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PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE SAYS STOP TEENAGE PREGNANCY

The Parliamentary Oversight Committee on Social Services, chaired by Hon. Josephine Emma Kowa, has concluded four day's visitation to the North, South, and Eastern regions on the theme "stop teenage pregnancy and early marriage in Sierra Leone".

The Committee targeted Secondary Schools, Heads of Social Welfare Units, Local Councils, Local Authorities, and Ministry of Education in Bo, Kenema, and Bombali Districts.



Committee Members addressing students on early marriage and teenage pregnancy.

According to the Chairperson, Hon. Emma Kowa, the purpose of the visitations is to assess the level of sensitization on the danger of early marriage, teenage pregnancy, and to speak to Ebola survivors. Also to explain to students the passing of the sexual offences Act and other gender laws enacted by Parliament for the protection of women's and girls' rights.

In Bo District, the Committee engaged both Councils and the Social Welfare offices in which officials explained to the Committee about their responsibilities in combating early marriage and to look after the Ebola survivors. Council Officials explained to the Committee their challenges in getting funds from the central government to undertake activities for the Social Welfare office in those Districts. The Committee later engaged UCC, QRS, and Ahmadiyya Secondary Schools during which MPs explained various gender acts that have been passed by Parliament to protect the girl-child in the country.

In Kenema District, the social services Committee visited both Councils and the Social welfare office, where they observed that teenage pregnancy is on the increase, funds for the Social Welfare office are minimal and sometimes not forthcoming. They also reviewed the question of remand homes in the District for children attending court cases, Ebola survivors and orphans' related issues, among others.

In Makeni, the committee carried out similar activities whereby MPs observed that teenage pregnancy is also on the increase with over 540 recorded cases by the Social Welfare Ministry in the Northern region. Similar sentiments were also expressed on the challenges that are faced by the Social Welfare Ministry itself..

In their engagements with schools, the pupils suggested that tougher laws should be established on teenage pregnancy and early marriage to deter perpetrators. Pupils also called on the Committee to do similar oversight in future and urged the Ministry to engage schools further on the gender acts passed by Parliament.