

The ENCISS Story

2010-2014

Highlights from Phase 3

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ENCISS glossary of terms

Accountability platform: an event giving local councils space to share and discuss information with civil society organisations, ward development committees and citizens, on aspects of service delivery.

Civil society organisation (CSO): a broad term covering any non-governmental, non-profit organisation working to bring about change in a particular area.

CSO/Local Council Coordination Forum: a meeting bringing CSOs and councillors together to plan and monitor initiatives, coordinate projects and discuss progress, challenges and successes in local development.

Enhancing impact: a strand of ENCISS programme designed to create opportunities for direct engagement and dialogue between civil society and all levels of government.

Implementing partners: organisations (including, but not exclusively, former grantees) with whom ENCISS works and supports to deliver its activities.

Micro grant: a grant with a ceiling of £10,000, funding local, short-term activities (typically three to six months), run by emerging community-based organisations at the ward or community level.

Policy dialogue forum: an interactive session enabling civil society to hear from, and discuss with, state representatives on issues of policy and practice relating to ENCISS thematic areas: gender, youth, justice and security, decentralisation and the 2012 elections.

Project grant: a funding award given to established CSOs, government agencies, networks and coalitions with a proven track record of working in one or more districts; typically ranging from £10,000 to £60,000.

Results chain thinking: a management tool used for the design, monitoring and evaluation of programmes and projects.

Strategic grant: a high-value grant (worth up to around £150,000) given over the course of two years to established national CSOs, government agencies, networks and coalitions with a track record of policy engagement.

Ward development committee: elected groups of up to 12 members (including a local councillor and, where relevant, a paramount chief) who monitor the delivery of council projects in their wards, facilitate grassroots participation in development policies, and act as a forum for the discussion of community issues.

Foreword



Twelve years ago, Sierra Leone emerged from a brutal decade-long civil war that caused untold damage to our people and our prospects. Although many steps have been taken to heal the wounds of conflict, the scars remain: Sierra Leone is still one of the world's poorest countries, with two thirds of people living in poverty. Average life expectancy is just 48, while employment rates, education levels, healthcare facilities, gender injustice and poor infrastructure all offer cause for concern.

In order for the country to flourish and thrive, certain cornerstones must be fixed firmly in place: good governance, an accountable state, women's empowerment, an active citizenry and a genuinely democratic society, to name but a few. It is to these ends that the ENCISSE programme has worked, over the past four years, funded by UK aid from the UK Government and the European Union.

As someone who has witnessed the work of the programme, I can say with confidence that ENCISSE has certainly played its part in the story of Sierra Leone, as it has sought to enhance the governance landscape of our country. ENCISSE understands that in order to create a better Sierra Leone – one where women, men, girls and boys can live dignified lives – citizens must have a voice, and their voice must be heard.

That's why I am delighted to commend this new publication to you. The pages that follow contain a vivid snapshot of the ENCISSE story during its third phase, under the management of Christian Aid. They paint a picture of some of the steps the programme has taken in order to enhance the interface between the state and its citizens, with the goal of bringing about a more inclusive, democratic and developed Sierra Leone.

You will read about some of the activities ENCISSE has delivered since October 2010, which have created space for civil society organisations (CSOs) to engage with government and advocate on issues affecting the populace. You will also find out about the capacity building work ENCISSE has carried out with CSOs, ward development committees, traditional authorities and local government.

But most importantly, you will hear inspiring stories of change featuring former ENCISSE grantees. The case study compilation in the latter half of this publication showcases a small proportion of the many individuals and groups who have worked tirelessly to make a difference.

The accounts are rich and stimulating. From Kabala and Kailahun, to Bo and beyond, they tell of efforts to increase access to justice for people with disabilities, build citizens' engagement in council planning, combat the marginalisation of young people, promote gender equality, increase voter engagement and connect citizens with their councillors using mobile technology – among other things.

While we do not yet know what the next chapter will hold for the country, thanks to ENCISSE we know that CSOs are now better equipped to articulate society's concerns to a state that is becoming increasingly responsive and accountable to its citizens. Indeed, ENCISSE's achievements were recognised a year ago when it was awarded the Presidential Gold Medal in recognition of its service to the nation in promoting good governance. I was part of the team that proudly attended the award ceremony at State House on Independence Day 2013.

Among other things, this national accolade recognised the contribution ENCISSE made towards the peaceful election process in November 2012. We gave grants to 59 organisations working in this thematic area: with support from ENCISSE, civil society played an instrumental role in helping to ensure the polls were inclusive, fair and free of conflict.

The work is not yet done: the story of Sierra Leone is still being written. While the chapter on ENCISSE Phase 3 is drawing to a close, there are still many more stories to be told. So on behalf of the ENCISSE Programme Advisory Board, the ENCISSE team and Christian Aid, I wish you happy reading.



Dr Aisha Fofana Ibrahim, PhD
Former Chair, ENCISSE Programme Board
(October 2010 – September 2013)

Introduction

Programme Director Alpha Sankoh reflects on the highlights of ENCISS Phase 3

The current chapter of ENCISS started in October 2010, when Christian Aid began to manage the third phase of the programme, with a budget of £8.3m. From the onset, ambitions were big and expectations were high: the programme hit the ground running and has continued apace ever since.

Grant making and enhancing impact were the twin focal points for Phase 3. Between October 2010 and September 2013 we awarded 243 grants, worth £3.8m, to a host of organisations. These micro, strategic and project grants went to groups of all shapes and sizes, including civil society organisations (CSOs) and local councils, to fund initiatives across the ENCISS thematic areas: gender, youth, justice, decentralisation and the 2012 elections.

At the same time, we delivered a comprehensive capacity-building programme for these grantees, with training and mentoring in areas such as budgeting, monitoring and evaluation, advocacy and financial management (see overleaf).

The enhancing impact strand of Phase 3 saw us creating opportunities and space for direct engagement and dialogue with government authorities. Working closely with civil society to deliver events such as policy dialogue forums and accountability platforms, we have witnessed steady steps towards our vision to see local and national government demonstrating increasingly responsive and inclusive decision-making (see p16). One key highlight has been the passing of the Freedom of Information Bill, which was a key focus of civil society advocacy efforts.

We are pleased that our civil society partners continue to do enormous work to improve the quality of lives for citizens nationwide. Working in collaboration with councils and other stakeholders, they continue to strive to ensure that the views of marginalised groups are reflected in decision-making processes and other development programmes.

Bearing fruit

These efforts, supported by ENCISS, have been bearing fruit. Indeed, as our annual review (conducted in September 2013 by the UK Government's Department for International Development) concluded: 'There are indications that real progress is being made.' This progress was recognised when we were given

the honour of a Presidential Gold Award for 2013, for our contribution towards good governance.

The latter end of that year saw us making the transition into a one-year extension period for ENCISS Phase 3 (October 2013 to September 2014). With an

additional budget of £1.8m, this extension phase has seen us move beyond grant-making into a portfolio of activities designed to facilitate even more dynamic interaction between actors in the social policy space (see p4 and p21).

We have scaled up our support to district and city councils, to strengthen resilience even further at a local governance level. For instance, our CSO/Local Council Coordination Forums are giving parties a chance to discuss their priorities. We are delighted that several councils have now formalised their relationship with CSOs by signing Memorandums of Understanding, fostering greater transparency and accountability in service delivery.

What's more, earlier this year it was announced that three former ENCISS grantees had been ranked first, second and third as the best performing councils for 2013: Makeni City Council (whose esteemed Mayor is a member of our Programme Advisory Board), Bo City Council and Bonthe District Council respectively.

Elsewhere, ENCISS continues to be part of the Governance Stakeholders Coordination Forum, alongside other institutions such as Christian Aid, ActionAid, IBIS, OSWA and Oxfam. This forum seeks to complement the work of the Government of Sierra Leone in promoting and sustaining good governance, in areas such as corruption, justice, economy, decentralisation and institutional reform.

Sharing and learning

Another key feature of this extension has been capturing and sharing lessons and models of best practice. This strand of work has included our new Learning Labs initiative, which uses various channels to help our implementing partners share expertise and capture knowledge. What's more, our former grantees continue to meet under the umbrella of Strategic Partnership Meetings, to share evidence and results. We are hopeful that this spirit of collaboration will continue long after ENCISS Phase 3 ends.

We have continued to support civil society to make policy information more accessible. In May 2014 we were pleased to launch a public education campaign: we have given grants worth Le315m (£45,000) to four CSOs, so that they can popularise public policy using theatrical forms such as song, dance, story-telling and drama. Meanwhile, our innovative SMS Voices pilot project is breaking new ground by using web and mobile technology to connect citizens and councillors in Bo and Koinadugu Districts (see p10).

All of the above is but a snapshot of the work that ENCISS Phase 3 and our partners have done, and continue to do, under the management of Christian Aid and with the valued support of our donors: UK aid from the UK Government and the European Union.

The remainder of this publication contains a selection of the stories that we have been privileged to help write. Regrettably we could not include all the examples of the valuable work being done - but our hope is that these stories will continue to be told, and written, even after this chapter of ENCISS comes to a close.

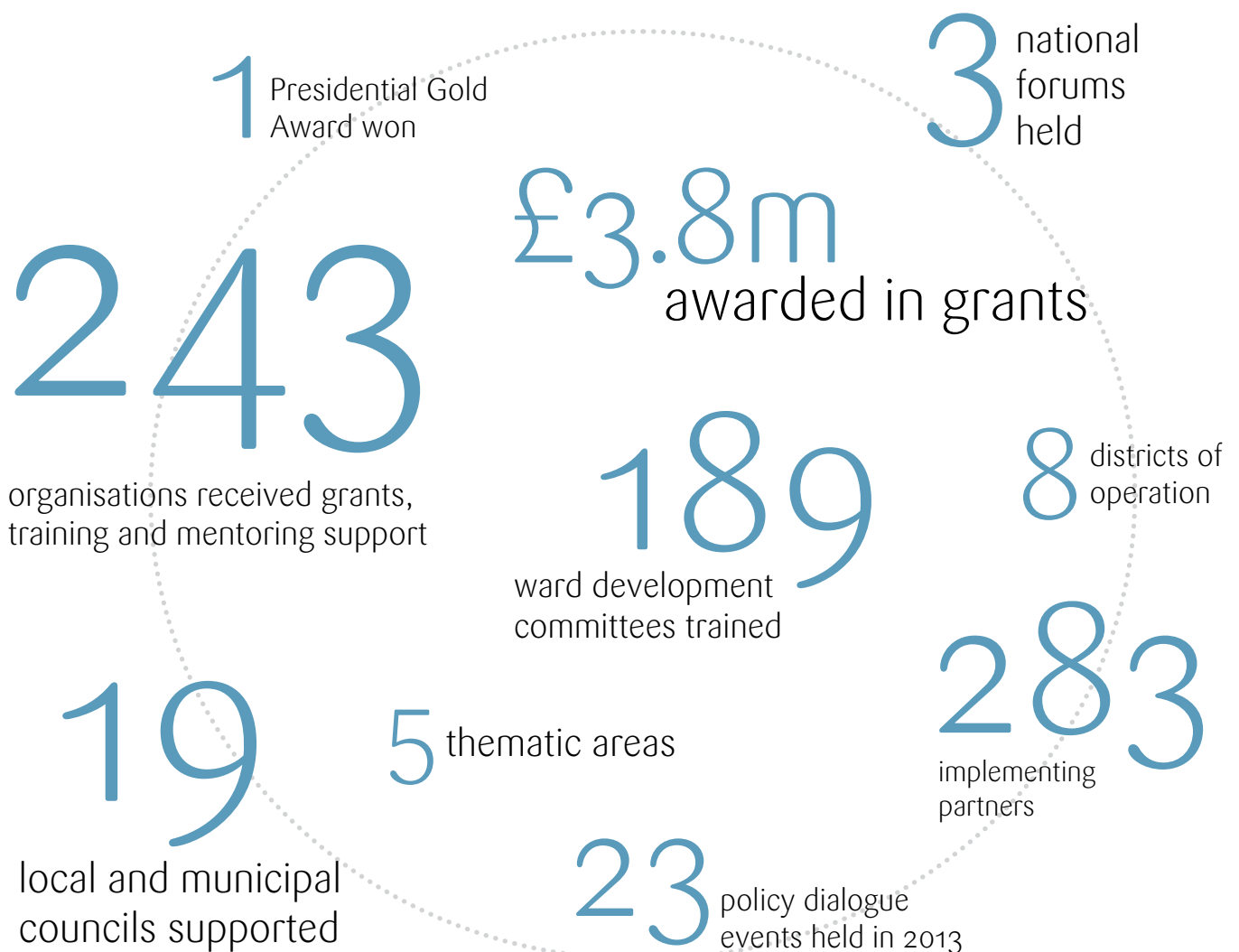
Alpha Sankoh
ENCISS Programme Director



Stories of change from Phase 3

- Civil society contributed to the development of key policies and legislation relating to gender, justice and freedom of information, as well as to the constitutional review process.
- Civil society played a significant role in ensuring that the 2012 national elections were peaceful, democratic and inclusive.
- In the Kenema and Kailahun Districts, mediation committees were set up to support women in disputes over land, child support, sexual abuse and other matters.
- As a result of CSOs' work in Koinadugu District, two women joined the chiefdom council committee, which previously had only one female member.
- Civil society partners were invited by the Government to participate in the formulation of its Agenda for Prosperity poverty reduction strategy.
- Council notice boards in the Southern Province and several other areas have begun to publicise minutes of council meetings and financial information.
- Civil society lobbied the Ministry of Youth Affairs on the out-of-date National Youth Policy, with their advocacy efforts contributing towards the creation of an updated policy, in consultation with CSOs.
- In Koinadugu District, there is evidence of the government responding to the needs of the citizens by extending provision of basic services, such as free healthcare, water and sanitation, and education.

ENCISS in numbers: figures from Phase 3



Building capacity

Capacity building has always been a core part of ENCISS. Since Phase 3 began, the programme has invested a lot of energy into equipping the scores of civil society organisations, community based networks and local state structures with whom we work. Here, we round up of some of the programme's capacity building activities.

From workshops in advocacy, financial management, communications, monitoring and results chain thinking, to training sessions tailored to the needs of ward development committees, ENCISS Phase 3 has helped to develop and strengthen the capacity of our implementing partners and local government structures.

This work has not been limited to formal training sessions given by external service providers. Throughout the programme,

ENCISS staff have complemented formal training activities by offering ongoing coaching, advice and mentoring, based on the individual needs of implementing partners.

In December 2013, an independent evaluation of the programme found that our capacity building activities were considered to be 'a key contributing factor in [the] project success of implementing partners'. The evaluation concluded that by offering this support, we had succeeded in raising the ability of civil society organisations 'to engage with public institutions and articulate/represent the interests of the poor and marginalised'.

Several of our micro and project grantees in particular have reported that the skills and knowledge gained have empowered them to approach other potential donors. In this way, ENCISS has played a part in helping these organisations chart a path towards sustainability, security and success in their endeavours.

Resource centres



The resource centres were located in Freetown, Bo, Makeni and Kenema.

From 2010-2013 ENCISS ran four resource centres in each of its offices: Freetown, Bo, Makeni and Kenema. The centres aimed to provide a space for people and organisations to source information about ENCISS and grants, gain free internet access, use reference materials, and learn about government policies and initiatives.

During 2013, the centres welcomed an average of 447 visitors each month. Resource centre assistants helped many organisations to get started online and set up email accounts for the first time. Textbooks, training materials, ENCISS newsletters, newspapers, grant application guidelines and legislation were among the other resources available.

Feedback from ENCISS staff and user surveys indicated that without the resource centres, many organisations would have been excluded from applying for ENCISS grants – especially rural groups and potential micro and project grantees with no prior internet experience. Many used the centres to develop proposals, complete forms and find out more about the process.

The centres also brought government and civil society together. 'Development planning officers were regular visitors to the Makeni Resource Centre,' explained Northern Region Programme Manager Saio Momor Kinthor. 'It helped the state actors and CSOs to interact in a more informal way.'

In short, these centres helped to strengthen civil society capacity, as confirmed by visitor and staff surveys conducted in 2012 and 2013. The outcomes recorded included better access to information on funding opportunities, improved skills in email and internet use, and stronger links with other organisations.

'Before the resource centre, having access to policy documents was very costly, as we had to buy it from the government bookshop: but at the resource centre we got these materials for free'

Laurent Atumbe, Programme Director, Helping People

'The resource centre has helped to develop my skills in project writing; it provided me with printing and photocopying facilities, internet access and reading materials based on our thematic focus'

Ramatu Kamara, Coordinator, Women's Initiative Movement for Justice

‘We are learning a lot’

Bambara Rural Women’s Development Organisation was awarded a micro grant for its work in the Kailahun District in 2012. Coordinator Lucy Gondor (pictured) reflects on how the group’s involvement with ENCISS built their capacity.



‘At first the reporting [element] was difficult to do, but after attending ENCISS trainings we are now conversant. They supervised and they even monitored the programme. They came and gave advice. We have learned a lot from them.

‘We had Mango training in Bo: financial, monitoring, project writing and budgeting. And communications training too – whatever

you do, you have to communicate with beneficiaries and be transparent.

‘With ENCISS, I have learnt how to put things together, such as keeping records and writing minutes. ENCISS has taught us to really map things out. The capacity building management and report writing has been a big legacy. Now we can plan projects and manage our groups.’

Ward development committees

ENCISS, in collaboration with our partners, has been working to strengthen the capacity of ward development committee (WDC) members and civil society to achieve sustainable service delivery within the local council localities.

During the first half of the extension phase, ENCISS trained 189 ward development committees in our operational areas, to equip them for monitoring development in their communities.

This process began by conducting learning needs assessments (LNAs) with WDC members, to ascertain the challenges they faced in carrying out their responsibilities. CSOs were also invited to participate.

These LNA sessions gave ENCISS a picture of the training needs and any knowledge gaps of committee members. A variety of needs were highlighted, including training in leadership skills, state structures, resource mobilisation, monitoring and evaluation, advocacy and accountability.

Information acquired from these sessions provided the foundation for a series of WDC training sessions rolled out in our operational districts. Among other things, committee members were equipped with the skills to monitor services in their communities: these monitoring exercises have since been carried out by WDCs working in collaboration with local CSOs.

Focus on financial health

During the grants-making phase, ENCISS engaged the services of Mango, a UK-based charity offering financial training to the non-profit sector. This was due to the recognition that many beneficiaries would require support to manage their grants effectively: particularly our micro grantees, who were found to have low capacity in this area.

In a series of sessions, Mango specialists trained all our former grantees nationwide in issues relating to budgets, grant management and financial reporting. The group training courses were tailored for those with similar learning objectives.

To increase the impact, ENCISS staff members were trained to conduct financial capacity building and monitoring visits. During these visits, staff coached grantees on how to improve their practices and they also assessed their record-keeping processes, internal controls and reporting procedures.

As these grantees progressed through the project lifecycle, the ongoing support they received became increasingly customised to their needs. Many groups were also taught how to assess their own financial management capacity, using the Mango Health Check resource.

These combined efforts resulted in improved management of grants by organisations with limited capacities, while helping to limit instances of improper use of funds. What’s more, some ENCISS grantees have reported that this training built their skills to a level where they have applied successfully for funding from other organisations.

Manifesto for change

In August 2012, voters in Pujehun district helped to set the agenda for potential candidates, thanks to an initiative run by the Pujehun Youths for Development (PYD), and with support from ENCISS. A major component of PYD's work was the introduction of a district-wide 'People's Manifesto' initiative. This inclusive approach aimed to tackle voter apathy and encourage greater numbers of local citizens, particularly young people, to engage in the election process of that year.

Grantee: Pujehun Youths for Development
Project: Strengthening policy debate for accountability at the local government level
Grant details: £40,000, Call 2, project grant
Theme: youth, 2012 elections, gender
Case study published: February 2013



PYD Project Director Phillip Mando at a People's Manifesto meeting in the Pujehun District.

Pujehun Youths for Development (PYD) works to engage young people in the Pujehun District on issues such as education, youth development, peace-building, food security, community hygiene and sanitation, HIV prevention, children's rights and gender-based violence.

The organisation received a £40,000 ENCISS project grant in 2012 to fund its 'People's Manifesto' initiative, ahead of the November 2012 elections. Its mission was to increase citizens' participation in the election process – with a special focus on the younger generation.

PYD wanted to address the 'governance gap' between citizens and their elected officials, and to create a platform that would allow communities to engage with aspiring local councillors on the issues affecting their lives. Its application for ENCISS funding was borne out of a desire to ensure that candidates' political manifestos genuinely reflected the needs of the communities – in particular, citizens whose views had often been drowned out in mainstream politics: young people, women and those living in poverty.

This project began in August 2012 when PYD formed a youth manifesto committee in each of Pujehun District's five constituencies. These committees were made up of young people from across all 22 wards of the district, with women and men represented equally.

'All committee members at ward level hail from their communities and membership is based entirely on love for the community and development,' explained PYD Project Director Phillip Mando.

A crucial first step

The creation of the youth manifesto committees was the crucial first stage of PYD's 'People's Manifesto' approach to the 2012 elections. Under the organisation's supervision, the newly formed committees then organised and ran consultations in each constituency in the district, in the run-up to the national polls.

These consultations were designed to give young residents and others a chance to speak to their potential political representatives, and share their views on the sorts of issues they felt ought to be addressed in their political manifestos.

'The manifesto is a bond. If you don't fulfill it, then we won't vote for you'

In doing so, citizens effectively took responsibility for creating their own manifestos, said Phillip Mando. 'It took PYD two weeks to get the whole exercise done and, at the end, about 750 young people benefitted. It was a very detailed approach.

'The idea was to encourage groups to agree with all the constituents in the wards, councillors and aspirants, about what

should go into their manifestos for candidacy, so that councilors will understand the needs of the people.'

He added: 'We also used the media and discussion programmes on community radio stations to reach communities that were not within the targeted areas.'

A marked difference

Twenty-five-year-old Joseph Moore, chair of the youth committee in constituency 87 in Pujehun District, noticed a marked difference in community attitudes on how to engage with political candidates.

'Before the intervention of PYD, all political manifestos presented by political aspirants in the district used to be produced by the political parties and brought to the people,' he explained.

'This was a major factor to underdevelopment in Pujehun District. We used to do needs assessments with our political aspirants, but the process was not led by us. We never heard the word "manifesto" and the politicians used to lie to us because we were blind. We voted for them and when they left, they never came back,' he added.

As a result of this ENCISS-funded initiative, 'there are no more issues of blind support', Joseph Moore remarked. 'There are no more cases where councillors say "I will make". The new saying now is: "I will facilitate". We agreed on the commonalities and those things that are possible along cultural, economic, and social lines. There is now more inclusion and more people are getting involved.'

Moreover, Joseph Moore believes that the PYD project led to a change in the way that citizens across the Pujehun District chose to cast their votes. He explained: 'The people decided not to vote on party lines, but for the people they believe can do the job. Even our traditional authorities had no bearing on the decisions; they were treated like any other constituent.'

A vote of confidence

With the elections over, the challenge remains to see whether elected officials and politicians will keep the commitments that they made to voters.

'The manifesto is a sort of agreement, a bond. If you don't fulfill the bond, then we won't vote for you in another election,' stressed Joseph Moore. 'The whole process even exposed those politicians that have been dormant, and it has also engendered competition. Politicians will not lie to us again.'

PYD hopes that this approach will continue to unite young people to hold politicians to account if they do not perform in the best interests of the citizens they serve. As Joseph Moore put it: 'We are now clear about the expectations of the community, and the politicians also know about their roles and responsibilities to the people.'

Justice and the gender laws

With funding from ENCISS, Action Plus has been working in Kenema District to ensure the full implementation of Sierra Leone's three gender justice laws. It has given legal assistance to women seeking justice, supported district level authorities to improve the quality of their services and response, and educated communities on the rights enshrined in the gender legislation.

Grantee: Action Plus

Project: Gender-based violence prevention and response project

Grant details: £50,000, Call 1, strategic grant

Theme: gender, justice and security

Case study published: August 2012

Sowa Brima arrives at Kenema's court house to collect her first mandatory maintenance payment from her husband. This marks the culmination of a long search for justice and the start of a more secure future for herself and her two daughters.

Abandoned by her husband and in debt, Sowa was struggling to make ends meet and all attempts to get help from district authorities had failed. It was only after ENCISS grantee Action Plus intervened and took up her case that she was able to get a court agreement forcing her husband to pay maintenance.

Sowa is one of many women in Kenema District who have been helped by Action Plus. The organisation promotes gender equality and an end to violence against women and girls. With support from an ENCISS strategic grant, it has raised awareness among communities about the rights enshrined in Sierra Leone's three gender justice laws.

'This grant has enabled us to provide legal aid for victims'

Passed in 2007, these three acts – the Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce Act, the Domestic Violence Act and the Devolution of Estates Act – provide protection for women under civil, religious and customary law.

Among other things, this legislation criminalises domestic violence and gives it a broad definition that includes the withholding of financial resources; entitles surviving spouses to remain in the family home; allows for the equal inheritance of property among male and female relatives; provides legal protection from early and forced marriage; and allows applications to be made for spousal and child maintenance payments.

Raising awareness

While the gender acts have increased women's protection under the law, they are still subject to discrimination in day-to-day life, explained Agnes Sandy, Project Manager at Action Plus. Using the strategic grant, training and other capacity-building support from ENCISS, Action Plus sought to raise awareness of the legislation. It conducted community education events across five chiefdoms in the district, reaching approximately 15,000 people.

These events aimed to demystify the gender laws and teach people how to report crimes or access assistance. Among other things, citizens were told about the free services provided by family support units (FSUs) – specialist teams that are attached to police stations and which investigate reports of child abuse and violence against women.

'The community people don't know the law so we explain their rights,' explained Agnes Sandy. 'We hire someone who speaks the local language.' Action Plus also provided a mediation service to help resolve disputes, with 15 cases successfully mediated.

Changing attitudes

Agnes Sandy has noticed a gradual shift in attitudes, citing an example of action taken as a result of the Action Plus training and awareness events: 'We took a phone call from a chief who knew of a case of a wife beaten nearly to the point of death.

'Before now, in this community and in Sierra Leone, we had this notion that the husband has the right to beat his wife and to withhold food. Through these trainings, people know this is a crime that is punishable by law.'

With financial support from ENCISS, Action Plus was able to retain the services of a lawyer to provide legal assistance to women seeking justice. 'ENCISS has helped a lot,' continued Agnes Sandy. 'Most people cannot afford a lawyer, and this grant has enabled us to provide legal aid for victims of domestic violence.'

Action Plus was keen to sustain the impact of the project once the grant ended. 'We conduct training and put structures in place so that communities can handle the issue even when Action Plus has left,' explained Agnes Sandy. This approach includes training women's groups to become facilitators within their communities, so that they are equipped with skills in mediation and conflict resolution, together with the confidence to demand action from the police and FSUs in more serious cases.

After the project, Action Plus successfully applied for funding from the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA). Staff at Action Plus maintain that this funding success was in part due to the grant and capacity building support from ENCISS, as well as the reference supplied by ENCISS to OSIWA as part of the application process.



Sowa Brima with her daughters Rashidatu and Alpha.

Sowa's story

Sowa Brima is a primary school teacher from Kenema, with two daughters. Her 18-year marriage collapsed after her husband abandoned her for another woman, leaving her in debt.

Sowa made numerous attempts to get her husband to contribute financially to the family: 'He wanted me to leave his house. The chief asked my husband to make peace but he refused. He asked him to pay maintenance of Le60,000 for all of us but I said "no", because the money is small. From there, the chief referred us to social welfare and they failed for two years to get him to pay – he started one time but stopped after two months. I went to the family support unit, but there was no action.'

Sowa struggled to get by on her teacher's salary while providing for

her daughters as well as a nephew and stepson. 'My salary was not enough and I could not afford sufficient food, a well-balanced diet.'

Her desperation increased when she heard her husband was going to re-marry. 'I was frustrated. I was searching for help. I asked around and my friend directed me to Action Plus... She directed me to the office and luckily they were in the office and they paid attention to me. They focused on my story. They said they would monitor the matter to the last, until justice prevailed.'

Action Plus provided the services of the lawyer and supported Sowa to take action against her husband to secure maintenance, accompanying her at every step. 'They monitored the social welfare until the case was referred. They went with me to the court.

I was frightened and panicked but they consoled me. The magistrate called us to his chamber and they came with me.'

The magistrate's decision went in Sowa's favour and reflected the rights enshrined in the gender legislation. 'He was angry with my husband for not taking care of his family... He asked him to pay Le150,000 per month, school fees, medicare and to pay me compensation of Le5m.'

With greater financial security, Sowa has begun to make plans for her and her family's future. 'My plan is to become really educated and serve as a role model. Things are very much different. I will try to find a place and get a business going to sustain us. Without Action Plus, I would have been frustrated.'

Voices for good governance

SMS Voices is a pioneering governance pilot project launched by ENCISS in January 2014. This initiative is designed to encourage transparent dialogue between citizens and local councillors via a custom-built SMS (text message) system. Here, we highlight some initial findings from the first three months of the pilot.

Project: SMS Voices – community reporting pilot project

Theme: decentralisation

Date published: May 2014

Mobile communications is a rapidly growing sector across many countries in Africa. Whether it's by sending weather forecasts, receiving news alerts or transferring money, mobile phones are presenting new ways for people to access services.

ENCISS has been tapping into this trend by piloting an innovative community reporting initiative that uses mobile technology to strengthen interaction between citizens and their councillors in Bo and Koinadugu Districts.

The project, SMS Voices, sees volunteer citizens in these two distinct parts of the country sending regular text message reports to their councillors, highlighting issues of concern in their communities. Nine ward councillors and 45 citizens – including representatives of civil society groups – have been participating in the pilot since January.

'This innovative project enables us to gather information that will allow civil society to monitor and follow up on the councils' work at a local level'

ENCISS Programme Director Alpha Sankoh

Bo and Koinadugu were selected for the project because they represented two ends of Sierra Leone's political spectrum, offered different governance structures and are locations with established ENCISS projects.

The community reporters range from farmers and teachers to students and traders, ensuring a wide spectrum of voices can be heard. Participation is voluntary, but monthly phone credit is provided to cover the cost of reports, and all the participants completed a three-day training course prior to the project.

Constructive engagement

The project emphasises constructive engagement rather than confrontation with elected officials, with councillors being encouraged to respond to messages, also by SMS, giving feedback on the issues raised. All messages are stored and sent using online technology created by a UK communications organisation, Radar, which is monitoring the reports alongside Christian Aid and ENCISS, as a means of promoting transparency and accountability within the project.

In the first month of the pilot, 64 reports were sent, followed by 20 in the second month and 26 in the third. The messages centred on one of five themes: gender, youth, justice and security, governance, or access to essential services (including health and education). To date, access to services has been the most commonly reported theme, with education, water, corruption, refuse, roads and health being the most popular topics within this.

Messages have included reports concerning faulty water hand pumps, lack of school teaching materials, insufficient supplies of medication in local hospitals, unsafe roads and bridges, and ineffective waste management, giving councillors a picture of the needs of their communities. In turn, responses from councillors have included pledges to investigate matters, discuss the issue at council meetings or pass on the information to the relevant individual or body.

Greater awareness

Reporters believe the project has already created an increased sense of responsibility and engagement about issues affecting their community, greater awareness and appreciation of the councillors' work, and a better flow of communication between citizens and councils.

Meanwhile, councillors have reported that the project is helping them to gather information about local issues, stay accountable to citizens in their wards, and build their capacity for responding swiftly and effectively to community concerns. In short, it has contributed towards a more inclusive and participatory governance landscape in the participating wards.

There have also been early indications of positive impact at community level. For instance, during two refresher training sessions held in Bo and Kabala in April 2014, a number of participants highlighted examples of tangible changes in their wards, which they believed were directly attributable to, or supported by, SMS reports sent in the first three months of the pilot.

The positive developments cited included: the rehabilitation of seven hand pump wells in Sinkunia (Ward 165, Koinadugu); an improved waste management system following the creation of a new garbage site in Yogomaia (Ward 148, Koinadugu); the commencement of a school building project (Ward 235, Bo); the rehabilitation of feeder roads at five different sites

Speaking out

Claude Sheriff, citizen reporter, Ward 232, Bo:

'There are a lot of advantages of mobile reporting. First, you learn to condense your messages down to just the most important words. Second, you can send a message to the authorities from wherever you are. And third, through all of this you can get the appropriate action to be taken by your councillor. Now we're sending these messages through SMS, information can be spread quickly from one point to another.'

Ballay Mansaray, councillor, Ward 160, Koinadugu:

'The project is very good for me as a councillor, because it has created awareness about the issues. It will also help with the ward committee members, because if there is anything they don't mention when they report to me, I know that members of the community will pick it up. With more information, I can discuss these issues with the chairman, with the staff: we will all be more aware of work to be done. And in this way I can work better with the council, for the benefit of Kisonko chiefdom, for the district, and Sierra Leone as a whole.'



Bo District councillor Martin M B Goba

(Ward 160, Koinadugu); the introduction of a police warden to direct traffic at a high-risk junction (Ward 235, Bo); and an improvement in the relationship between cattle and crop farmers (Ward 165, Koinadugu). ENCISS is following up on such cases, to gain more insight into the outcomes achieved.

One community reporter, Evelyn Turay from Ward 235 in Bo, was enthusiastic about the project's impact so far. 'It's making a lot of improvements, because whenever I send a report to my councillor he promises that he will take an action,' she said.

'I have seen change. Especially in terms of the gender issues that I normally report on. I have now seen council officials in the community raising awareness on issues around teenage pregnancy and early sexual activities: issues that lead to early marriage and under-development. The project has helped my councillor to do his job better. He even told me: "Evelyn, you have helped me in my job so much".'

Her ward councillor, Martin M B Goba, agreed: 'It's been challenging, but it's helping me to improve on my job; to know the issues, to know the problems in my community, so that I can find solutions to them. Some of the problems have been taken to the council, and they have tried to assist me and have started some development activities in my community as a result.'

Promoting participation

While there have been successes, levels of participation among different wards has varied greatly. Challenges have included technical problems, ill-health, lost mobile phone handsets, frequent travel, low levels of councillor engagement and difficulty accessing sources of information. ENCISS and Radar have been working to help overcome these issues.

Meanwhile, headline information on the reports and trends is being shared with ENCISS implementing partners, ward development committees and local councillors. It is hoped this information will inform their work and inspire further discussion and action, including dialogue events between CSOs and local government.

After the success of the first three months of the pilot, Christian Aid and ENCISS decided to extend the project by a further four months, to give it time to meet its full potential. It will now run until the end of August 2014, giving citizens a further chance to make their voices heard.

Moving from the margins

In Sierra Leone, people with disabilities are often marginalised and denied a chance to play a full active role in society. They face barriers to education, healthcare and employment, as well as difficulties accessing legal services. Disability Sierra Leone (DiSiL) has a vision to see this community integrated into all aspects of national life. With ENCISS' support, it has been able to improve access to justice for people with disabilities living in the Western Area.

Grantee: Disability Sierra Leone

Project: Access to justice for people living with disabilities

Grant details: £60,153 project grant, Call 2

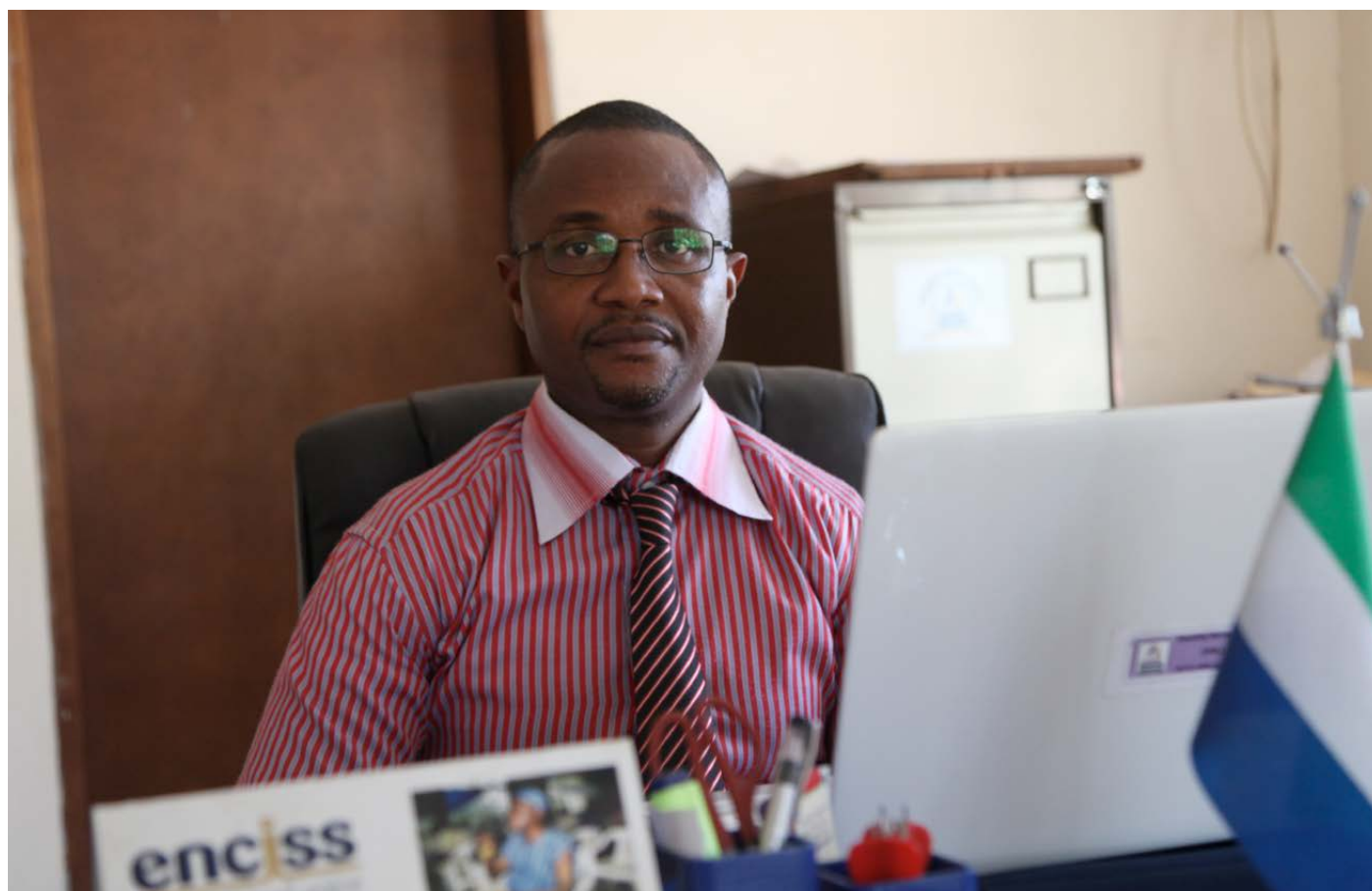
Theme: justice and security

Case study published: January 2014

An estimated 450,000 people live with disabilities nationwide, according to World Health Organization figures, including polio victims, blind and deaf citizens, and those injured during the war. Disability Sierra Leone (DiSiL) works to ensure they are fully included in a society that has traditionally viewed them as second-rate citizens.

'The disabled community has long been marginalised by the justice sector,' observed Teddy Foday-Musa, Director of DiSiL. 'The sector is not designed to deal with them, and many of those working within it are unsympathetic to their needs, whether it be the provision of physical access to premises or understanding those who cannot articulate themselves vocally. The deaf are particularly affected.'

DiSiL received a £60,153 project grant from ENCISS during the Call 2 funding round to improve both victims' and suspects' dealings with the country's criminal justice system. The organisation was concerned that people with disabilities were unaware of their rights and wary of systems that could not relate to them.



Teddy Foday-Musa, DiSiL Director.

Today, partly through the efforts of DiSiL, the community in the Western Area is better educated on legal issues, while the sector is, in turn, more sympathetic to their needs.

Accessing justice

For the project, DiSiL chose to focus on the Sierra Leone Police Force (SLPF), since the police often represented a citizen's first point of contact with the justice system.

Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) Ibrahim Samura, DiSiL's key liaison within SLPF, acknowledged that officers have often shown a lack of empathy towards people living with disabilities, particularly those who are deaf. He also noted that the absence of people with disabilities within the force had further alienated the force from this community.

'In the absence of officers who could interpret sign language, the force leaned towards the testimony of those more able to articulate - sometimes to the disadvantage of the disabled plaintiff,' ASP Samura said.

'The disabled community has long been marginalised by the justice sector'

DiSiL began by holding consultations with affected groups, during which it became apparent that those with hearing difficulties were particularly at risk of being refused justice. Few were able to make themselves understood to police officers, either through sign language or vocally, making it difficult to plead their cases.

The police were seen as being unsympathetic to the grievances of those with disabilities, and were viewed with suspicion. This was partly found to be because they frequently engaged in actions targeting people with disabilities: for instance, through their efforts to deter street begging or enforce eviction orders against groups of disabled squatters.

Using these findings, DiSiL engaged with the justice sector, holding workshops to alert practitioners to the concerns raised, develop solutions and improve communication between the parties.

Continued engagement

'Working with DiSiL and other stakeholders helped us to appreciate some of these issues, allowing us to develop concrete solutions for addressing them,' said ASP Samura, who is enthusiastic about the progress being made.

Largely thanks to the efforts of DiSiL, the Sierra Leone Police Force now has 20 officers in the Western Area trained in sign language: it would like to train a total of 100 nationwide.

Meanwhile, a special advertising campaign led to the recruitment of four people with disabilities into the force. It is hoped more will follow.

'Our initial success in recruiting officers from amongst people with disabilities was slow,' ASP Samura said. This, however, was overcome through continued engagement with stakeholders. Meanwhile, a new Disability Reporting Desk, staffed by an officer with disabilities, has been established to give frontline assistance to members of this community, while work is being done to improve the accessibility of new police buildings.

Progress has been steady, and DiSiL is able to point to some early successes. Teddy Foday-Musa cites the case of Henry Nyamdebo, a wheelchair user on remand at the Pademba Road central prison. He was arrested in 2011 as part of a police clampdown on armed robberies in Freetown, accused of manufacturing the weapons used by the robbers. While his co-accused were released on bail, Nyamdebo languished in prison for over two years, his case file lost and access to his family denied.

After being alerted to his predicament, DiSiL helped Mrs Nyamdebo gain access to her husband. It engaged with the police and prosecutors on the issue, which prompted them to locate Mr Nyamdebo's file. DiSiL subsequently alerted the National Commission for Persons with Disability to his plight, who agreed to ensure that he received legal advice.

An issue of rights

'Guilt or innocence were not the issue here', commented Teddy Foday-Musa. 'Quite simply, here was an individual whose access to justice was being thwarted. For us it was a matter of ensuring that he was granted his rights while justice takes its course.'

On the whole, ASP Samura feels there has been a move forward in relations between the police and people with disabilities as a result of DiSiL's work, despite some initial challenges. Rather than hostility, he now perceives a new spirit of cooperation between the two groups.

Teddy Foday-Musa ascribes DiSiL's success to a thorough review of the issue, broad consultation, partnership and focus. He and DiSiL's Finance Director Tamba Pessima believe that working with ENCISS has benefitted their organisation, by providing invaluable support and training and helping them to network effectively. The latter singled out the Mango financial training as being of particular value.

Meanwhile, Teddy Foday-Musa noted that ENCISS training and support has facilitated DiSiL's successful enrolment into the Access to Security and Justice Programme, a project to help Sierra Leone's government implement key aspects of the 2011-2013 Justice Sector Reform Strategy and Investment Plan.

Votes for women

ENCISS grantee the Social Enterprise Development Foundation (SEND) has worked through the Kailahun Women in Governance Network in eastern Sierra Leone to challenge gender discrimination, encourage women's participation in local and national politics, and promote the voice and concerns of women across the Kailahun District.

Grantee: The Social Enterprise Development Foundation
Project: Kailahun Women in Governance Network Capacity Building Project
Grant details: £45,000 project grant, Call 1
Theme: gender, 2012 elections
Case study published: August 2012

Girls and women in Sierra Leone face discrimination and challenge at every stage of their life. The situation is particularly acute in Kailahun District, one of the country's poorest districts and one of the hardest hit by the civil war: a Kaillahun village, Bomaru, is where the conflict began in 1991. It has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world, the majority of girls do not finish secondary school and over 65% of women are illiterate.

It is against this setting that SEND Sierra Leone is working to address the systematic causes of poverty among women, by helping them to hold Kailahun decision-makers and service-providers to account.

When SEND started work in Sierra Leone in 2008, it chose to base its operations in Kailahun District due to the level of need there. 'We decided to look at the most vulnerable areas in Sierra Leone, and Kailahun was one of the most vulnerable. When we started there was no representation of women,' explained SEND Field Officer Mariama Bah.

Although nearly half of Kailahun's 462,000 population are women, they are under-represented at every level of decision-making and political representation. When SEND began working in the district, only one of its eight members of parliament was a woman, and only four out of 29 elected councillors were women.

With support from ENCISS, SEND Sierra Leone has implemented a range of activities to build the capacity and participation of local women. 'We've done communications and advocacy training,' said Mariama Bah. 'We have noticed that women are ready to take up advocacy issues, but they have to build their confidence. They are learning to be more confident over time.'

The pursuit of gender equality

SEND carried out its project by working through the Kailahun Women in Governance Network to challenge political parties to put the pursuit of gender equality at the heart of their policies.

The network brings together more than 100 women's groups representing a membership of over 5,000 women, men and young people. In February 2012, it launched a Kailahun District Women's Manifesto 2012 to educate political parties and citizens about the priority policies, issues and concerns of women in Kailahun, and to mobilise women to register and vote during the 2012 elections.

With the financial, advisory and capacity-building support of SEND, the women's network organised a workshop to develop the manifesto and discuss key issues around gender discrimination. It was attended by representatives from the major political parties, religious groups, media and traditional authorities.

The manifesto was designed as a baseline against which to measure the performance of the district council, political parties, traditional authorities and civil society organisations in promoting gender equality. It covered 11 thematic areas: health, agriculture, education, the council, the environment, water for domestic use, business, youth, political parties, women with learning disabilities and the media.

Under each theme, the women acknowledged the progress that is being made and identified further concerns and recommendations for service providers and local authorities.

A manifest success

The manifesto worked. After the 2012 elections, fewer than 11% of elected parliamentarians and councillors in Sierra Leone were women. However, this trend was bucked in Kailahun, which was the only district to meet the official 30% quota of female candidates: women there made up 63% of parliamentary nominees and 36% of councillor nominees.

Victoria Mamie Gbow from Upper Bambara, a councillor elected in 2008, certainly believes there has been a change in attitudes and a greater acceptance of women standing for political office or holding key community roles. 'The Kailahun District Women's Manifesto 2012 tells our community to listen to women, that women should be heard,' she said.

Kailahun Women in Governance Network member Isata N'Doleh agreed that the manifesto helped to challenge the status-quo. She has noticed a transformation in the way women participate in political debate and in decisions that affect them: 'We are now networking and have turned the tables now.'

This is a view echoed by Chief Brima S Samayandii of Luawa chiefdom, who acknowledges that people once felt it was neither acceptable nor appropriate for a woman to stand in an election. 'We didn't allow women to vie for any position. Tradition and custom didn't allow women and men to get together to make decisions,' he said.

'Now we [men and women] sit down. Before their [women's] opinions weren't there, but that was the tradition and what men said was the final decision. Now with women there, their voices are heard and the decisions are better.'

‘Now their voices are heard and the decisions are better’



Isata N'Doleh (right), member of the Kailahun Women in Governance Network, and Mariama Bah of SEND Sierra Leone.

Challenging female genital cutting

The influence of the Kailahun Women in Governance Network has helped to tackle the practice of female genital cutting (FGC). This practice traditionally occurs during the initiation of girls under 18-years-old into the women's Bondo society – the cultural system of informal education in Sierra Leone.

FGC is performed by Soweï women (traditional Bondo leaders), who perform clitoridectomies on the girls – often when they reach puberty – and provide training in how to become a good wife and mother.

Network member Isata N'Doleh estimates that at one time, almost half of all girls in the Kailahun community were initiated into the Bondo society. 'The

family spent a lot on initiation – there are people who conduct the ceremony and you spend a lot of money on the ceremony,' she said.

A pattern of decline

Describing how the Kailahun's Women in Governance Network helped to stem this practice, Isata N'Doleh said: 'The government came out with a policy saying that you should ask the consent of the individual, and that she can do it willingly if she wants, at the age of 18 years. The network would speak to the parents and the guardians and persuade them to wait for the girls' consent.'

The number of girls being initiated locally went into decline following the network's actions. 'It would mostly

happen in the long [school] holiday and it would take place in the bush. It has been going steadily down from 2010 and there are no reports in this [2012] long holiday,' Isata N'Doleh reported, expressing hope that the downward trend would continue.

According to Chief Brima S Samayandii of Luawa chiefdom, 'the network played a great role' in this. 'They sensitised people to know that they cannot initiate girls below 18,' he remarked. Commenting on the change, a former local Soweï Jaimie Brima, added: 'If a girl hasn't had initiation then it doesn't matter anymore. Instead of doing initiation ceremonies, I'm now doing market gardening.'

Planning for development

With support from ENCISS, councils across Sierra Leone have engaged local citizens, to involve them in the process of creating and reviewing development plans. In Bo District, in the Southern Province, ENCISS gave project grants and technical assistance to help Bo City Council and Bo District Council adopt participatory and inclusive approaches geared towards ensuring that plans were based on issues prioritised by citizens. The result has been greater dialogue and understanding between society and local government.

Grantees: Bo City Council and Bo District Council

Project: Reviewing council development plans and strengthening the capacity of ward development committees

Grant details: City Council £30,000; District Council £35,000 (project grants, Call 2)

Theme: decentralisation

Case study published: September 2013

District councils were re-established in Sierra Leone by the 2004 Local Government Act, which provides the legal framework for councils along with 80 devolved functions in areas such as community development. However, despite this move towards decentralisation, the approach of local councils to planning has not always involved genuine consultation of citizens.

‘Civil society organisations (CSOs) began to express concerns,’ explained Paul Koroma, programme director of Partners in Conflict Transformation (PICOT) and a former ENCISS board member. ‘Everything was in the Act but there was no effort, so CSOs began to demand accountability.’

Bo District Council deputy chief administrator Peter Koroma added: ‘Initially with decentralisation, the government sent some experts to design the template for the development plan, as the structures were not there in 2004. In 2011, we consulted with the chiefdoms, but the past plans did not reflect the general views of the people. Now we’re going further down, to the ward level.’

The participatory planning approach adopted by the District and City Councils in Bo, with support from ENCISS, has helped to foster greater openness and accountability. The councils report improved coordination with key stakeholders, as well as an increase in local revenue generation.

Participatory planning

In implementing its project, Bo City Council used a range of participatory planning tools, including the ‘budget game’, which saw residents being asked to highlight their key development issues.

‘The budget game gives opportunity for every participant to vote for a priority project, then we see which carries the highest number of votes,’ explained Emmanuel Deoud, Bo City Council deputy chief administrator. ‘Road works were generally the topmost priority.’ The net result of this approach has been greater ownership of planning. ‘They create it, so it is the people’s plan,’ he said.

‘Previously residents couldn’t articulate their issues, but now they speak up’

Bo City Council also opened up channels of communication to share information with local citizens. The simplest approach to this has been the displaying of news on community noticeboards. ‘We have posted financial information, the fixed asset register, tariffs for different transactions and the minutes from meetings,’ said William Alpha, chief administrator for the City Council. ‘We had lots of sessions with ENCISS on being accountable to the people.’

The drive to be more transparent encouraged the council to take to local radio to engage the public: a weekly phone-in show, ‘Bo City Council hour’, gave councillors and ward development committee (WDC) members an opportunity to share news with the community. Local meetings hosted by WDCs across the district have also given residents a chance to hear about progress or raise concerns.

Local councillor Catherine Kamara, of Ward 230 in northern Bo city, has participated in the radio discussions and has met regularly with local residents. ‘Whenever we meet, I always make sure it’s a two-way process. I bring the message back from Bo City Council, so they know what is happening. Communication is important,’ she said.

Commenting on the change this work has brought about in local wards, Peter Koroma said: ‘Previously they couldn’t articulate their issues but now they speak up – not just about the planning, but about the implementation too.’ Similarly, Paul Koroma of PICOT has noticed a change in the councils’ attitudes: ‘They used to fear accountability as a monster, but now it’s not a monster and they’re opening up to it.’

A deeper dialogue

As well as encouraging accountability, there has also been an improvement in coordination among key stakeholders locally, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs). ‘The legacy and beauty of ENCISS is the NGO coordination meeting, and

Lessons learnt

Some of the challenges and lessons arising from the council project:

1. Reporting

Councils faced challenges in complying with ENCISS reporting requirements. Reasons for this included limited resources and staff capacity, and the issue of managing different requirements from government and donors. 'Staff strength has to be increased. A lot of capacity building has to be done,' said William Alpha at Bo City Council. ENCISS consulted with councils to investigate the cause of their problems and offer additional support in this area. Peter Koroma at Bo District Council appreciated this: 'Our accountant attended the Mango financial training, and ENCISS pointed out areas for improvement. ENCISS has tried to capacitate us well.'

2. Staff transfers

Concerns were raised about the frequency and unexpected nature of staff transfers between councils, and its impact on continuity of work. Such transfers are decided by the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Affairs, and councils have little control over it. 'It makes it really difficult for planning,' says Julia Amara, who was transferred from Bo to Kenema District Council in July 2013.

3. Stakeholder relationships

Relations between councils and key stakeholders, such as traditional authorities and MPs, have been a challenge, said Paul Koroma, who noted that the decentralisation process

hadn't fully considered the relationship between these different structures. For instance, revenue collection remains an area of conflict between councils and chiefdoms. 'Accountability sessions have helped to simmer down conflict between them,' he said.

4. Procurement processes

During the project, some concerns were raised about the quality of the council procurement processes. Groups like PICOT highlighted this issue with the National Public Procurement Authority (NPPA), who acknowledged the need to raise awareness about good procurement practice among council staff – including by attending ENCISS accountability platforms.



Councillor Catherine Koroma (left) meets with members of the Ward 230 development committee.

going down to ward level to get the views of people's felt needs,' said Peter Koroma.

'It has improved sector planning. People are now aware of what's in [the development plan] and it has aided coordination and helps us to track progress,' agreed Julia Amara, former development planning officer with Bo District Council.

One significant change has been an increase in the payment of local taxes. William Alpha at Bo City Council attributed this directly to the participatory planning approach. 'Payment of taxes

has been enhanced because if people know what it's for, and understand how it's used, then they will pay,' he said. 'ENCISS has created this scenario.'

Meanwhile, Peter Koroma is adamant that this inclusive approach to planning must continue even though ENCISS funding has ended. 'Whether we have donor funds or not, we must continue to review the development plan,' he said. Julia Amara concurred: 'Maybe now that councils have seen the relevance of planning together, I hope that they will put funding into it.'

Rights for all

Kabala Cheshire Services was created by volunteers in the aftermath of the civil war. Today, it has a livelihood and skills training programme that focuses on supporting vulnerable women, including childless widows, and people living with disabilities. With support from ENCISS, Kabala Cheshire Services has sought to raise awareness of the different types of exclusion these marginalised groups face and to tackle the stigma and discrimination that prevents them from playing a full role in community life.

Grantee: Kabala Cheshire Services

Project: Improving social inclusion and opportunities for people with disability, youth and women

Project details: £18,000 project grant, Call 2

Theme: Justice and security

Case study published: April 2013



Monday Manseray received support from the project.

Kabala Cheshire Services has been working in several chiefdoms in the Koinadugu District to advocate for better access to justice and basic services for vulnerable women and people with disabilities. 'People don't consider them as important and some think they are devils and witches. They don't include them or consider them as part of society,' explained Sheku Davowa, the organisation's Livelihood Resource Centre Manager.

While the Government of Sierra Leone has shown an increased commitment on disability issues, this community continues to face stigma, a high degree of unemployment, limited social participation, difficulty in accessing healthcare and greater levels of violence and abuse.

Moving beyond skills

Kabala Cheshire Services has supported training in skills such as gara (tie-dye), weaving, tailoring and soap-making. However, it noticed that many trainees still struggled to earn a living. 'Most beneficiaries are worse off after two to three years, because there are no structures to sustain the impact,' said Sheku Davowa. That's why, with backing from ENCISS, the organisation has also addressed the social barriers that prevent people with disabilities from pursuing livelihoods.

'The ENCISS grant gave us the opportunity to link the service delivery aspect of our work to community level advocacy and awareness-raising on disabled rights. We believed that if we did not remove the social barriers or taboos that shape the perception of many people in society about people with disabilities, all our skills training programmes will be in vain,' Sheku Davowa said.

The organisation introduced various initiatives with the help of ENCISS support, including an annual Peace and Rights Day designed to bring people together to talk about disability issues. It also established taskforces in each of the five chiefdoms in which it operates.

The task at hand

Predominantly made up of people with disabilities, these seven-member taskforces exist to monitor and challenge local cases of social exclusion and discrimination. To complement this, Kabala Cheshire Services also set up five committees of elders (including court clerks, chiefs and mammy queens), to enhance fair access to justice.

One outcome of the organisation's campaigning efforts has been the willingness of key stakeholders – such as chiefs and service providers – to address the issues facing marginalised people and protect their interests. 'We are now getting full cooperation from stakeholders and the inclusion of people with disabilities in community-based activities has improved greatly,' Sheku Davowa reported.

'The support from ENCISS has helped us to interact with stakeholders and create structures such as the taskforces. These structures are helping to protect people in the community and sustain livelihoods by changing attitudes. We will continue to change perceptions and create more opportunities for people with disabilities in Koinadugu District.'

'The inclusion of people with disabilities in community-based activities has improved greatly'

Sheku Davowa also acknowledged, with gratitude, the non-financial support that Kabala Cheshire Services has received through the ENCISS programme: 'We had Mango training on finance, and results chain thinking training, which is about creating a realistic programme focused on specific issues. The support is more than the funding – it's about improving us.'



Abibatu Kamara was chosen to chair a taskforce created to monitor and challenge cases of exclusion.

‘I view myself differently now’

Nineteen-year-old Mohamed Sesay, a member of the Wara Wara Yagala Chieftdom taskforce, was disabled by polio at the age of 12.

‘I have suffered a lot. Even my own parents thought I was useless. They were willing to pay school fees for my able-bodied brothers and sisters, but when it came to me I was always considered last. As a taskforce member, I have been given the opportunity to monitor abuses against disabled people and report such cases to the committee.

‘The good thing is that any time I report an incident, immediate action is taken. If it was not for the training and exposure I received from Kabala Cheshire Services, I would not have been able to do what I am doing now. Things have changed very fast. We have even succeeded in having a disabled person elected as a town chief in Kabala. I view myself differently in society now and my disability does not precede me anymore. Now people call my name, and not “that disabled man”.’

‘There has been great change’

Abibatu Kamara, a mother of two from Kabala, chairs her local taskforce. She has a disability that affects her hip and knee joints. Having received tailoring training from Kabala Cheshire Services, she runs a dress-making business from home.

‘During my childhood I was an outcast. Even my parents did not recognise me as their daughter and when we went to the hospital we were not treated well. I find it difficult to go to town and to houses that are not friendly because the steps are too high. Kabala Cheshire Services has helped me greatly by training me as a tailor and I’m now a good seamstress. I’m now able to get money from the work. I’m a member of the taskforce. If things happen to disabled people then I share the matter with the chief and the mammy queen. There has been a great change. There is the inclusion of disabled people in radio discussions and in meetings, and they have been given the opportunity to own land.’

‘It is now better for me’

Monday Manseray, a widow from Kabala, has experienced verbal abuse and bullying because she does not have children.

‘In our society when women don’t have a child people say that woman is a witch. Whenever I got into a misunderstanding with my neighbours they usually say that I am a witch. One of my neighbour’s children got sick and immediately I was accused of being responsible for her child’s sickness. I didn’t have anyone to talk on my behalf. I wasn’t afraid because I know that I’m not a witch, but it makes me feel sad.

‘Kabala Cheshire Services called us to a public meeting, to make people understand that we are not witches. My neighbours were at the meeting: it was fruitful. Now my neighbours have got the picture that I am not a witch and they were ashamed. There is a great difference to how it used to be. The children used to run away from me, so it is now better for me.’

Peace monitors

A dynamic group of volunteer peace monitors have been steadily transforming their communities in southern Sierra Leone, under the guidance of Peace and Reconciliation Movement Sierra Leone. With the help of a project grant, the organisation has taken great strides in supporting local initiatives to prevent and mitigate conflict.

Grantee: Peace and Reconciliation Movement Sierra Leone

Project: People's Justice and Security Project

Grant details: £30,000 project grant, Call 2

Theme: justice and security

Case study published: February 2013



Peace monitoring volunteers taking part in peace and reconciliation training in Matru Jong.

'The use of volunteer peace monitors is the most cost effective way of dealing with conflict issues at the community level.' This is the firm view of Ambrose Karim, Programme Manager of Peace and Reconciliation Movement Sierra Leone (PRM-SL).

The organisation works on peace-building and reconciliation in Bo, Pujehun and Moyamba districts in southern Sierra Leone, and is part of wider efforts to strengthen justice systems, especially at the local level.

PRM-SL received a project grant from ENCISS in 2012 to establish a group of volunteers to promote peaceful methods of resolving local conflicts. It used local media to recruit these peace monitors to represent their neighbourhoods.

Those who came forward included a driver, police officer and nurse. All were given a two-day training course in mediation, conflict analysis, negotiation, dialogue, advocacy, community mobilisation and leadership skills.

'After the training, we formed the executive and started organising meetings,' explained John Tucker, a development worker who chairs the Matru group of volunteer peace monitors.

'The training was a springboard for us to go into action. It was this platform that gave us recognition in the community and made people respect our cause. We needed the special skills that PRM-SL taught us to be able to tackle these issues, and we could not have done so without them,' he added.

Seeking new ideas

The volunteers are encouraged to pursue new and creative means of conflict resolution. In Jong Chiefdom, Bonthe District, this approach has made a difference for the communities of Beyinga, Santogie, Basiaka and Yengesa.

In the past, these communities have experienced disputes over the election of town chiefs. It has also seen 'bush palava' (land or farm ownership disputes) between groups. Solutions were hard to find, and over time entire families and communities had become divided and polarised.

'We have been able to introduce fairness and humanity in conflict resolution and this is gaining momentum,' explained John Tucker. 'For example, an oil palm plantation, which created a major conflict between land owners, the community, local authorities and the local council, has been dealt with by the group. We dealt with these issues by creating platforms for discussions.'

The peace monitors were also able to resolve a 'bush' dispute between a local court chairman and paramount chief. Elsewhere, they helped to end a boycott of Matru's only community radio station by clearing up a misunderstanding between Christian and Muslim listeners. In Santogie, they brought parties together to find a solution to a town chieftaincy problem that had existed for over a decade.

'We have been able to introduce fairness in conflict resolution'

One peace monitor, Matru town chief Madam Edna Kallon, said the training had improved her mediation skills: 'Now I know how to deal with complex political issues and how to guide the parties into arriving on amicable settlements,' she commented. Although the group has faced challenges in relation to mobility and finance, the volunteers regard themselves as pioneers of community conflict resolution. 'Apart from us, no other organisation has ever done such work in these communities,' said John Tucker.

As far as Ambrose Karim is concerned, the recruitment of volunteers from within their sections or places of birth is critical to the sustainability of the project. Looking to the future, he said: 'The monitors will continue to mediate and resolve local conflicts and have an impact long after the end of the project.'

Held to account

In a country where the governing authorities' communication with the populace has traditionally been unilateral and limited, learning the art of constructive discussion is key. During Phase 3, ENCISS has sought to open the channels of dialogue. Accountability platforms are one initiative that is helping to cultivate a culture of discussion, collaboration and transparency.

Project: Accountability platforms

Location: Western Area

Theme: decentralisation

Case study published: April 2014

'Productive, well-meaning dialogue is key to creating a constructive relationship between civil society and local government,' according to ENCISS Governance Advisor Abdulai Walon-Jalloh.

ENCISS believes one way to create such dialogue is through its accountability platforms. Held across the country, these events offer local governments a chance to give account of their work, enabling citizens to stay informed on aspects of service delivery – including budgets, income, expenditure and the progress of projects. There were 19 planned for 2013-14.

ENCISS implementing partners (CSOs and former grantees) plan and host these accountability platforms on a regular basis, with financial and logistical support from ENCISS. Local governance structures have also played an increasingly key role in delivering these events, demonstrating that they are becoming more responsive and transparent, while also indicating that this culture of openness will be sustained after ENCISS Phase 3 ends.

'Before these accountability platforms we had little say with regard to influencing decision-making. Now we have input on how money is raised, budgeted and spent,' says George Morris, Executive Director of Youth Action for Self Development (YASD), an implementing partner from the Western Area.

He cites the CSO communiqué submitted to the Government of Sierra Leone in June 2013 as evidence of progress being made. Handed in after the June 2013 National CSO Forum hosted by ENCISS, the communiqué was the outcome of a series of accountability platforms and is believed to have influenced subsequent government actions, such as the Freedom of Information Bill.

Good governance

As a recent example of this progress, George Morris points to the series of accountability platforms held in Freetown earlier this year. These saw CSOs coming together with councillors, ward committee members, citizens and others to discuss council development plans for the capital city and its rural surrounds.

The accountability platform in January saw participation from Freetown City Council (FCC) officials and featured an address from the city's Mayor, Franklyn Bode Gibson, who took the opportunity to invite CSOs to attend a monthly 'Open Office'.

A similar session in Waterloo, the following month, saw the Western Area Rural District Council sharing its plans for projects relating to development issues such as water, sanitation and education. Meanwhile, a subsequent Local Council-CSO Coordination Forum, facilitated by ENCISS in March, gave local CSOs an opportunity to follow up on all the issues raised.

Reflecting on January's accountability platform, former chair of the ENCISS Implementing Partners Working Group in the Western Area, Santigie Kargbo, said it had 'affirmed the role of CSOs in promoting democratic good governance in Freetown'.

'By facilitating direct discourse with FCC, the event allowed residents to address pressing matters that affect their day-to-day wellbeing, to understand the council's priorities and constraints, and to see how best they can cooperate with the FCC to help it realise its ambitions for the benefit of all its stakeholders, particularly the less well-off,' he commented.

Although the relationship between civil society and the FCC had historically been strained, Santigie Kargbo is confident that the accountability platforms have improved relations and reduced confrontation between parties ostensibly working towards the same goals.

He cites FCC's willingness to share its development plan as one indicator of greater cooperation. Previously only obtainable for Le100,000, the document is now available, free of charge. ENCISS programme staff in the Western Region distributed hard copies to implementing partners across Freetown, enabling them to continue engaging with the issues raised.

'The accountability platforms are bearing fruit,' said ENCISS Western Region Programme Manager Wilhelmina Sho-Cole. 'We are making slow but steady progress and our engagement has resulted in action.'



Participants at an accountability platform in Freetown's Waterloo neighbourhood, held in February 2014.



ENCISS aims to improve accountability and strengthen citizens' voice, participation in decision-making and access to information.

Our vision is to see an active and engaged society capable of articulating citizens' demands, and an effective state that is responsive and accountable to its citizens.

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