another within the same CC.

HRCSL observed that the Kenema Female, Kambia Female, Kailahun, Mattru Jong, Sefadu and Moyamba CCs, the cells in the new blocks at the PTDSC, 36 cells at the Clarkson Block in Freetown Male CC and some cells in the Freetown Female CC have toilet and bathroom facilities within their cells. The other CCs have general toilet and bathrooms outside the cells for use during the day and use buckets to defecate after lock-up. These are emptied by inmates in the outside toilets in the morning hours.



A bathroom in one of the cells in the Port Loko CC



A toilet in one of the cells at the PTDSC

Toiletries

Corrections officers informed HRCSL that upon admission, each inmate is given a tooth brush, a tube of tooth paste and two bars of soap, one for bathing and the other for laundry. Female inmates are given sanitary pads. Subsequent allocations of toiletries are given to them monthly, when supplies are available.

However, some inmates explained that not in all cases did they received the individual allocation of toiletries. For example, 54 inmates at the Kenema Male CC who were admitted into the facility the day before HRCSL visited did not received toiletries on admission, whilst some inmates at the PTDSC claimed that for over two weeks they had being bathing with just water and no soap. Further, inmates at the Kailahun CC reported that they are seldom provided with soap, tooth paste and tooth brushes and had not been provided with prison wears (jumpers).

Inmates in the Bo Male, Pujehun and Moyamba CCs told HRCSL that toiletries and bars of laundry soaps were last supplied to them in June and for MRC since July. In many cases, their relatives provide these items for them.

Cell ventilation and lighting

Rule 14 (a) & (b) of the NMR states that, in all places where prisoners are required to live or work:

(a) *“The windows shall be large enough to enable the prisoners to read or work by natural light and shall be so constructed that they can allow the entrance of fresh air whether or not there is artificial ventilation”;*

(b) *“Artificial light shall be provided sufficient for the prisoners to read or work without injury to eyesight”.*

Correction Officers in all the CCs rated ventilation to be good in the cells of their respective CCs, but



Building showing windows at the Kenema Male CC

HRCSL observed that female cells at the Port Loko CC were dark and had poor air circulation because the windows were covered with cloths to keep mosquitos away. One of the female cells at the Sefadu CC had no window. HRCSL also observed that two male cells at the Moyamba CC were dark and very hot because the windows were small.

Corrections officers and inmates at the Makeni Male CC reported that the low height of the building does not allow for adequate ventilation in the cells and thus, during the dry season, the heat generated by the sun, coupled with overcrowding sometimes cause inmates to faint as a result of suffocation and excessive perspiration.

4.6 Right to Education and Recreation

Section 9 (1) of the Constitution of Sierra Leone 1991 states that:

“The Government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal rights and adequate educational opportunities for all citizens at all levels by;

- a. *ensuring that every citizen is given the opportunity to be educated to the best of his ability, aptitude and inclination by providing educational facilities at all levels and aspects of education such as primary, secondary, vocational, technical, college and university;”*

Rule 104 (1) & (2) of the NMR states that

1. *“Provision shall be made for the further education of all prisoners capable of profiting thereby, including religious instruction in the countries where this is possible. The education of illiterate prisoners and of young prisoners shall be compulsory and special attention shall be paid to it by the prison administration.”*

2. *“So far as practicable, the education of prisoners shall be integrated with the educational system of the country so that after their release they may continue their education without difficulty.”*

Rule 64 of the NMR states that

“Every prison shall have a library for the use of all categories of prisoners, adequately stocked with both recreational and instructional books, and prisoners shall be encouraged to make full use of it”.



An inmate at the Kenema Female CC being taught by a Corrections Officer



Lecture room at the Makeni Male CC

There is no provision for formal education opportunities for inmates in all the CCs monitored except at the Makeni Male and Female CCs where inmates have access to Certificate and Diploma courses at tertiary level certified by the University of Makeni (UNIMAK). There is a dedicated structure within the Ccs where classes are conducted for inmates. Corrections officers in other Ccs informed HRCSL that plans are underway to expand this initiative to other CCs located in places where universities are available. Due to the lack of formal education opportunities in the other CCs, convicted inmates who were in formal education had been unable to continue their education since their conviction.

Adult literacy and basic numeracy classes are conducted at the Kenema Male, Kenema Female and Freetown Male CCs. Computer literacy is also taught at the Freetown Male CC in their dedicated library. Funding for the computer literacy classes is provided by Don Bosco, an International NGO.

CCs focus mainly on providing informal education for inmates. Bread baking is the most common skill taught in male CCs because each has a bakery and inmates who are willing to learn this skill help the staff in baking the bread. Tailoring and bead embroidery are other skills taught in CCs except for MRC, Mattru

Jong and Sefadu CCs where there are no other skills training opportunities. At the Freetown Male CC, Carpentry, Welding, Masonry, Plumbing, Shoe making, Arts & Crafts are available and also provide training on the use of musical instruments. Apart from bread which is consumed internally, all other products are available for sale to visitors



An inmate in the carpentry workshop at the Makeni Male CC

Training materials are not always provided by the CCs. Inmates at the Freetown Male CC informed HRCSL that the non-availability of training materials and the lack of good tools and machines were challenges encountered in learning the skills. The tailoring unit at the PTDSC does not operate effectively due to the lack of equipment. It has only one sewing machine. The head of the unit who is also an officer, assists by providing training materials. The centre had not received any support from government or partners over the last three years.

Part of the income from the products sold is retained by the Welfare Officer which is given to the respective inmates after serving their jail terms. Another part is kept by the welfare officer and given to the inmate upon request to either purchase items they need or to be sent to their relatives. The third part is retained by the CCs and used to buy training materials.

HRCSL further observed that the Bo Female, Kenema Female and Freetown Female CCs provide training in tailoring, bead making, hair dressing, gara-tie dyeing and soap making. For Bo Female CC, the New Harvest Ministries and AdvocAid provide support to the skills training programme. Female inmates in other CCs do not have access to any form of education or skills training which contravenes Rule 104 of the NMR above.



Inmates in the tailoring workshop at the Freetown Female CC

The Freetown Male CC has a standard functioning library while Bo Male and Sefadu CCs have reading rooms that they referred to as libraries that provide reading and research materials for life-long learning. The remaining CCs either do not have libraries or have libraries that were no longer in use. Even in CCs with libraries or reading rooms, inmates seldom make use of these libraries.

Leisure and Recreation

Rule 105 of the NMR states that:

“Recreational and cultural activities shall provide in all prisons for the benefit of the mental and physical health of prisoners”.

CCs have fenced courtyards and buildings with corridors where inmates get fresh air and mingle. Inmates who wish to, can spend most of the day time outside of their cells, during which they are free to engage in skills training as well as leisure and recreational activities. In most male CCs inmates have the opportunity to play football, draught, cards, or ludo. However, in centres like Makeni Male, Pujehun, Kabala and Magburaka CCs, male inmates do not have the opportunity to play football as a result of limited space.

Female inmates in most CCs had access to either cards, ludo or television for information, education and entertainment purposes, while inmates at the PTDSC, Kenema Female and Freetown Female CCs also have opportunities to play football and volleyball. There are no leisure or recreational facilities provided for female inmates at the Port Loko, Mattru Jong, Kambia and Moyamba CCs.

4.7 Right to Work

Rule 96 (1)&(2)

“Sentenced prisoners shall have the opportunity to work and/or to actively participate in their rehabilitation, subject to a determination of physical and mental fitness by a physician or other qualified health-care professionals.

2. Sufficient work of a useful nature shall be provided to keep prisoners actively employed for a normal working day”.

Convicted inmates are allowed to do work that carries remuneration either within or outside the centres. For instance, convicted inmates at both the MRC and Moyamba CC form part of the workforce on the ongoing construction of additional buildings within the centres. Some male inmates at the Sefadu CC are employed by the Mapy Investment and Construction Company which is constructing a fence within the centre. At the Mattru Jong CC, inmates are allowed to work in small agricultural farms (gardens) in the neighborhood. Inmates at the Kenema Male and Kailahun CCs also engaged in farming outside the centres.

It must be noted that inmates who work outside of the CCs are those whose jail terms are near completion.



Ongoing construction at the Moyamba CC where male inmates work

Income earned is saved either by the Welfare or the Reception Officers in the centres and are later given to inmates upon their release. Nonetheless inmates are given the opportunity to request for between N1e 20 to 100 (which is approximately US\$1 to 4) at a time, whenever they want to buy items for their personal use.

Female inmates in all CCs do not have access to opportunities to work outside the centres.

4.8 Contact with the outside world, social relations and Reintegration

Maintaining close ties with the family and friends while in detention is very crucial for the emotional, physical wellbeing of inmates and for their post re-integration.

Rule 58(1) of the NMR states that:

“Prisoners shall be allowed, under necessary supervision, to communicate with their family and friends at regular intervals:

- (a) By corresponding in writing and using, where available, telecommunication, electronic, digital and other means; and*
- (b) By receiving visits”.*

Additionally, Rule 106 of the NMR provides that:

Rule 106 *“Special attention shall be paid to the maintenance and improvement of such relations between a prisoner and his or her family as are desirable in the best interests of both”.*

The SLCS has a policy for visitation which enables inmates to have direct contact with legal representatives, relatives and friends. Across all the CCs, legal representatives and official visitors are allowed to visit inmates from Mondays to Saturdays between 9:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. Relatives and friends are also allowed to visit on Tuesdays, Thursday and Fridays at the same time slots. An inmate is first notified of the visitor's arrival and seek his/her consent to meet with the visitor. Before meeting with the inmate, a manual body search is conducted on the visitor for security reasons. Relatives/friends has a maximum of thirty minutes to interact and chat with the inmate while legal and official visitors are not time bound within the visiting period.



HRCSL staff inside the visiting bay at the Port Loko CC

Inmates who are detained in CCs where they are not ordinarily resident have challenges in enjoying this right. A convicted inmate serving a long-term sentence for treason at the Pujehun CC informed HRCSL that he is dissatisfied with his relocation from Freetown Male CC to the CC to serve his sentence. He alleged that his family is constrained to visit him as he is allowed to receive visitors only once a month.

Due to the long distance and remote location of the Mafanta CC, inmates hardly receive visitors as the visitors find it difficult to access the CC. Visitors to this CC, which is located 3 miles away from the nearest surrounding village, have to book or notify the Centre Manager at least one day before the visit to enable the Manager to plan the schedule for visitors from distant locations. This CC was built to accommodate convicted male inmates transferred from other CCs in order to decongest those CCs.

Telephone Communication

Each centre has a dedicated mobile phone through which inmates contact their relatives, friends and legal service providers/private practitioners. Calls are made in the presence of a corrections officer.

Inmates at the Freetown Female and Moyamba CCs serving sentences for treason, informed HRCSL that they were not permitted to make telephone calls. Following HRCSL's intervention corrections officers informed HRCSL during the validation of this report that the restrictions for all treason inmates have been lifted.

Although the administrative heads are responsible for ensuring that the pre-paid phones have mobile credit, in most CCs inmates also request their relatives to provide mobile credit so that the phones are always accessible for making calls.

Reintegration

Rule 107 of the NMR states that:

“From the beginning of a prisoner's sentence, consideration shall be given to his or her future after release and he or she shall be encouraged and provided assistance to maintain or establish such relations with persons or agencies outside the prison as may promote the prisoner's

rehabilitation and the best interests of his or her family.”

While the CCs strive to maintain close ties between inmates and their relations, very little is done to support inmates after release as the SLCS does not have any reintegration strategy.

Counselling sessions are provided for inmates throughout their stay and few weeks to the completion of their terms of imprisonment. Family tracing is also done in cases where inmates provide contact details of their relatives to ensure smooth communication and facilitate the reintegration process. Welfare Officers at the CCs informed HRCSL that they sometimes check on the welfare and progress of reintegration of inmates after their release.

In most CCs, neither transportation nor transport fare is provided to inmates after completing their jail terms regardless of where they intend to reside. However, in some CCs, like Magburaka CC, inmates who are well-behaved are assisted by the officers with transport fares to return home.

HRCSL was informed that Prison Watch Sierra Leone (a local NGO) supports the Freetown Female CC with vehicles to convey discharged inmates to distant destinations. Reintegration support in the form of financial assistance is also provided for discharged inmates at the Freetown Female, Kenema Female and Makeni Female CCs by Prison Watch Sierra Leone and AdvocAid.

Constant checks and follow ups on discharged inmates may restrain them from engaging in crimes that led to their incarceration. However, the absence of a reintegration strategy in some ways undermines the rehabilitation/transformation process that CCs are now working towards.

4.9 Freedom of Religion and Conscience

Rule 2 (1) of the NMR state that:

Rule 2 (1) “...*The religious beliefs and moral precepts of prisoners shall be respected*”.

This right is freely enjoyed by inmates as guaranteed under national, regional, and international standards. Religion plays a very important role in re-shaping the minds / psychosocial lives of inmates.

CCs have designated structures or spaces within, where congregational worship sessions are held. Pastors, Imams, and faith-based groups are allowed to pay regular visits and conduct faith-based prayers with inmates.



The Mosque at the Makeni Male CC

The Freetown Male CC has a separate building which is used exclusively for church services on Wednesdays and Sundays and another used exclusively for daily muslim prayers and Friday Juma prayers. Similar structures exist in other Ccs.

The designated building where Christian services are held at the PTDSC is currently under construction and near completion.

The SLCS has among its staff Chaplains and Imams who attend to the religious and psychosocial needs of inmates. Inmates also have among themselves, those who lead the daily worship and prayers. This is a form of therapy for inmates.

The religious tolerance that is neatly embedded in the society and for which Sierra Leone is internationally acclaimed is practiced within the courtyards of the CCs. Some Christians and Muslims join prayer sessions conducted by visiting Pastors, Imams and philanthropic faith-based groups

regardless of their individual faiths.

4.10 Internal Discipline

Rule 36 of the NMR states that:

“Discipline and order shall be maintained with no more restriction than is necessary to ensure safe custody, the secure operation of the prison and a well-ordered community life.”

Rule 43 (1) of the NMR states that:

“In no circumstances may restrictions or disciplinary sanctions amount to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. The following practices, in particular, shall be prohibited:

- (a) Indefinite solitary confinement;*
- (b) Prolonged solitary confinement;*
- (c) Placement of a prisoner in a dark or constantly lit cell;*
- (d) Corporal punishment or the reduction of a prisoner's diet or drinking water;*
- (e) Collective punishment”.*

Rule 22 and 23 of the Bangkok Rules state that:

Rule 22 “Punishment by close confinement or disciplinary segregation shall not be applied to pregnant women, women with infants and breastfeeding mothers in prison”.

Rule 23 “Disciplinary sanctions for women prisoners shall not include a prohibition of family contact, especially with children”.

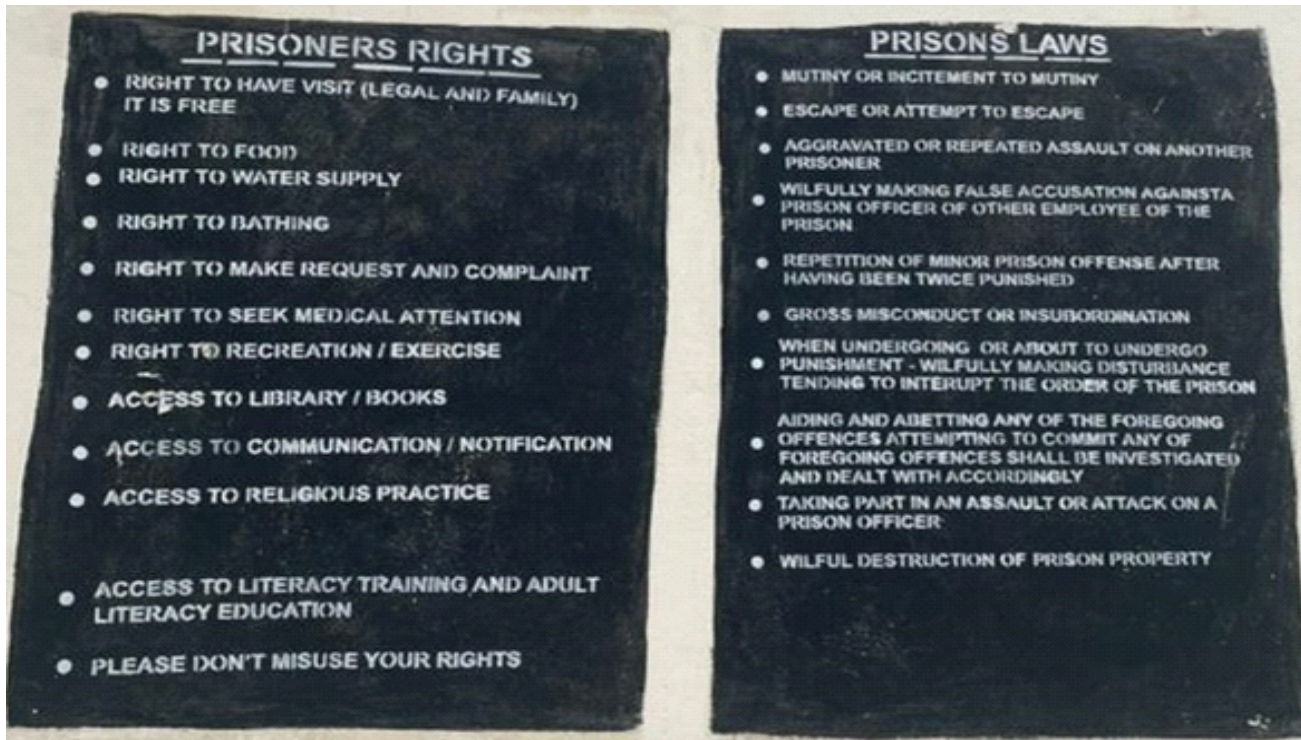
All CCs monitored have laid down rules and regulations that inmates must abide by. These bye-laws are publicly displayed within the centres and corrections officers also interpret them to inmates upon their admission. Regular counselling and sensitization on the bye-laws is conducted to prevent indiscipline in these CCs.

Discipline is maintained initially by inmates through the Senior Yard Provost who is also an inmate and later escalated to the Officer-in-Charge of the Yard (OC Yard) if unresolved. The Second in Command (2IC) and the Centre Managers are the last point of call. Corrections officers settle disputes among inmates through mediation. Most CCs informed HRCSL that disputes between inmates and corrections officers rarely happen because corrections officers have been trained not to get offended by inmates' unruly behavior. However, when there is conflict between inmates and corrections officers, an investigation is conducted by the Centre Manager and the defaulting individual is usually reprimanded or punished. If corrections officers are found wanting, they are not reprimanded or punished in the presence of the inmates.

The punishable offences include: fighting, abusive language, quarrelling, stealing, provocation and incitement. The most common form of punishment is isolation. CCs have at least one separate cell for confining inmates (solitary confinement) who breach the rules. Inmates are locked up in these cells for few hours as a way of punishment and to maintain decorum in the CCs. Other forms of punishments require inmates to clean their cells/centres, restrict visiting rights/phone calls, reduction of food rations and suspension from skills training programmes. The SLCS may also revoke the remission of convicted inmates who violate the disciplinary rules.

In one of the CCs, HRCSL was informed by an inmate that they are sometimes handcuffed and asked to stand up in a position where the sole of their feet does not touch the ground as a disciplinary measure.

Another inmate further stated that corrections officers instruct them to “pump” (squatting and standing in quick succession with hands on both ears).



Information on inmates rights (left) and Bye-laws (right) displayed at the Freetown Female CC

4.11 Access to Justice

This section examines how inmates on trial access the courts in a bid to have speedy trial and fair hearing.

Section 23 of the Constitution of Sierra Leone 1991 states that:

(1) “Whenever any person is charged with a criminal offence he shall unless the charge is withdrawn, be afforded a fair hearing within a reasonable time by an independent and impartial court established by law”.

Rule 119 (1) of the NMR states that:

1 “Every untried prisoner has the right to be promptly informed about the reasons for his or her detention and about any charges against him or her”.

Table 4.2 Number of inmates detained in correctional centres monitored by categories:

No.	Correctional Centres	Date of visit	No. of inmates on remand		No. of trial inmates				No. of inmates convicted		Total No. of Inmates
					Undergoing trial		Awaiting Indictment				
					M	F	M	F			
1	Kenema Male	2/09/25	121	-	21	-	41	-	202	-	385
2	Kenema Female	2/09/25	-	05	-	-	-	-	-	05	10
3	Kailahun	3/09/25	21	-	27	-	20	-	144	-	212
4	Sefadu	3/09/25	166	6	01	-	31	01	238	07	450
5	Pre-trial Simulation and Detention Centre	8/09/25	127	04	04	-	-	-	156	03	294

6	Kambia	9/09/25	22	02	09	-	-	-	28	-	61
7	Freetown Male	9/09/25	237	-	333	-	242	-	764	-	1576
8	Port Loko	10/09/25	47	01	47	01	21	-	107	03	227
9	Bo Male	11/09/25	57	-	52	-	-	-	76	-	185
10	Bo Female	11/09/29	-	08	-	04	-	1	-	06	19
11	Mattru Jong	12/09/25	97	2	13	-	13	-	25	-	150
12	Pujehun	12/09/25	35	-	05	-	28	-	54	-	122
13	Moyamba	13/09/25	23	02	04	-	24	1	71	-	125
14	Kabala	15/09/25	84	01	-	-	18	-	52	-	155
15	Mafanta	16/09/25	-	-	-	-	-	-	772	-	772
16	Makeni Male	17/09/25	169	-	51	-	19	-	132	-	371
17	Makeni Female	17/09/25	-	11	-	03	-	-	-	08	22
18	Magburaka	16/09/25	23	-	05	-	22	-	33	-	83
19	Male Reintegration Centre	18/09/25	-	-	-	-	-	-	141	-	141
20	Freetown Female	24/09/25	-	33	-	28	-	27	-	28	116
Total			1304		608		509		3055		5476

4.11.1 Attendance at court sittings

SLCS has the responsibility to convey inmates standing trial to court. HRCSL was informed that there were challenges in conveying inmates to court due to inadequate number of vehicles and the distances to be covered to attend court sittings. For instance, the Moyamba CC has only one vehicle that is used to convey inmates to attend court sittings at Moyamba Town, Rotifunk, Gbangbatoke, Mile 91, Taiama and Moyamba Junction. This situation results in one vehicle being over used to take inmates to the various locations and also puts pressure on the schedules for court sittings. The Kambia CC does not have a vehicle to transport inmates to Court and relies on the SLP to assist in transporting inmates.

- **Magistrate's Courts**

Remand inmates are inmates standing trial in the Magistrates' Court. The Judiciary has established at least one Magistrates' Court in each of the 16 Districts.

- **High Courts**

Seven out of the 16 districts were reported to have functioning High Courts. In districts where the High Courts do not sit, inmates are either transferred to attend court sittings in other districts, or wait until the next circuit High Court sitting. Trial inmates at the Kambia CC and PTDSC are transferred to continue their trial in Port Loko or Freetown respectively.

At the time of conducting this research, trial inmates were not attending High Court sessions because the High Court was on recess.

- **Inmates Awaiting Indictments**

For inmates who have had a preliminary investigation trial in the Magistrates Court and have been committed for trial in the High Court due to the nature of the offence(s) they have been charged with, they have to wait for an indictment to be drawn up by the Law Officers Department in the Ministry of Justice. They remain detained within the CCs during that waiting period unless they are granted bail. HRCSL noted that 509 inmates across CCs were awaiting indictment, with many waiting for over 6 months. At the Makeni Male CC, two Trial Inmates had spent the longest period awaiting an indictment, for twenty (20)

and thirty-six (36) months respectively. Also, an inmate at the Makeni Female CC, who was detained for conspiracy, had been awaiting an indictment for over 16 months.

At the Magburaka CC, eight (8) inmates were awaiting indictment for between one (1) and three (3) years. The Pujehun CC had Ten (10) inmates awaiting indictment for over 6 months. The Freetown Male CC had two hundred and forty-two (242) inmates awaiting indictment, eight of them since 2023. In contrast, for Freetown Female CC there were 27 inmates awaiting indictment for less than 6 months.

HRCSL is concerned about the delay in the preferment of indictment which impact on the right to speedy trial and affects the mental health and wellbeing of inmates. It also puts pressure on the correctional centres in the form of overcrowding and other welfare issues.

- **Prolonged Trial**

Inmates and Corrections Officers reported delays in completion of trials. HRCSL was informed that Magistrates' Courts sit regularly in all districts except in Pujehun and Falaba. Despite the efforts of the SLCS to ensure that inmates attend their court sittings, sometimes their matters are not called up for hearing or adjourned immediately they are called up. According to the Corrections Officers, inmates' matters are sometimes not called for hearing due to the number of cases to be heard in a day.

Remand and trial inmates in all CCs informed HRCSL that their matters are frequently adjourned because complainants and witnesses fail to attend court sittings or the Magistrate/Judge is unavailable. An inmate at the PTDSC explained that his matter had been adjourned for four consecutive sittings due to the failure of the witness to attend court. Five inmates at the Moyamba Male CC standing trial for Sexual Penetration, explained that their matter was adjourned for eight consecutive court sittings due to the non-attendance of the complainant. In the Pujehun CC, inmates complained about the long period of adjournments for the High Court and irregular Magistrates' court sittings due to infrequent attendance of the resident Magistrate and assigned High Court Judge. The last High Court sitting in Pujehun was in February 2025. At the Mattru Jong, Sefadu, Magburaka, Moyamba and Kailahun CCs, Trial Inmates stated that they seldom attend court sittings due to irregular sittings of the High Court.

For inmates at the PTDSC, matters not heard before 3:30 p.m. at the Magistrates' Courts at Waterloo and York are adjourned by the respective Magistrates. This was as a result of an agreement between the correctional administration and the Magistrate's Court in order for the Corrections Officers and inmates to return to the CC before the time for lock-up. According to the Corrections Officer, this was for security reasons as the centre has only one vehicle to convey inmates to court sittings at the Magistrate's Courts in Waterloo and in York which is approximately twenty-three (23) miles from Waterloo.

At the Makeni CC, it was also mentioned that matters of inmates standing trial for murder were frequently adjourned due to the insufficient number and sometimes non-attendance of jurors, resulting in prolonged trials.

4.11.2 Inability to meet bail conditions

Across CCs, HRCSL noted that many Remand and Trial Inmates were incarcerated because they could not meet the bail conditions. Two female inmates at the Kambia CC charged with Loitering (one of them visibly pregnant) were found in detention because they were unable to secure sureties to guarantee their release. An inmate at the PTDSC had been granted bail for over 4 months but remained in detention due to lack of a surety. A male inmate at the Moyamba CC, charged with Burglary and Larceny informed HRCSL that he had been given bail a week before HRCSL's visit but could not meet the bail requirement and his potential surety had not been responding to his calls.

The Centre Managers sometimes try to contact relatives of the inmates to assist in securing sureties for them. However, many of the relatives either refused to engage in the discussion or stand as sureties.

4.11.3 Access to Legal Representation

This is a right that should be enjoyed by all inmates through their private or state legal representatives. Rule 119 (2) of the NMR states that:

“If an untried prisoner does not have a legal adviser of his or her own choice, he or she shall be entitled to have a legal adviser assigned to him or her by a judicial or other authority in all cases where the interests of justice so require and without payment by the untried prisoner if he or she does not have sufficient means to pay. Denial of access to a legal adviser shall be subject to independent review without delay”.

The Legal Aid Board (LAB) was set up in 2015 by the Government to provide legal aid services to indigent litigants with a focus on defence work within the criminal justice space. The vast majority of private practitioners are found in Freetown with a few practicing in Makeni, Bo, Kono and Kenema.

Legal representation was noted to be a challenge for inmates. Only a few inmates at CCs in the regional headquarter towns of Bo, Makeni, Port Loko, Kenema and Freetown informed HRCSL that they benefited from the services of the LAB.

Some inmates, particularly at the Freetown Female, Kenema Female and Makeni Female CCs received legal advice and assistance and legal representation via civil society organisations like AdvocAid, Prison Watch and Centre for Accountability and Rule of Law (CARL-SL).

Across CCs, many inmates informed HRCSL that they did not have legal representation because they could not afford to hire the services of a private lawyer. According to an inmate at the PTDSC, priority is given by the Magistrates to matters of those with legal representation and those without are frequently adjourned. HRCSL also noted that the same practice occurs at the High Court. This lack of legal representation affects progress in the proceedings and subsequently delays in speedy trial.

4.12 Sentencing (Fines and custodial sentences)

There were a total of 3,055 (56%) convicted inmates across CCs who were serving custodial sentences. Some of them were serving only custodial sentences, others were serving both custodial sentences with fines while others were serving alternative sentences due to their inability to pay fines or compensations ordered.

Table 4.3 Sample of inmates with fines or sentences or both

Region	District	Offence	Fine (NLe.)	Sentence
Western Area Urban	Freetown (MRC)	3 inmates for Conspiracy	1,500	6 months
Western Rural	Waterloo (PTDSC)	Larceny	1,000	12 months
		Larceny	250	3 months
		Larceny	1,000	12 months
		Larceny	8,400	6 months

Southern	Bo	Failing to produce accused person (Surety)	-	18 months
		Fraudulent conversion	4,500	12 months
		Larceny	5,000	12 months
		Larceny	5,000	18 months
		Larceny	4,000	18 months
		Larceny	3,500	6 months
		Larceny	1,500	6 months
		Larceny	12,000	24 months
		Larceny	4,000	18 months
		Larceny	4,000	12 months
		Larceny	2,000	6 months
	Moyamba	Frequenting	4,000	24 Months
	Matru Jong	Larceny	40,000	12 months
		Larceny	3,200	12 months
	Pujehun	Possession of drugs	5,000	60 months
Larceny of Cocoa		5,000	36 months	
Simple larceny		2,500	18months	
Larceny		2,000	24 months	
		Larceny of bike	-	36 months
		Larceny 3 heads Palm Kernel		18 months
		Larceny of Nokai 1100 phone	2,500	20 months
		Larceny Vehicle Battery	2,000	12 months
		Larceny of Itel phone	2,500	12 months

		Larceny	2,500	36 months
		Larceny of Cacao	2,500	24 months
		Larceny 2 heads palm kernel	4,000	24 months
		Malicious damages	2,000	24 months
		Larceny	-	24 months
		Larceny a bag of palm Kernel	2,000	12 months
		Malicious damage	1,000	6 months
		Malicious damage	1,000	6 months
North West	Port Loko	Cruelty to Child	10,000	12 months
		Larceny	5,000	36 months
		Larceny	3,000	7 months
		Fraudulent conversation	1,000	12 months
		Larceny	5,000	48 months
		Frequenting Area Smoking Kush	2,000	12 months
		Domestic Violence	2,000	12 months
		Insulting Language	3,000	12 months
		Larceny	4,000	12 months
		Larceny	5,000	24 months
		Larceny by Trick	5,000	36 months
		Unlawful possession of Kush	5,000	36 months
		Domestic Violence	1,500	24 months

		Domestic violence	2,000	12 months
		Larceny by trick	5,000	36 months
		Larceny by Bailee	8,000	24 months
		Dangerous Driving	5,250	48 months
North		Larceny	9,000 (Including 4,000 for compensation)	36 months
	Makeni	48 inmates for Larceny	Various amounts	6 to 36 months

The SLCS automatically calculates remission of 1/3 off the custodial sentences for each convicted inmate and informs them of their Expected Date of Departure (EDD).

HRCSL noted that many with alternative sentences (fine or imprisonment) were serving custodial sentences due to their inability to pay the high fine or compensation ordered. At the Magburaka CC, two inmates were serving 18 months sentence because they could not afford to pay the fine of NLe. 3,000 (approx. US\$125) each. Another was fined NLe. 4,000 (US\$167) or serve 16 months in detention.

A female inmate at the Port Loko CC who was convicted of larceny of NLe 3,100 (US\$ 133) was ordered to pay a total sum of NLe. 9,000.00 (NLe. 5,000.00 fine and NLe. 4,000 as compensation to the plaintiff) (approximately US\$ 375) or 36 months in detention. A male inmate at the Sefadu CC found guilty of the offences of conspiracy and burglary was in detention because he was unable to pay the fine of NLe. 4,000.00 (US\$ 167). The Makeni Male CC had 132 convicted inmates with 48 serving custodial sentence of between 6 months and 36 months for the offence of larceny because they could not pay the fine option.

In addition, convicted inmates across CCs complained that the sentences handed down at both the Magistrate's and High Courts were disproportionate to the crimes committed. HRCSL noted that majority of the crimes for which inmates were serving custodial sentences or for which they could not pay fines could be described as petty or minor offences. The high number of inmates serving custodial sentences for unpaid fines suggests that the fine system disproportionately impacts indigent individuals, thereby criminalizing poverty. However, due to the absence of alternative sentences, Judges and Magistrates can only hand down sentences prescribed by the law. This situation should be remedied with the passage of the Criminal Procedure Act 2024, which came into effect in September 2025.

HRCSL also observed the inconsistencies in which sentences were handed down for inmates with similar offences. For instance, in Port Loko, an inmate convicted of Larceny was sentenced to 36 months imprisonment or pay a fine of NLe 5, 000 (US\$ 208) while an inmate of the same offence in Bo was sentenced for the same fine but for only 12 months imprisonment. Similarly, in Waterloo, an inmate convicted of the same offence was fined NLe 8,400 (US\$ 350) but only sentenced for 6 months.

Another category of convicted inmates was those who were sentenced to both custodial sentences and fines and had completed their term of imprisonment but remained in detention because they could not pay the fines due. Four of these were found at the PTDSC; one had completed his sentence two weeks before HRCSL's visit but could not pay the NLe.1,500.00 (US\$ 66) fine.

Chapter 5

5. Analysis of the Human Rights situation in the SLCS's detention facilities

Under the SLCS Act 2014, the SLCS has the responsibility to protect and respect the rights of all inmates in their custody. HRCSL notes that in carrying out this responsibility, the SLCS is fraught with a lot of challenges that undermine its operations, performance and efficiency. This chapter will analyze the Human Rights (HR) implications and challenges faced by inmates in detention facilities.

5.1 Centre facilities and overcrowdin Facilities

HRCSL noted that the facilities of the SLCS were inadequate to provide minimum detention standards for inmates as required by the NMR. HRCSL observed that most of the infrastructures are not only old (having been built in the colonial period when the national population was small and crime rates were low) with insufficient space for accommodation, recreation, or rehabilitation activities, but also poorly maintained. Across CCs, the internal upkeep of the detention facilities is generally poor and added to the discomfort experienced by inmates, particularly in the male detention centres.

Overcrowding

Correctional centres are required to admit any inmate once they are remanded, convicted by the courts or for police safe custody, regardless of their holding capacities. The actual total holding capacity of the 20 CCs visited is 2,009. However, the total inmate population at the time of conducting the research was 5,476, which exceeded that number by 173%.

Table 5.1 Holding Capacity and Inmates Population at the Time of Visit

No.	Correctional Centre	Date of visit	No. of cells		Holding Capacity		Total Holding Capacity	No. of inmates at the time of visit		Total No. of inmates at the time of visit
			M	F	M	F		M	F	
1	Kenema Male CC	2/09/25	55	-	150	-	150	385	-	385
2	Kenema Female CC	2/09/25	-	4	-	32	32	-	10	10
3	Kailahun CC (Male)	3/09/25	15		60		60	212		212
4	Kailahun Correctional Centre (Female)	3/09/25		5		15	15		-	-
5	Sefadu Correctional Centre	3/09/25	10	2	-	-	200	436	14	450
6	Pre-trial Simulation and Detention Centre (Male)	8/09/25	5		100		100	287		287
7	Pre-trial Simulation and Detention Centre (Female)	8/09/25		1		10	10		07	7

8	Kambia Correctional Centre (Male Section)	9/09/25	4		60		60	59		59
9	Kambia Correctional Centre (Female)	9/09/25		2		20	20		02	02
10	Freetown Male Correctional Centre	9/09/25	324	-	324	-	324	1576	-	1576
11	Port Loko Correctional Centre (Male)	10/09/25	15		100		100	222		222
12	Port Loko Correctional Centre (Female)	10/09/25		2		10	10		05	05
13	Bo Male Correctional Centre	11/09/25	14	-	80	-	80	185	-	185
14	Bo Female Correctional Centre	11/09/25	-	4	-	30	30	-	19	19
15	Mattru Jong Correctional Centre	12/09/25	3	1	-	-	60	148	02	150
16	Pujehun Correctional Centre (Male)	12/09/25	19		73		73	122	-	122
17	Pujehun Correctional Centre (Female)	12/09/25		1		2	2		-	-
18	Moyamba Correctional Centre (Male)	13/09/25	9		50		50	122		122
19	Moyamba Correctional Centre (Female)	13/09/25		4		15	15		03	03
20	Kabala Correctional Centre (Male)	15/09/25	10		70		70	154		154
21	Kabala Correctional Centre (Female)	15/09/25		2		10	10		01	01
22	Mafanta Correctional Centre	16/09/25	18	-	320	-	200	772	-	772
23	Makeni Male Correctional Centre	17/09/25	7	-	80	-	80	371	-	371
24	Makeni Female Correctional Centre	17/09/25	-	4	-	45	45	-	22	22
25	Magburaka Correctional Centre (Male)	16/09/25	10		60	15	60	83	-	83
26	Magburaka Correctional Centre (Female)	16/09/25		3		15	15	83	-	-
27	Male Reintegration Centre	18/09/25	9	-	120	-	120	141	-	141
28	Freetown Female Correctional Centre	24/09/25	-	18	-	18	18	-	11 6	116
Total							2009			5,476

Table 5.1 above shows that the number of inmates in detention across most correctional centres far exceeded their actual holding capacities. Overcrowding is one of the most persistent and widespread challenges that the SLCS has to contend with. All the facilities save for the female sections in correctional centres were observed to be overcrowded. A cell in the male section at the Moyamba CC had 24 inmates instead of the 6 for which it was built. Sixteen (16) inmates at the Kenema Male CC shared a cell initially built to accommodate 5 people. On the day of HRCSL's visit, the Freetown Male CC had 1,576 inmates instead of its actual holding capacity of 324. This clearly shows an excess of 385% of inmates in detention.

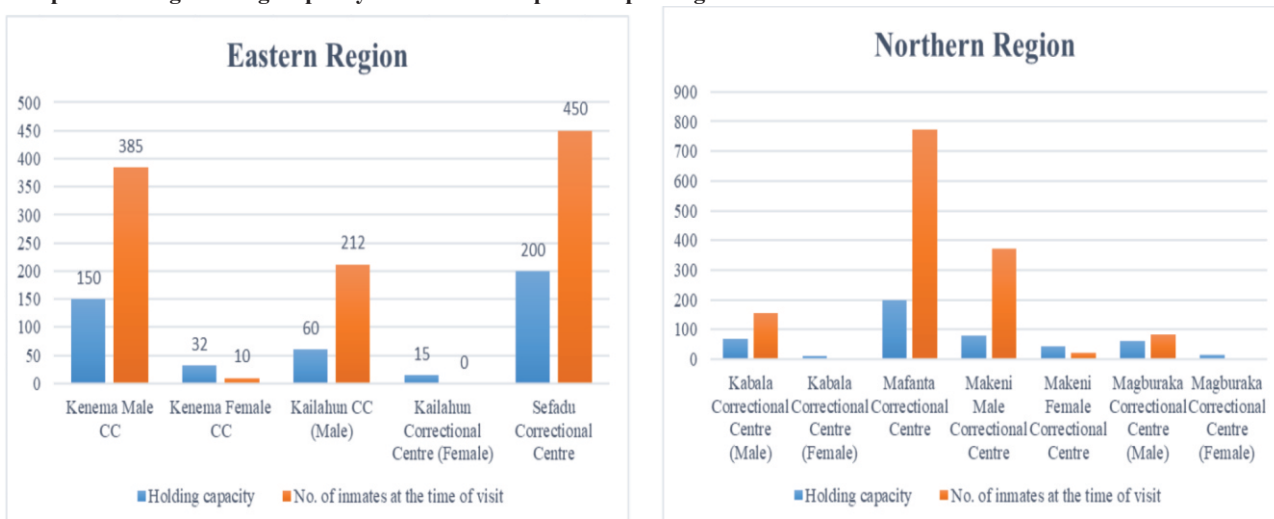
Overcrowding creates conditions that are unhygienic and unsafe for healthy living of inmates and compromise security management. Although many of the cells and washrooms were observed to be cleaned by inmates, but the smell from the cells and washrooms were nauseating. The body odour of inmates was observed to be strong due to the congestion and irregular supplies of toiletries. HRCSL considers this as a serious challenge to the health and well-being of inmates and contrary to Rule 18(1) of the NMR, which to some extent can be a reason for the body rashes that are prevalent among inmates across Ccs.

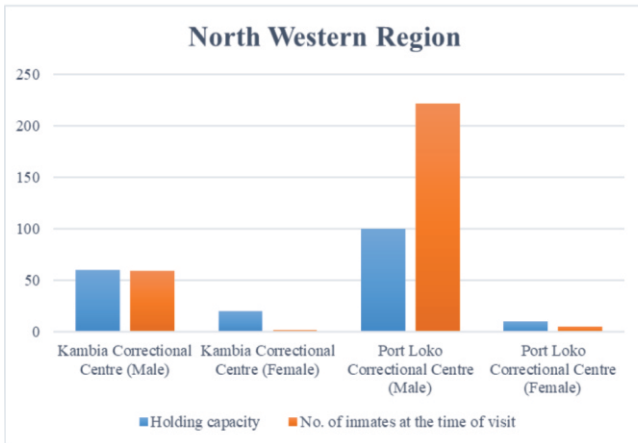
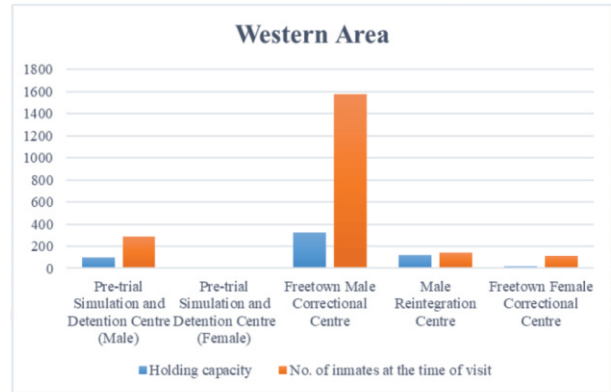
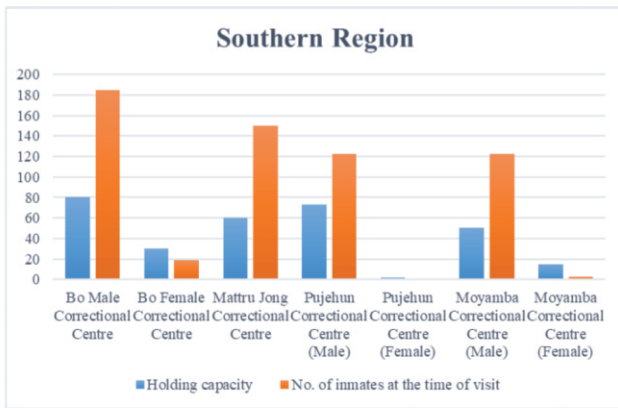
Delays in processing indictments, frequent and long periods of adjournments for ongoing cases, inadequate legal representation and the absence of resident High Court Judges and Magistrates in some districts, create a significant backlog in the judicial system and has contributed to overcrowding in CCs. Equally, the inability of inmates to meet bail conditions or pay fines and compensation were considered to be other factors affecting overcrowding.

HRCSL also observed that another effect of overcrowding was the inadequate and poor sleeping conditions for inmates as most cells had far less mattresses relative to the inmate population within, forcing some to share mattresses or many others to sleep on bare card boards. Due to the poor sleeping conditions, inmates reported that they suffered from body pains, fever, cold and body rash. This situation is at variance with Rule 13 of the NMR and also amounts to inhuman and degrading treatment, prohibited under Articles 7 and 5 of the ICCPR and UDHR respectively.

Overcrowding in correctional facilities further compounds the problem of managing the inmates, resulting in increased workloads and making working conditions even more strenuous for Corrections Officers. HRCSL observed a disproportionate ratio between the inmate population and corrections officers, clearly indicating that there is a shortage of personnel managing correctional centres. This can partly explain why Corrections Officers seldom go on leave and prefer to volunteer their services while they should be resting and rejuvenating to maintain health and vitality.

Graphs Showing Holding Capacity and Inmates Population per Region at the Time of Visit





5.2 Non-Separation and non-classification of inmates

Another finding observed was the non-separation and non-classification of inmates. The SLCS Act 2014 only makes provision for separation based on gender whereas the NMR goes further to provide for separation based on status and risk. Though male and female are housed in separate correctional facilities or separate wings within the same centre, there is no status-based separation as Remand, Convicted and Trial detainees except for MRC and Mafanta CC that house purely convicted male inmates.

Also, there is no risk and offence-based separation where inmates should be separated based on the “seriousness” of the offence, risk level, and rehabilitative needs. The Correction Officers attribute this to limited space, as a result of overcrowding and for security reason. They maintain that overcrowding and inadequate facilities often result in mixing of Remand, Trial and Convicted inmates and that the mixing is also to prevent conspiracy to escape, as they perceive that a convict nearing completion of jail term will not connive with inmates on remand to plan/plot any escape. Despite the reasons, HRCSL considers this as inappropriate and contrary to best practice. Rule 11(b & c) and Rule 93(1) (a & b) of the NMR clearly outline the reasons for the separation and classification, taking into account among other issues, necessities for their treatment and risk levels. Rule 93(1)(a) requires correctional centres “*To separate from others those prisoners who, by reason of their criminal records or characters, are likely to exercise a bad influence*”. HRCSL considers this separation based on status and classification most appropriate to prevent correctional facilities serving as centres for recruitment of criminals particularly since many inmates spend long periods awaiting indictment or going through trial. Non-separation increases the potential and likelihood for recidivism.

5.3 Right to Food

Feeding of inmates was observed to be a problem across the correctional centres as inmates complained of reduced rations and the quality of the food provided. Rule 22(1) of the NMR, outlines the rights of inmates to food of nutritional value, and wholesome quality that is well prepared and served. HRCSL observed that these provisions were not strictly complied with. According to the SLCS, overcrowding makes it

difficult to meet the individual needs of inmates as it puts a strain on its resources. Its budget allocation covers both administrative and operational cost (which includes the cost for feeding, clothing and the general welfare of inmates) and that the inadequate and late disbursement of funds, affect the running of its detention facilities and the provision of mandatory services to inmates.

5.4 Rehabilitation & Reintegration

The absence of formal education in all but one CC (Makeni Male CC) and lack of informal education in MRC, Sefadu, Mattru Jong, Magburaka and Kabala Ccs erodes one of the purposes for which the Correctional Centres were established, which is to rehabilitate inmates in order to prevent them from committing crimes upon their release and promote their reintegration into society as law abiding citizens. This is particularly a concern for the MRC which was established for the reintegration of inmates who are close to completing their custodial sentences. It also violates the right to education of inmates as provided for in Rule 104 (1) & (2) of the NMR and Section 9 (1)(a) of the Constitution of Sierra Leone 1991. The absence of educational programmes in these centres does not only affect inmates' right to education but also their self-dignity and worth.

HRCSL further noted that most of the inmates incarcerated with no form of formal or informal education are within the youthful age when they should be engaged in activities that will capacitate them to become meaningful individuals in the society upon their release. This absence will subsequently contribute to lawlessness, increase in crime and poverty rates in the society as inmates who are incarcerated especially with long custodial sentences have limited or no skills or education that will promote their empowerment and development upon their release and prevent them from engaging in criminal conduct.

CHAPTER 6

6.1 Recommendations

Based on the findings and analysis thereto, the following recommendations are made to various institutions.

Sierra Leone Correctional Service

1. The SLCS should develop policies to ensure corrections officers have access to free dedicated medical facilities.
2. Should pay risk allowances to corrections officers.
3. Should regularly provide capacity building training programmes for their officers.
4. Should provide adequate number of mattresses and beddings for all correctional centres.
5. Should provide inmates with adequate number of jumpers.
6. Should collaborate with the Ministry of Education and other tertiary education institutions to provide formal and informal educational programmes in the centres.
7. Should provide skills training opportunities in all CCs.

Ministry of Internal Affairs

1. The MIA should review the existing Prison Rules 1960 to facilitate implementation of the SLCS Act 2014.
2. Should ensure that the SLCS has adequate number of vehicles to effectively carry out its operations.
3. Should construct adequate number of dwelling quarters in barracks to accommodate Corrections Officers across the country.
4. Should endeavor to commission the New Block at the PTDSC that has 9 holding cells in order to reduce overcrowding.
5. Should improve on the height of perimeter fences at the PTDSC and Kambia CC and also construct a secure perimeter fence at the Pujehun CC.
6. Should ensure that electric power supply is available in all correctional centres.
7. Must ensure that at least two professional medical personnel are stationed in each correctional centre.
8. Should set up systems in correctional centres that will ensure that inmates have access to formal and informal education and improve on existing ones.
9. Must ensure that there is a provision for proper reintegration of inmates.
10. Must improve on the terms and conditions of service of corrections officers to bring it in line with other security institutions.
11. Should expedite the plan to construct new correctional centres especially in Falaba and Karene and relocate Freetown Male and Makeni Male CCs to their proposed locations.
12. Should expand existing facilities in centres with sufficient space for recreation and rehabilitation.
13. Must guarantee adequate nutrition and healthcare through timely contract or payments, regular drug supplies, and the deployment of qualified medical staff and nutritionists.

14. Should construct separate blocks for female inmates within the PTDSC, Matru Jong, Pujehun, Port Loko and Kabala Ccs.
15. Should establish a child friendly center in female correctional centres for babies whose mothers are in detention.
16. Should institutionalize oversight and accountability by empowering HRCSL, civil society, and parliamentary committees to conduct routine monitoring and follow up on recommendations.
17. Must ensure that the SLCS is represented at the National Security Coordination Council chaired by the President.

Ministry of Finance

1. The MoF must provide adequate funds for the SLCS for effective service delivery in their operations, including recruitment of additional personnel and procurement of uniforms and food supplies.
2. Must ensure that contractors and other service providers are paid promptly to avoid disruption in service delivery.

Judiciary

1. The Judiciary should implement the alternative sentencing provisions in the newly enacted Criminal Procedure Act 2024 in order to decongest the correctional centres.
2. Should review the sentences of inmates who have been previously convicted for petty/minor offences and apply the alternative sentencing provisions in the CPA 2024, in order to address overcrowding.
3. Must ensure that court sittings are held regularly in each district in order to speed up trials and establish a monitoring mechanism for pre-trials.
4. Must ensure that the assigned resident Judges and Magistrates do reside in their respective districts.
5. Should ensure that each district has a separate building/structure for Magistrate and High Court sittings to be held simultaneously.
6. Develop and publish Sentencing Guideline for Judges and Magistrates.
7. Review bail conditions for inmates who are unable to meet the initial bail condition and remain incarcerated for a period of time.

Ministry of Justice

1. The MoJ should strengthen justice delivery by ensuring regular court sittings and appoint and deploy resident State Counsel in each district.
2. To fast-track the preferment of backlog indictments.
3. Should support the process to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture.

Sierra Leone Legal Aid Board

1. The Sierra Leone Legal Aid Board should recruit more paralegals and duty counsel to operate more effectively in the regions.
2. Should provide legal representation for indigent inmates undergoing trial particularly those outside of the regional headquarter towns.

6.2 Conclusion

In conclusion, the comprehensive examination of human rights within the Correctional Centres of Sierra Leone has highlighted a series of critical issues that demand urgent attention. This report by HRCSL is grounded in firm methodological monitoring research and extensive field observation and reveals that despite existing legal frameworks and policies intended to protect inmates' rights, significant gaps remain in their implementation and enforcement.

The findings indicate not only systemic overcrowding, poor health and living conditions, the lack of healthcare, education, and rehabilitation services for inmates but also failings across the relevant sectors to address these issues. Prolonged detentions and inadequate resources exacerbate the challenges faced by the Sierra Leone Correctional Service, further diminishing the dignity and well-being of those incarcerated. The SLCS requires investment and resources from government, NGOs, CSOs and development partners to construct new CCs, furnish and upgrade existing infrastructure, recruit and train more personnel and to ensure that inmates enjoy their human rights while behind bars within their facilities.

An inter-sectoral approach is needed to ensure that human rights are enjoyed behind bars. It is imperative that stakeholders, including the government and correctional authorities, address these human rights violations by enhancing operational standards, developing effective legal and policy frameworks, and ensuring that the rights of all individuals behind bars are upheld. Moving forward, the recommendations highlighted should not only be carried out by related bodies, but commitment to improving the conditions within correctional facilities must be reinforced by strategic action and collaboration across various sectors to effectively safeguard the rights and dignity of all inmates.

Through concerted efforts, the government we can transform correctional institutions into environments that emphasize rehabilitation over punishment and ensure that every person, regardless of their circumstances, is treated with respect and humanity.

Appendix 1

References

National

1. The Constitution of Sierra Leone 1991
2. The Sierra Leone Correctional Service Act 2014
3. Prison Rules (1961)
4. Sierra Leone Legal Aid Board Act 2012
5. Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone Act No. 9, 2004
6. The Ombudsman Act 1997

Reports

7. Management and Functional Review of the Sierra Leone Correctional Services November 2024 (www.psru.gov.sl)
8. Behind Walls: An Inventory Assessment of Prisons in Sierra Leone published by the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone 2007.
9. Opening minds to rights behind bars: Report on the situation of detention in Sierra Leone 2012 published by UNIPSILS
10. The United Nations Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review recommendations to Sierra Leone 2011, 2016 and 2021.

Regional

11. African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights adopted in 1981, became effective in 1986

International

12. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948
13. United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders with their Commentary 2010
14. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966
15. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 1976
16. The Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment 1985
17. United Nations Convention against Torture adopted in 1984 and entered into force on 26th June 1987.
18. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2007
19. United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners 2015
20. The United Nations Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty 1990
21. International Criminal Court 2000

Appendix II Monitoring Checklist



HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION OF SIERRA LEONE Checklist for Monitoring Correctional Centres

Background information

Name of Institution	
Province:	District:.....
Town/City.....Chiefdom:.....	
Date of visit:.....	Time of Visit.....
Officer in Command at time of visit:	
Contact No:.....	Email

1. Admission Procedures – (Section 34 of the Sierra Leone Correctional Service Act 2014 and Rule 7 of the NMR)

- a. How do you admit inmates into the facility? Court orders Police orders
others (specify)
- b. Does the centre have a register to record information of inmates? Yes No
- c. What does the centre provide to every inmate upon admission?
.....
.....
.....
- d. Upon receipt of inmates, does the centre respect their self-perceived gender? Yes
No (Rule 7 (a) NMR)
- e. If no, why?
- f. Is the inmate's physical and mental condition (sanity, injuries etc.) assessed upon admission? Yes No
- g. If no, why?
- h. If yes, what actions are taken?
- i. Does the centre have a register to record items brought in by inmates? Yes No
- j. Does the centre provide orientation for new inmates?
- k. Does the centre inform inmates' relatives of their admission? Yes No
- l. Does the centre provide psycho-social services for inmates upon admission?
.....
- m. Is this service provided throughout their stay?

2. Facility Records

2.	Correctional Centre Records	Male	Female	Total
i)	No. of inmates at the time of visit			
ii)	No. of inmates convicted			
iii)	No. of inmates on remand			
iv)	No. of holding cells for:			

	a. Remand inmates			
	b. Convicted inmates			
v)	No. of inmates awaiting indictment			
vi)	No. of inmates on trial			
vii)	No. of inmates on life imprisonment			
viii)	No. of pregnant women			
ix)	No. of lactating mothers			
x)	No. of juveniles (if any)			
xi)	No. of inmates in solitary confinement			
xii)	No. of inmates with disability			
	a. Physically challenged			
	b. Visual impairment			
	c. Hearing impairment			
	d. Speech impairment			
	e. Mentally challenged			
	f. Others			
xiii)	No. of correction officers on duty at the time of visit			
xiv)	Total no. of correction officers assigned to the Centre			
xv)	No. of Support Staff			

a. How many inmates are/have been on remand for the following periods? Less than six months One year between one and two years above two years

b. What are the reasons for the long periods in remand?

c. Do inmates always/regularly attend their respective court sittings? Yes No
If no, why?

How are inmates transported to court sittings?

d. Are inmates' matters called up for hearing each time they appear court sittings? Yes
No

e. If no, why?

f. How many inmates have been affected by this situation for over the last 3 months?

g. What does the correctional centre do in such cases?

3. Detention Facilities

a. What is the centre's total holding capacity? Male Female

b. How many holding cells are within the facility? Male Female

c. How many holding cells are in active use? Male Female

d. What is the capacity of one holding cell? Male Female

e. No. of inmates per holding cell at the time of visit? Male Female

f. Ventilation in the cells: Excellent Good Poor

g. Beds and Beddings

Category	Male	Female	Comments
No. of beds per cell			
No. of cells with beddings			
No. of beddings supplied to inmates and how often?			
No. of beds with mosquito net			
Others, specify			

h. How do you handle inmates with disabilities?

Physically challenged:
Visual impairment:
Hearing impairment:
Speech impairment:
Mentally challenged:
Others:

4. Separation of Categories

- a. Are tried and untried inmates kept in separate cells? (Rule 11 (b) NMR)
.....
.....
- b. Are persons imprisoned for debt and other civil offences kept in separate cells from persons imprisoned for a criminal offence? Yes No (Rule 11 (c) NMR)
- c. If no, why?
.....

5. Internal Discipline (NMR 36-46)

NMR Rule 36
“Discipline and order shall be maintained with no more restriction than is necessary to ensure safe custody, the secure operation of the prison and a well-ordered community life.”

- a. How is discipline maintain within the Centre?
.....
.....
- b. What offences are punishable?
- c. How are they communicated to inmates?
- d. Is solitary confinement used as a disciplinary measure? Yes No
- e. If yes, where are they placed
- f. Does the centre use corporal punishment on defaulting inmates? Yes No
- g. What other methods are used to maintain discipline in the facility?

7. Health Care Services

NMR Rule 24

1. "The provision of health care for prisoners is a State responsibility. Prisoners should enjoy the same standards of health care that are available in the community, and should have access to necessary health-care services free of charge without discrimination on the grounds of their legal status.

2. Health-care services should be organized in close relationship to the general public health administration and in a way that ensures continuity of treatment and care, including for HIV, tuberculosis and other infectious diseases, as well as for drug dependence".

- a. What health care services are available within the centre?
- b. Are there assigned medical personnel? Yes No
- c. If yes, how many?.....

Category of medical personnel	Total No. assigned		No. on duty at the time of visit		Comments
	M	F	M	F	
Doctors					
Nurses					
Support staff					

- d. What ailments are regularly reported?
- e. Are all categories of sick inmates treated within the centre? Yes No
- f. If no, are there provisions for referrals? Yes No
- g. What kinds of cases are normally referred?
- h. Where are these cases referred to? Government Hospital Private Hospital Others (specify)
- i. When patients are referred who bears the cost of their treatment?
- j. Are inmates suffering from skin and other communicable diseases separated from other inmates?
- k. Where does the centre get drug supplies from and how often does the centre receive supplies?
- l. What happens when supply of certain drugs run out before restocking?
- m. Are there persons with HIV and Aids in the facility? Yes No
- n. Do they have access to the Retroviral Drugs? Yes No
- o. How often?

- p. If no, why?
- q. Are the files of the patients kept confidential? Yes No
- r. Do the sick inmates gain access to their medical files? Please explain

- s. When there is epidemic or outbreak what measures do you put in place, especially for admitting new inmate?

7b	Hygiene & Sanitation	Yes	No	Comments
i)	Provision of toiletries (soap, towels, sanitary pads, toilet roll)?			
ii)	Are inmates provided with clean and serviceable attire?			
iii)	Are convicts provided with prison wears (Jumper)?			
iv)	Access to bathing and toilet facilities			
	Are these located within the cells?			
	If yes, how many per cell?			

- v. If no, please explain
- vi. How do inmates access these facilities after lock up?

8. Education and Recreation

NMR 104

1) "Provision shall be made for the further education of all prisoners capable of profiting thereby, including religious instruction in the countries where this is possible. The education of illiterate prisoners and of young prisoners shall be compulsory and special attention shall be paid to it by the prison administration.

2) So far as practicable, the education of prisoners shall be integrated with the educational system of the country so that after their release they may continue their education without difficulty".

NMR 105- "Recreational and cultural activities shall provided in all prisons for the benefit of the mental and physical health of prisoners".

- a. Does the centre provide any form of education for inmates? Yes No
- b. If yes, what types?
 Formal:
- Informal:

- c. Is the required educational support/materials provided by government?
- d. Does the centre receive any support from Non- Governmental Organisations?
- e. Is the education provided (particularly formal education) in line with the educational system of the country?
- f. What types of recreational facilities are available?
- g. Are provisions made for post detention integration of inmates?
- h. Are inmates allowed to work while in detention?
- i. Does this work carry remuneration? Yes No
- j. If yes, does the inmates benefit from these earnings?

9. Incidents Record

9a	Occurring Incidents	Yes	No	Comments/courses /Date
i)	Have you experienced death of inmate in the facility within the year?			
ii)	Have you experienced jail break in the last 24 months			
iii)	Have you experienced confrontation with the community in the last 6 months			
iv)	Have you experienced confrontation with inmates in the last 6 months?			
v)	Has there been confrontation between or among inmates in the last 6 months?			

10. Social Relations and After-Care

NMR Rule 106 -107

106) "Special attention shall be paid to the maintenance and improvement of such relations between a prisoner and his or her family as are desirable in the best interests of both".

107) "From the beginning of a prisoner's sentence, consideration shall be given to his or her future after release and he or she shall be encouraged and provided assistance to maintain or establish such relations with persons or agencies outside the prison as may promote the prisoner's rehabilitation and the best interests of his or her family".

- a. What post integration strategy does the Correctional Centre have for inmates who complete their terms of sentence?

-
- b. Are relatives, friends and legal service providers allowed to visit inmates? Yes No
- c. If yes, how often?
- d. What is the visiting time for the public?
- e. Apart from visits, what other access does inmates have to communicate with their relatives, friends and legal service providers?
-

11. General Questions

- a. Does government pay subvention directly into the account of the SLCS or through the line MDA?
- b. How often is subvention paid and what is it used for?
- c. Do you get support from NGOs? Yes No
- d. If yes, what types of support?
- e. Please list the 3 organisations that regularly provide support to the centre?
.....
.....
- f. Are inmates allowed to practice their respective religious faiths?
- g. Are pastors and imams allowed to pay regular visits and conduct faith-based prayers with inmates? Yes No
- h. Please explain
-

Inmates with their Babies in Detention

- I. Does the centre provides antenatal care for pregnant women?
- II. Where do they give birth? Within the Centre Government Hospital Private hospital
- III. Does the centre provide post natal service?
- IV. Are lactating mothers allowed to stay with their babies in detention?
Yes No
- Is there a special for lactating mothers to properly nurse and care for their babies?
Yes No
- V. Does the centre provide the following for the babies:
Food

Diapers and toiletries:

Medical Services:

Is there a Child Friendly Centre within?

12. Training and conditions of service for Corrections Officers

- a. Is capacity building training programme provided for staff members? Yes No
- b. If yes, how often?
- c. What kind of training is provided?
- d. Is there any policy on the review of the staff conditions of service? Yes No
- e. If yes, how often is it reviewed in line with the trend of events?
.....
.....
.....
- f. What challenges do you encounter in the execution of your job?
.....
.....
.....
.....

13. Logistics

- a. What logistical challenges does the centre have?
-
-
-

Interactive Session with Inmates

- a. How long have you been in detention?
- b. Are you undergoing trial or convicted?
- c. What offence are you standing trial/convicted for?
- d. How many other people do you share the cell with?
- e. Does each inmate have his/her bed or mattress? Yes No
- f. How many times a day is food provided?
- g. Are you satisfied with the quality of food that is provided?
-
-

h. Hygiene and Sanitation

Items supplied	How Often	Comments
Toiletries		
Laundry soap		
Prison wears (Jumpers)		
Others (specify)		

- i. Do you have access to the following:
 Medical services:

 Clean and safe drinking water especially during lock up period:

 Education: Formal Informal
- j. Please explain- Formal:

- k. What kind of informal education (skills training) is provided?

- l. How many times a week?
- m. Are educational/training materials always available? Yes No
- n. How do you engage yourself when educational/training materials are not available?

- o. Who are your trainers? Correctional officers Civilians Both
- p. What do you do with the products?
- q. What types of recreational facilities are available for inmates and how often are inmates allowed to engage in these activities?

- r. Do you practice your religion without hindrance?

I.

For Inmates Undergoing Trial

- o have legal representation? Private Legal Aid Board Other
- II. How are you transported to court?
- III. Do you attend court sitting each time your matter comes up for hearing? ...
- IV. Do the complainants or witnesses regularly attend court sittings?.....

- V. Is your matter heard each time it comes up for hearing?
- VI. If no, how many times have you attended court and your matter is not heard?

- VII. What reasons are given for this?
- VIII. Have your family members visited you since your detention? Yes No
- IX. If yes, how often?
- X. If no, why?

Is there anything more you want to tell the HRCSL

Summary of Monitor's Observations

Monitor's Guide

Indicate number of inmates interviewed during visit.

For cell inspection please:

1. Record total number of inmates in each cell monitored.
2. Record actual number present in each cell monitored.
3. Record number of inmates undergoing trial in each cell monitored.
4. Record number of inmates on remand in each cell monitored.
5. Record number of inmates convicted in each cell monitored.
6. Record number of beds or mattresses in each cell monitored.
7. Take note of the type of toilet facility available within the cells and the number.
8. Take note of the general sanitation within the cells.