

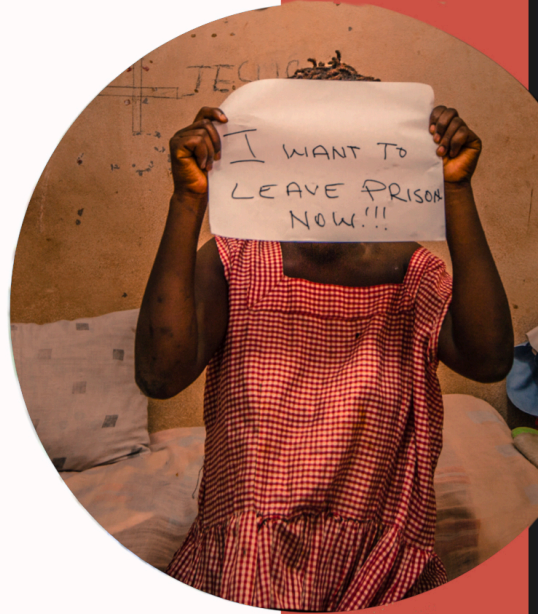


# SAWIE'S STORY

Sawie\*, a young woman from Makeni was arrested when she was only nineteen years old. Sawie is a survivor of domestic violence. With AdvocAid's intervention, Sawie's offence was changed from murder to manslaughter, recognising she was acting in self-defence due to domestic violence. When we first met Sawie, she was already married with two children. She earned an income for her family by working as a farmer.

Sawie was never granted bail and was held in pre-trial detention for over 6 months, before her case appeared at the High Court. AdvocAid took on her case and she was represented by AdvocAid's Duty Counsel in the special High Court session in Magburaka.

Sawie's offence was reduced from murder to manslaughter through AdvocAid's representations that the committed crime was not done intentionally but occurred in self defence as a result of domestic violence. Her case went on for 5 months, and Sawie was convicted of manslaughter in December 2020. She was sentenced to three years in prison. This sentence recognised and included the time she had already spent in pre-trial detention.



"I should have been in prison up to now or they should have sentenced me to death by hanging if AdvocAid was not there to help me out."- Sawie.

After her trial, Sawie continued to receive support in the correctional centre from AdvocAid. AdvocAid's social workers provided her with counselling, worked to ensure her basic needs were met, and that she was supported to prepare for her release from prison. Sawie has also been receiving legal education from AdvocAid's paralegal to increase her knowledge of her legal rights and to put the power of the law into her hands.

Women have different needs than men while incarcerated, as recognised internationally under the Bangkok Rules. Sawie, like many women in Sierra Leone, was separated from her children in prison. To support Sawie in dealing with the effects of mother and children separation, AdvocAid provided her with psycho-social counselling. Sawie also received family tracing support from AdvocAid to ensure she felt she had the necessary support from her family while in detention and upon release.

Sawie was granted a presidential pardon in April 2021. Since being released, AdvocAid has continued to support Sawie to empower her and ensure she felt she had the necessary support to achieve her goals.

The stigma of incarceration affects women like Sawie's return to their community after their release. Sawie's husband remarried while she was in prison and his new wife is now pregnant. Sawie has found it challenging to reintegrate back into her community, and has to cope with the stigma that faces many women in Sierra Leone when they are released from prison.

Sawie was assisted by AdvocAid to achieve her aspiration of becoming a petty trader in order to provide a better standard of living for her children. Sawie is still in contact with AdvocAid and continues to participate in AdvocAid's legal education sessions to learn more about her legal rights.

After her experience and journey with AdvocAid, she hopes that Sierra Leone will become a better country that can empower and educate citizens to know their legal rights and abide by laws without fear.

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