



THE NATIONAL SOCIAL WORK CONFERENCE 2024 REPORT

SLASW SIERRA LEONE ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS
in collaboration with
MINISTRY OF SOCIAL WELFARE, GO SL
Presents

NATIONAL SOCIAL WORK CONFERENCE 2024

Theme: "A National Conversation on the Regulation of Social Work Practice, Education and Ethical Standards in Sierra Leone"

Keynote Speaker:
Madam Melrose Karminty - Minister of Social Welfare

TUNDE COLE AUDITORIUM
Fourah Bay College Campus
29th April, 2024 11:00am

PARTNERS

SUPPORTED BY
unicef

EVENT SUMMARY

Conference Organisers

- Sierra Leone Association of Social Workers (SLASW)
- Ministry of Social Welfare, GoSL

Partners:

Universities in Sierra Leone offering Social Work Program

Funding Support

The event was supported by:

- **UNICEF SIERRA LEONE**

Venue

The TUNDE-COLE, Auditorium, Fourah Bay College Campus

Number of Attendees:

- 238 guests attended the Conference

❖ INTRODUCTION

The Sierra Leone Association of Social Workers (SLASW), in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Welfare; successfully concluded the National Social Work Conference 2024 on April 29th, 2024. Held at the esteemed Tunde Cole Auditorium on Fourah Bay College Campus in Freetown, the conference served as a pivotal platform for practitioners, educators, stakeholders, students from Social Work Societies of Fourah Bay College (FBC), Milton Margai Technical University (MMTU), Njala University (NU), University of Makeni (UNIMAK), Ernest Bai Koroma University of Science and Technology (EBKUST) and Eastern Technical University (ETU) and with support from UNICEF to engage in a profound dialogue centered on the theme: *“A National Conversation on the Regulation of Social Work Practice, Education and Ethical Standards in Sierra Leone”*.



Photo: Cross Section of Participants at the National Social Work Conference 2024

Mr. Ibrahim H. Koroma, the Organizing Secretary of SLASW, initiated the proceedings by calling the conference to order and conducting the opening courtesies. The solemnity of the occasion was augmented by invocations from leaders representing both Christianity and Islam, symbolizing the unity and inclusivity inherent in the field of social work.

Mrs. Melvina M. William, the Public Relations Officer of SLASW, introduced the esteemed Chairman for the conference, **Sahr Septimus Sandy Esq**, a distinguished personality with a remarkable academic and professional trajectory spanning from BSc. in Social Work to Law and beyond. In his opening remarks, Mr. Sandy expressed his deep connection to the academic institution where his journey of excellence began, highlighting the interconnectedness of Social Work and Law, particularly in facilitating human service delivery.

❖ WELCOME STATEMENT

Dr. Abdul Kamara, the Head of the Department of Sociology and Social Work at Fourah Bay College-University of Sierra Leone, welcomed the assembly. In his welcome address, he underscored the conference's significance in advancing the regulation of social work practice, education, and ethical standards within the country. Kamara emphasized the crucial role of social work during challenging periods such as the Ebola outbreak, COVID-19 pandemic, and the Mudslide crisis, highlighting the necessity for regulation to maintain standards and effectiveness within the field.



Photo: Dr. Abdul Kamara, Head of Social Work Department at Fourah Bay College making a statement

❖ STATEMENT FROM IFSW

Mr. Musa Maurice M. Kargbo, Vice President of the Sierra Leone Association of Social Workers, delivered a compelling statement on behalf of Dr. Oluwatoni Adeleke, President of the International Federation of Social Workers Africa Region. In his address, Kargbo emphasized the paramount importance of elevating the profession of social work. He shed light on the noble mission of social work in assisting individuals and communities in overcoming challenges, noting the profession's often-underestimated role. Kargbo stressed the urgent need to raise standards in social work across the continent, outlining key areas for improvement, including education, professional development, and self-care for social workers.



Photo: Musa Maurice Kargbo, Vice President of Sierra Leone Association of Social Workers (SLASW)

In terms of education, Kargbo advocated for high-quality social work programs that equip graduates with the requisite skills and knowledge to effect positive change in their communities. He underscored the importance of integrating local cultures and customs into social work training to enhance cultural competence among practitioners. Furthermore, Kargbo emphasized the necessity for ongoing training and support for social workers to stay abreast of best practices and emerging issues in the field. He highlighted the significance of workshops, conferences, and mentorship programs in facilitating professional development.

Additionally, Kargbo underscored the importance of self-care for social workers, acknowledging the emotional and physical demands of the profession. He emphasized the need for practitioners to prioritize their own well-being to ensure they can continue to provide effective care for their clients.

Expressing gratitude to the Government of Sierra Leone, the Ministry of Social Welfare, and UNICEF-Sierra Leone for their collaborative efforts in standardizing social work in the country, Kargbo called for continued cooperation among government officials, NGOs, community leaders, and social workers to develop and implement strategies for elevating social work standards in Sierra Leone.

❖ **STATEMENT FROM THE DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY**

Representing the United Nations Resident Coordinator, Seraphine Wakens, the conference was joined by Senior Human Rights Adviser, **Dr. Uchenna Emelonye**, expressed gratitude to SLASW and the Ministry of Social Welfare for organizing the conference. Emelonye emphasized the conference's significance in initiating a national dialogue on regulating social work practice, education, and ethical standards in Sierra Leone. Highlighting the versatility of social work backgrounds within the UN's various sectors, Emelonye underscored the fortunate position of students pursuing social work, given its broad scope. From my perspective, social work is inherently multi-disciplinary. Individuals with expertise in social work are equipped to function across various systems within the UN and beyond. Social work is not only a practical profession but also, an academic discipline, requiring practitioners to engage in theoretical development and promote social cohesion for national peace and stability.



Photo: Dr. Uchenna Emelonya, Senior Human Right Adviser representing the UN Resident Coordinator to Sierra Leone

Whether addressing issues related to the rule of law, navigating cases within correctional centers, or advocating for clients in court proceedings, social work intersects with numerous disciplines. It is essential to recognize that while one may have a legal background, a comprehensive understanding of social justice and human rights is equally crucial in effectively serving clients.

In essence, social work embodies a cross-disciplinary approach that integrates legal expertise with principles of social justice and human rights to address the diverse needs of individuals and communities.

The German Ambassador to Sierra Leone, His Excellency Jens Kraus-Massé, in his statement said “I am deeply honoured to have the opportunity to address the esteemed social workers gathered here today. Germany's partnership with Sierra Leone spans over six decades, and at its core lies a commitment to empowering society and assisting vulnerable groups.”



Photo: His Excellency, Jens Kraus-Masse - The German Ambassador to the Republic of Sierra Leone

Furthermore, he said, undoubtedly, social work is a challenging profession. It demands a wealth of knowledge and skills, particularly in areas of development and empowerment. However, with this responsibility comes the imperative to uphold ethical standards and avoid any misuse of power, as the consequences can be significant.

For over two decades, Germany has been actively involved in initiatives aimed at supporting women and children in Sierra Leone. Our focus has been on leaving no one behind, particularly in addressing pressing issues such as HIV/AIDS, economic development, FGM, access to justice, and teenage pregnancy. It is evident that many of these endeavours rely heavily on the expertise and dedication of social workers like yourselves to promote the well-being of individuals and communities.

Indeed, being a social work practitioner is more than just a career, it is a calling that requires unwavering devotion and commitment. In this profession, personal values must often take a back seat to professional ethics, ensuring that the needs of those we serve remain paramount.

Once again, I extend my sincere gratitude to SLASW and all social workers for their invaluable contributions to society, and I commend your dedication to making a positive impact in the lives of others.

❖ STATEMENT FROM SOCIAL WORK EMPLOYERS AND SERVICE USERS

Speaking from a Social Work Service Users' perspective, on behalf Street Child Sierra Leone **Mr. Kelfala Kargbo**, the Country Director for the organisation. He expressed gratitude towards the conference organizers for the opportunity to address the audience. While his mandated was to discuss on children, the link to employment was emphasized. Street Child-SL has employed over 240 social workers as permanent staff across the country, highlighting the importance of bridging academia with practical experience. The challenge lies in connecting academic knowledge with real-world practice. Without this link, there are significant hurdles to effective service delivery. Although he was pleased with the Social Work Department's recognition of their top graduates, it's crucial to ensure that academic achievements are complemented by practical skills. Some interns may prioritize returning to lectures over fieldwork, limiting their practical experience. The essence of social work lies in its application, and continuous engagement with real-world scenarios is essential.

He emphasized a called for dialogue to explore ways academia and practical experience can be better integrated. Street Child-SL pledges support for employment opportunities, emphasizing the significance of practical knowledge. This commitment underscores the importance of regulating the profession.



Photo: Mr. Kelfala Kargbo, Director of Street Child Sierra Leone



Photo: Mr. Joseph Senessie, HR Director of Correctional Services

Mr. Joseph J. Senessie, the Director of Human Resources at the Sierra Leone Correctional Services (SLCS) also delivered a statement during the conference. He underscored SLCS duty to hold offenders of the law accountable and highlighted the multifaceted nature of their operations, which include providing treatment, reinforcement, and rehabilitation. Social workers' roles intersect with those of the SLCS, and our collective efforts are crucial in supporting our mission.

However, it's important to note that the SLCS lacks the necessary manpower, particularly in addressing mental health issues. The challenges, such as drug abuse, extend beyond political decisions and necessitate the involvement of professionals with expertise in these areas. Social workers are trained to handle such complex issues and play a pivotal role in the correctional system, not only in detaining offenders but also in facilitating rehabilitation and societal reintegration. We must collaborate effectively to address these challenges and be the agents of positive change in our society. Thank you all.

❖ **PRESENTATION ON SOCIAL WORK ETHICAL STANDARDS AND EDUCATION**

Prof. Alfred A. Jarrett (Ph.D), former Head Of Department at the Sociology and Social Work Department of Fourah Bay College and one who is widely acclaimed as the father of Social Work at Fourah Bay College, addressed Social Work Ethical Standards, highlighting the ethical challenges facing social work academic institutions and practitioners. Dr. Jarrett began his remarks with a sense of appreciation, stating, "I must confess that I am flattered!" Assigned to discuss ethics, he acknowledged the multifaceted nature of ethical considerations and opted to focus on the negative aspects.

Enforcement of the law and regulatory measures, he stressed, are imperative. Dr. Jarrett expressed concern over receiving complaints from students regarding unethical practices such as exchanging sex or money for grades, and distributing unedited pamphlets. These actions, he emphasized, are unacceptable and evoke his anger.



Photo: Prof. Alfred Abioseh Jarrett, Former Head of Social Work & Educator, Fourah Bay College- University of Sierra Leone

Reflecting on policy implementation, Dr. Jarrett questioned how these policies are enforced. He underscored the importance of quality over quantity, highlighting the need for educational programs that prioritize the development of students capable of delivering high-quality service in practice.

Addressing ethical conduct among educators, Dr. Jarrett emphasized the need for ethical-mindedness. He lamented the marginalization experienced by students, which dissuades them from returning to institutions. Moreover, he raised doubts about the ability of practitioners to provide quality services in such an environment.

Dr. Jarrett cautioned against issuing licenses in social work without first addressing institutional shortcomings. He called on the Sierra Leone Association of Social Workers to ensure that institutions uphold standards of quality service delivery. Additionally, he referenced a sponsored program by the BBC, warning lecturers to remain vigilant against corruption within academic institutions.

❖ PRESENTATION ON SOCIAL WORK REGULATION AND THE PROPOSED SOCIAL WORK BILL

The presentation on the Social Work Regulatory Bill, delivered by **Mr. David Lamin** from UNICEF Sierra Leone, commenced with an acknowledgment of the government's efforts to regulate various aspects of the Social Work Profession in Sierra Leone. He emphasized the necessity for stakeholders to familiarize themselves with the bill before its enactment, highlighting the potential risks posed by the absence of trained and qualified practitioners, which could endanger clients. Mr. Lamin underscored that regulating the practice is essential to ensure quality service delivery.

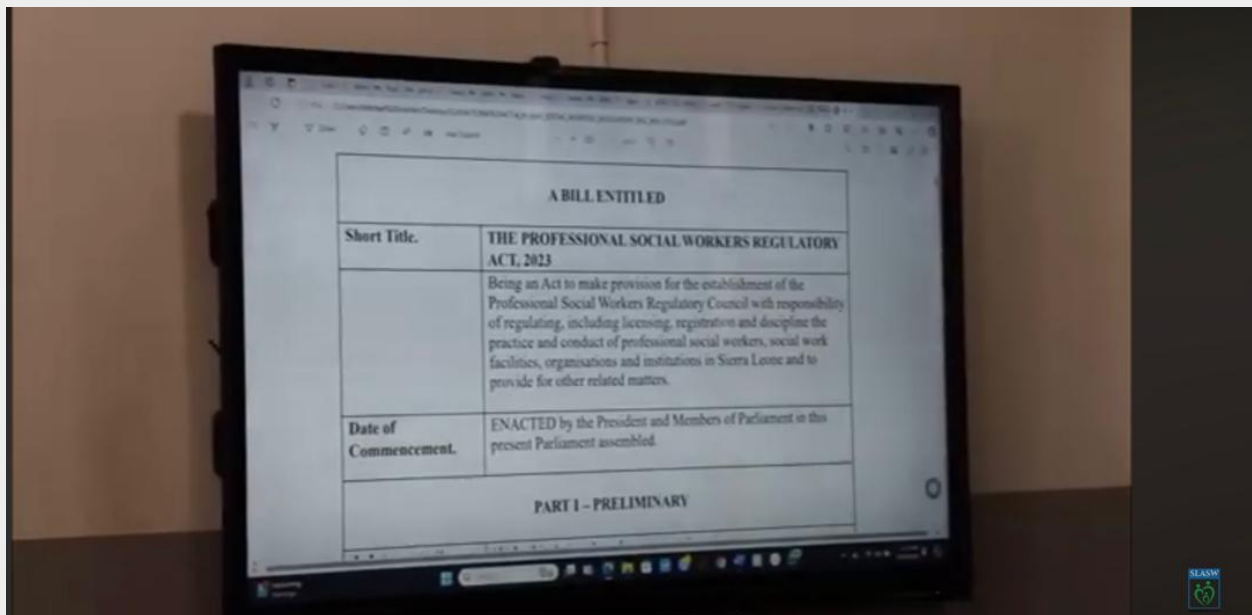


Photo: Proposed Bill for the Regulation of Social Work, Social Workers, Facilities, Education, Practice and Ethical Standards in Sierra Leone

He mentioned the ongoing engagement between UNICEF and the Ministry of Social Welfare since 2021 to assess societal institutions and engage in the regulation process framework. This collaboration reflects the growing recognition among institutions and local communities regarding the need for regulating the profession.

Key components of the drafted bill were discussed with participants to facilitate an understanding of its provisions. These components include the establishment of a Regulatory Council tasked with regulating, guiding, monitoring, and registering members to the council. Additionally, the bill proposes the issuance of licenses to social workers and institutions providing services within their professional duties. Importantly, licenses are not granted for a lifetime and can be revoked if

individuals violate the law. An appeals process is outlined, wherein an appeal committee investigates and decides on the outcome of appeals.

Furthermore, the bill addresses various other aspects, such as the establishment of an Appeal Committee, provisions for offenses and fines, general penalties, and more. Mr. Lamin urged all members to thoroughly review the document to ensure a clear understanding of its contents and implications.

❖ KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER OF SOCIAL WELFARE ON THE NATIONAL SOCIAL WORK CONFERENCE THEME

The keynote address by the esteemed Minister of Social Welfare, **Mrs. Melrose Karminty, The Minister** opened her address amidst her demanding schedule, emphasizing the indispensable role of social work in national development. She asserted that without social work, a nation cannot truly progress, stressing the need for qualified professionals across all sectors to deliver essential services.



Photo: Mrs. Melrose Karminty, Minister of Social Welfare and Keynote Speaker for the National Social Work Conference 2024

She announced the forthcoming intake of individuals struggling with drug abuse, particularly prevalent among university students, to the rehabilitation center. Expressing gratitude to the conference organizers, she pledged to host the next year's social work conference on a larger

platform beyond the university campus, underscoring the importance of empowering social workers to support individuals, communities, and vulnerable groups effectively.

Highlighting the pivotal role of social workers in providing care for the population, she emphasized their presence in various settings such as hospitals, communities, and family support units. Moreover, she emphasized the need for regulation within the profession, especially given their involvement in sensitive areas like child protection agencies and court proceedings, stressing the importance of maintaining client dignity.

The Minister proudly announced the Ministry's establishment of the first Rehabilitation Center in the region for drug abusers, emphasizing that social workers are uniquely qualified to deliver these vital services. However, she acknowledged a shortfall of social workers and highlighted ongoing efforts, including training programs by the Civil Service Training College, to bridge this gap.

Encouraging all stakeholders to prioritize service delivery, she emphasized the collaborative efforts between UNICEF and the Ministry in drafting regulatory legislation. She affirmed the support of various governmental bodies, partners, and institutions for the proposed bill, which is soon to be presented to Parliament.

Asserting her commitment to capacity building, she stressed the necessity of professionalism and diligence in social work practice. She underscored the importance of adhering to standards to ensure quality service provision, noting the development of codes of standards and a standardized curriculum for social work education by the Ministry. She urged all practitioners to approach their work with passion and dedication, emphasizing the transformative potential of their efforts in effecting positive change within society.

In closing, Minister Karminty admonished universities to adopt the harmonized social work curriculum, emphasizing the importance of specialization in social work education. She called for professionalism and diligence in delivering services to vulnerable populations, expressing confidence that through education, professionalism, and support services, social workers can effect positive change in Sierra Leonean society.

❖ PRESENTATION OF CERTIFICATES AND AWARDS

The ceremony culminated in the presentation of awards, highlighting the achievements of outstanding graduates. Mamadu Jalloh was recognized as the Overall Best Graduate at the Fourah Bay College Graduation Ceremony 2023, while Erica A.B. Konneh was honoured as the Best Female Graduate. Both graduates from the Social Work Department, they were awarded the prestigious **"PROF. ALFRED ABIOSEH JARRETT, Ph.D AWARD OF EXCELLENCE"** for their exceptional academic performance within the department. Their achievements, marked by the highest-Grade Point Average among male and female graduates respectively, were celebrated as a testament to their remarkable accomplishments.



Photo: Mamadu Jalloh and Erica A.B. Konneh - Overall Best Graduates from Fourah Bay College, Class of 2023

Additionally, several recognition awards were conferred upon academic institutions and social work societies across various universities. These awards acknowledged their invaluable support to the Association and their exemplary contributions to professional service delivery. Among the honoured institutions were the Social Work Societies of Ernest Bai Koroma University of Science and Technology, Milton Margai Technical University, the University of Makani, Eastern Technical University, Njala University and the Social Work Society at Fourah Bay College. Furthermore, UNICEF SL and the Ministry of Social Welfare were recognized for their significant contributions to the professionalization of Social Work in Sierra Leone.

❖ INDUCTION OF FIRST SET OF NEWLY REGISTERED MEMBERS OF SLASW

The Minister of Social Welfare and Prof. Alfred A. Jarrett, Ph.D, officiated the induction ceremony of the first set of registered members of the Sierra Leone Association of Social Workers (SLASW), marking their official entry into the association as the inaugural cohort of qualified social workers in Sierra Leone



Photo: Cross-Section Newly Inducted members of the Sierra Leone Association of Social Workers (SLASW)

❖ CONCLUSION

The National Social Work Conference 2024 is the culmination of months of planning and efforts, spanning the entirety of March, which is celebrated as World Social Work Month. Throughout this month-long celebration of the Social Work Profession, various conversations on important social work issues took place across the country.

From discussions on Social Work, Mental Health, and Substance Abuse in the Western Region to reflections on Social Work and Child Protection in the Northern Region, and even conversations on Social Work, Climate Change, and Sustainable Environment in the South Region, each event brought awareness to the need for the regulation of social work practice, education, and ethics.

These conversations underscore the urgency of regularizing social work practices and ethical standards. Therefore, the National Social Work Conference in Sierra Leone serves as a platform for the national dialogue on the regulation of social work practice, education, and ethical standards in the country.

❖ **RECORDINGS, PUBLICITY AND MEDIA REPORTS:**

Media Houses carried the stories of Social Work as top stories and visible publications were made:

1. S/L Broadcasting Corporation: <https://youtu.be/j4PdonemS7I?si=FMqu6J3kAbcQMvJF>
2. STAR (Media One Centre): https://youtu.be/5uOD1G5uh_c?si=alzhmTdmjn_8_H1Y
3. Africa Young Voices (AYV): <https://youtu.be/HvgbxsvnLyM?si=yEyrGDFw77XQPCpc>
4. RADIO DEMOCRACY: https://youtu.be/4KtSmCOZ7_U?si=MVWZmWepJPCJ_Rgd
5. LIBERTY TV: <https://youtu.be/ULtiNwgsJ3M?si=bSkJUkGks7vCaf0J>
6. AMAZE TV: https://youtu.be/Bh5rN8oa9VM?si=XbPpBJAeQ_-yd_nx
7. AWOKE NEWSPAPER: <https://awokonewspaper.sl/social-welfare-minister-calls-for-empowerment-and-professionalism-among-social-workers/>
8. CALABASH NEWSPAPER: <https://thecalabashnewspaper.com/slasw-social-welfare-ministry-conclude-national-social-work-conference-2024/>
9. FORUM NEWSPAPER: **Publication of 3rd May, 2024**
10. SLBC PODIUM SHOW: https://youtu.be/nBKPrPZxIrE?si=_mTyCWNNonlVOTnr0
11. The conference was livestreamed on Facebook www.facebook.com/slasw.sowk for real-time viewing by those who wished to follow; the traffic was impressive.
12. SOCIAL WORK MONTH 2024 REPORTS PLAYLIST: <https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLFeb0ta1uhsC7HDg-15NRqgzK95KfYArI&si=z5D9V9lu-xoNkUXe>

Signed:

M. Mitchell Conteh

Michael Mitchell Conteh, Esq.

Secretary General – SLASW





SIERRA LEONE ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS (SLASW)

In Collaboration with

MINISTRY OF SOCIAL WELFARE, GoSL

❖ **PARTNERS:**

- International Federation for Social Workers (IFSW)
- **SOCIAL WORK (STUDENTS) SOCIETIES OF:**
 - Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone, Freetown
 - Milton Margai Technical University, Freetown
 - University of Makeni (UNIMAK), Makeni
 - Ernest Bai Koroma University of Science and Technology, Makeni
 - Eastern Technical University, Kenema
 - Njala University, Bo

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