

# POWER TO THE PEOPLE

For almost five years, Christian Aid's Governance and Transparency Fund (GTF) has supported partners to work with some of the most marginalised people in the world. For these people – who are discriminated against because of their gender, disability, age, ethnicity or social class – the path out of poverty towards equality is especially challenging. GTF partners have worked to empower these groups to challenge authorities and claim their rights, and their work has brought impressive results

## Women stand up and speak out in Sierra Leone's elections

Elections provide a vital opportunity for people to challenge entrenched systems which maintain the status quo. But shifting the balance of power towards underrepresented groups is not easy, nor does it happen overnight. It requires social and cultural change, leadership and commitment from governments and civil society organisations, and a movement of people calling for fairer participation.

In 2008, systems of governance in Sierra Leone were heavily male-dominated and hard for women to access or take part in. Just 14 per cent of 124 members of parliament were women. In Kailahun district, three of 29 (10 per cent) elected councillors were women. Many of them experienced regular and routine abuse and discrimination, making it hard to do their jobs and discouraging other women from seeking office.

Since 2008, GTF partner, the Social Enterprise Development Foundation (SEND) in Sierra Leone, has worked with the Kailahun Women in Governance Network (KWIGN) to encourage women's participation in local and national politics and fight discrimination. SEND-Sierra Leone's strategy goes beyond just putting women's faces on election posters. They have educated, trained, practically supported and encouraged 107 groups totalling over 5,000 women across Kailahun, and engaged with traditional



Election posters of KWIGN female candidates

leaders and leading political representatives to challenge discrimination.

Sierra Leone's 2012 elections showed there is still a long way to go as fewer than 11 per cent of elected members of parliament and local councillors were women. However,

## Kailahun broke the trend... 63 per cent parliamentary nominees and 36 per cent councillor nominees were women

Kailahun broke the trend; of the country's 14 districts, it was the only one to meet the official 30 per cent quota of female candidates – 63 per cent parliamentary nominees and 36 per cent councillor nominees were women. Both public and political support for these candidates was huge, and discrimination surrounding their campaigns minimal.

SEND will continue to roll out their success across the country and the wider West Africa region.

# THE FINAL GTF CONFERENCE

In October 2012, the final GTF global conference brought together 27 staff and partner representatives from the 10 GTF countries. The atmosphere was one of overwhelming positivity and determination, with everyone resolved to make the most of the final few months of the programme.

Attendees drew on their deep experience in delivering and supporting voice, and accountability work with marginalised groups, providing firm foundations for solid learning and planning. They reflected on highlights and challenges, shared learning, strategised over how to maximise and articulate their results, how to best sustain the benefits of the GTF after funding comes to an end in 2013, and how to maximise impact in the final months of activity.

## Partner reflections: Rights & Prosperity, Tajikistan

Najiba Shirinbekova from Rights & Prosperity (R&P) reflected on the establishment and evolution of a system of public chambers, which has been set up in some of the most deprived and remote areas of Tajikistan. Community volunteers are trained to educate poor and marginalised people about their rights and how to claim them. 'We aim to change their attitudes from "Wait and see" to "I can help



GTF staff and partners at the 2012 GTF conference in Brighton

myself";' she explained. Between 2011 and 2012, claims registered in the public chambers increased sixfold to 798, of which 85 per cent had positive responses. Successful cases have brought access to essential services such as healthcare and education, as well as leading to the construction of necessary infrastructure. It has also helped many people obtain the citizenship documents they require in order to study and work.



Parvina Nabieva, 27, lives in hardship with eight members of her family in one small room. She and her three sisters are all divorced after suffering extreme abuse from their husbands. The Rudaki public chamber set up by Rights & Prosperity helped them each to get their names on the government waiting list for housing and land so that they can rebuild their lives

Having forged close relationships with the authorities, plus gaining legal recognition, the ground-breaking work of the public chambers has a strong basis to be sustained beyond the lifetime of the GTF. In a country characterised by corruption, debt, and the repression of women and the poor, these communities and many more will be supported to access their rights, claim their entitlements, and hold the government to account as the ombudsman for human rights in Tajikistan will seek to establish many more public chambers throughout the country in recognition of the success of R&P.

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**‘We aim to change their attitudes from “Wait and see” to “I can help myself”’**

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### **Partner reflections: SEND-Ghana**

In 2005, Ghana’s government launched the Ghana School Feeding Programme (GSFP), aiming to reduce hunger and malnutrition by providing all primary and kindergarten students attending beneficiary schools with a nutritious meal every school day. They hoped the programme would lead to increased school enrolment, attendance and retention, and also boost domestic food production by sourcing food locally, and providing a sustainable market for food producers in the community.

It was a laudable policy, but the programme was slow to get off the ground. The Social Enterprise Development Foundation (SEND) in Ghana found that due to limited resources such as vehicles, fuel and staff, and without necessary governing bodies in place, the communities most in need often missed out – or sometimes the schemes were failing due to mismanagement or lack of funds. SEND-Ghana established District Citizen Monitoring Committees (DCMCs) to ensure the smooth running of the programme at national, district and local levels. Since becoming involved in holding the government to account for its commitment to the GSFP and assisting to set up the structures required for its implementation, the number of pupils receiving free meals has grown to more than 50,000 in Ghana’s northern region and enrolment rates have increased dramatically.

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**‘Marginalised groups are systematically included in monitoring poverty reduction programmes’**

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By setting up groups to hold the government to account for their commitment, SEND-Ghana ensured that the rhetoric of the GSFP became reality where it was most needed, while also giving marginalised people control over its implementation in their own communities. If SEND-Ghana had bought food, or provided seeds and tools, the government may have reallocated their resources elsewhere, and a chance to find a solution to



Christian Aid/Annonette Powell

**Pupils at Gbanyamni Primary School in northern Ghana collect their free school meals. Since the programme began, school attendance has dramatically increased**

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child malnutrition and poor school attendance would have been missed. This illustrates the complex trade-offs and decisions that need to be balanced at all levels.

At the GTF conference, Adamu Mukaila from SEND-Ghana reflected on the work of the DCMCs, explaining their strategy of in-depth research of government policy, which guides training plans. He said: ‘Marginalised groups are systematically included in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of district development plans and poverty reduction programmes. This has strengthened public accountability and transparency.’

As well as monitoring and facilitating the GSFP, these community groups, trained by SEND-Ghana in budget monitoring and advocacy work, advocate for and follow up on other pro-poor policies. In 2012, they also saw the District Assembly increase its support to people with disabilities, both financially (through an increase in access to the District Assembly Common Fund from two per cent to three per cent) and through successfully campaigning for their inclusion in the country’s National Health Insurance Scheme, allowing them to access necessary healthcare.

# POWER FOR CHANGE

## Making governance work for marginalised groups

Power to the People (P2P) is a response to Christian Aid's belief, set out in our new corporate strategy *Partnership for Change*, that poverty is driven and maintained by the uneven distribution and abuse of power. If we are to move beyond aid to truly sustainable development, we must address unequal power relations, from the individual to international levels.

P2P also speaks to the belief that a lack of power is a form of poverty in its own right. The programme trains and empowers marginalised people to take control of the issues which impact upon them and their lives: to participate in decision-making and make governance work.

P2P partners respond to these aims according to the needs of the groups they work with. The Justice Development and Peace Commission (JDPC, Nigeria) empowers communities to hold governments to account for spending and decisions which impact marginalised communities, leading to transparency, less corruption, and increased services and infrastructure. Refugee Law Project (RLP, Uganda) combats the entrenched and systemic discrimination of refugees in Kampala, often denied their rights by authorities and refused access to basic services or employment. As well as campaigning and monitoring government policies, they provide training to the police and practical support and legal advice to the refugees and asylum seekers.

## Brazil and Dominican Republic – learning to harness the power of the media

Representatives from the Jesuit Service for Migrants and Refugees (SJRM, Dominican Republic), the Ecumenical Service Coordination (CESE, Brazil) and the Institute for Socio-Economic Studies (INESC, Brazil) have used 'power mapping' to identify stakeholders in their governance work and the nature of the relationships between identified stakeholders and each partner. Using this tool, they realised they could strengthen their advocacy by engaging with different aspects of the media. In each context, mainstream media is biased in favour of their country's elite and discriminatory towards the marginalised groups they seek to protect.

SJRM supports Dominican Republic citizens of Haitian descent who were effectively rendered stateless by national law, their citizenship documents confiscated so



Partners from Brazil and the Dominican Republic participate in a power mapping exercise

that they are unable to access employment or essential services, despite an international court ruling declaring the decision unconstitutional and against human rights.

INESC campaigns against corruption and for a fairer political system in Brazil where the white, male, rich elite dominates. CESE works with indigenous and quilombola groups, many of whom face their land rights being violated as the government allows the agribusiness sector to take over the land they have occupied for thousands of years.

As well as working with the marginalised communities and political leaders, these organisations seek to fight historic discrimination and build critical public support to give momentum to their campaigns. Their learning initiative will look at how using different methods of engagement and working with new audiences achieve their aim of changing power relations to help these marginalised groups.

**Poverty is an outrage against humanity. It robs people of dignity, freedom and hope, of power over their own lives.**

**Christian Aid has a vision – an end to poverty – and we believe that vision can become a reality. We urge you to join us.**

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POVERTY