

## GOVERNMENT OF SIERRA LEONE

### NATIONAL HIV/AIDS POLICY

**JANUARY 2002**

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### 1. ACRONYMS

CBOs - Community Based Organisations

CAC/DAC/RAC - Chiefdom AIDS Committee/District AIDS Committee/Regional AIDS Committee

HIV/AIDS - Human Immuno-Deficiency Virus/ Acquired Immuno- Deficiency Syndrome,

IEC/BCC - Information Education Communication/ Behaviour Change Communication

NAC - National HIV/AIDS Council

NACP - National AIDS Control Programme

NAS - National HIV/AIDS Secretariat

NGO - Non Governmental Organisation

PLWHAs - People Living with HIV/AIDS

STIs - Sexually Transmitted Infections

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### 2. INTRODUCTION:

Sierra Leone is emerging from a ten-year civil conflict that has devastated the productive capacity and infrastructure in every part of the country and caused mass displacement of the population. The 1997 military coup and the 1999 rebel invasion of Freetown, which resulted in the destruction of most of the health and other social sector support systems, intensified the problem of service delivery, exacerbated ill health and poverty. The problem has been further exacerbated by the emergence and rapid spread of AIDS (Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome) caused by HIV (Human Immuno-Deficiency Virus). Currently, HIV prevalence has by all indications passed the 5% threshold and it is fast becoming an epidemic that requires urgent and coordinated action to control it.

The low level of awareness and knowledge about HIV/AIDS, particularly those relating to risky sexual behaviour and unsafe health practices further compound the problem. The primary mode of HIV transmission in Sierra Leone is through sexual contact and a small magnitude through blood transfusion, harmful indigenous practices and unsafe injections. Most of those infected remain unaware of their status and so represent a pool capable of transmitting the virus to new uninfected individuals.

Government's initial response to the HIV epidemic was in 1986 when a National AIDS Committee was established. In response to the call from WHO for member states to establish HIV prevention and control programmes, the National AIDS Committee was in 1987 transformed into the National HIV/AIDS Control Programme within the Ministry of Health and Sanitation to address the threat of HIV/AIDS. Since then, many stakeholders have undertaken several interventions but these were not guided by a national policy. Thus the efforts undertaken to address the threat of the epidemic of HIV/AIDS in the country were inadequate and uncoordinated.

The Government is now coming to terms with the fact that even if political stability returns and an all out development effort is undertaken, the failure to contain this epidemic will have social, psychological, demographic and economic impact on both individuals and societies. It will deprive families, communities of their young and productive people.

As part of Government's overall social and development strategy, this policy is formulated to guide Government and its development partners in combating the spread of HIV/AIDS. This policy seeks to:

- ensure that people everywhere in the country, particularly the young, know what to do to avoid infection,
- reduce the spread and stop perhaps the most tragic of all forms of HIV transmission from mother to child;
- provide access to affordable treatment to all those infected;
- care for all whose lives have been in a way or other devastated by AIDS, particularly the orphans; and
- mobilize necessary resources to battle against AIDS
- □empower young people with HIV/AIDS related information for behaviour change.

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### **1.0 PREAMBLE:**

1.1 The Government of Sierra Leone fully recognises the urgency of the threat posed by the current HIV/AIDS pandemic and undertakes to ensure the development of coherent policies and the implementation of a coordinated national multisectoral programme to successfully combat this epidemic.

1.2 The National Policy and National Strategic Plan shall be in accordance with existing international conventions to which the Government of Sierra Leone is signatory.

### **2.0 POLICY STATEMENT**

2.1 The Government shall address the impact of the epidemic at all levels of society; develop and implement a multisectoral prevention, care and control programme with open access to basic social services; and will adapt economic and social development policies and programmes to address the impact of HIV/AIDS.

2.2 The Government shall espouse policies that address gender relations: support shall be given to empowering women to recognise their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS/STI within the framework of universal human rights advocacy.

### **3.0 GENERAL PRINCIPLES**

3.1 Multisectoral Approach and Partnerships

3.1.1 The Government shall establish a National AIDS Council (NAC); HIV/AIDS Secretariat (NAS); strengthen the Ministry of Health and Sanitation and its National HIV/AIDS Control Programme (NACP) and institute Chiefdom AIDS Committee, District AIDS Committee and Regional AIDS Committee (CAC/DAC/RAC), in each chiefdom, district or region as the country situation warrants, to mobilize, coordinate and utilize all sectors of private and public activities to promote behaviour change for the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS/STI.

3.1.2 The composition of the institutions and committees, NAC, NAS, NACP, RAC/DAC, will include representatives of NGO/CBOs, civil societies, women, youth, religious groups, traditional leaders and healers, line ministries, private sectors, people living with HIV/AIDS, relevant national and international organisations.

3.1.3 These institutions shall foster cooperation, coordination and collaboration within all sectors of society, national and international organisations to integrate HIV/AIDS/STI prevention, care, and support into the mainstream of the national development process. Their programs shall have clear time-bound goals and measurable objectives.

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3.1.4 Within the framework of the national policy, these institutions shall develop and implement effective strategies, and comprehensive programs that define and focus on those factors, including social, behavioral and traditional practices, which make individuals, families and communities particularly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS/STI.

3.1.5 The Government shall ensure through the Ministry of Finance that budgetary provisions are made for line ministries and uniformed services for the effective implementation of their HIV/AIDS/STIs programmes.

3.1.6 The Government shall call upon all UN agencies, regional and international organisations and national and international NGOs working in country to incorporate HIV/AIDS/STI prevention, care and awareness components into their country plans and programs along with HIV/AIDS/STI awareness, care and training, with a behavior change component for their own staff.

3.1.7 The Government shall integrate HIV/AIDS/STI components into development programmes where applicable.

3.1.8 The Government shall actively engage and support NGOs/CBOs and the private sector

### 3.2 Respect for Human Rights

3.2.1 The Government shall ensure that all line ministries, uniformed services, national and international agencies, public and private authorities, state and private institutions, corporations, professional organisations and fraternal associations respect essential human rights especially for those People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) and their dependants and assist in the de-stigmatisation of all affected persons. Government shall also ensure that PLWHAs have access to available care and services.

3.2.2 The Government shall further ensure that all programmes are developed and effectively implemented for the prevention and protection from HIV/AIDS/STI of vulnerable groups, with special focus on youth, women, orphans, street children, commercial sex workers, health workers, transient workers, migrants, refugees/returnees and internally displaced people.

3.2.3 The Government shall take action to prevent unlawful search, seizure, detention and dismissal from work of people living with HIV/AIDS and shall consider as a criminal offence any willful infection of another with HIV.

3.2.4 The Government shall ensure that no persons shall be denied essential services due to their HIV/AIDS status

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### 3.3 Transparency and Accountability

3.3.1 The Government and its development partners shall ensure international standards of transparency and accountability in the allocation and use of both national and international HIV/AIDS/STI resources.

### 3.4 Monitoring, Evaluation and Research

3.4.1 All National HIV/AIDS Institutions, NAC, NAS, NACP and RAC/DAC/CAC, shall employ accepted internationally approved standards of monitoring, evaluation and research in their programmes.

3.4.2 The Government shall ensure that there be clear ethical and practical guidelines, including informed consent and assurances of client confidentiality with regards to testing, counseling and care. The Government shall seek to widely disseminate such guidelines and monitor their application. The Government shall undertake that all screening and testing shall be carried out only by accredited institutions.

3.4.3 The Government shall support and encourage national and international investment in HIV/AIDS research to address all areas of the HIV/AIDS/STI epidemic, with particular attention to the prevention of mother to child transmission.

3.4.4 The Government shall establish effective surveillance systems for HIV/AIDS and STIs with committed resources as part of an integrated disease surveillance system.

### 3.5 Universal Access to Information

3.5.1 Government recognizes that the fight against HIV/AIDS is dependent on the proper dissemination of the correct information and the right of the people to know. Therefore, the Government shall encourage and support national, sub-regional, regional, international IEC/BCC partnerships, coalitions and networks to strengthen local community initiatives to mitigate the impact of HIV/AIDS/STI.

3.5.2 The Government shall develop and implement in collaboration with partners a national education curriculum that incorporates HIV/AIDS/STI awareness, behavioral change and life skills, into all levels of formal and non-formal institutions of education. Government shall ensure the strengthening of the Family Life Education/ Social Studies Curricula to incorporate HIV/AIDS/STIs education.

### 3.6 Advocacy

3.6.1 The Government shall continue and strengthen the advocacy for its national HIV/AIDS/STI prevention, care and control programme.

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3.6.2 The Government shall develop and implement a wide range of effective multisectoral advocacy strategies and activities, including behavioral change, for a successful national response.

3.6.3 The Government shall encourage and initiate national and international NGOs and civil society to play an active role in HIV/AIDS/STI initiatives and advocacy.

## 4.0 STRATEGIC POLICY PRINCIPLES

4.1 The Government overall strategic policy principles shall be:

4.1.1 Policy development, advocacy, capacity building, gender equality, poverty reduction, transparency and accountability, effective monitoring and evaluation and civil society partnerships.

4.1.2 Multisectoral response to HIV/AIDS/STI awareness, prevention and care with behavioural change components to include all line ministries.

4.1.3 Health sector responses to HIV/AIDS/STI management, effective surveillance, research, prevention, care and support, including relevant hazardous waste disposal and environmental health protection and the provision of safe blood supply system.

4.1.4 Resource mobilization to combat the spread of STIs/HIV/AIDS.