

SIERRA LEONE: SEND'S KAILAHUN WOMEN IN GOVERNANCE PROJECT



The ratification ceremony for the Kailahun Women in Governance Network's constitution on 25 May 2010

Putting women at the heart of governance

With one of the world's highest maternal mortality rates, Sierra Leone isn't the safest place to be a woman. But opportunities to speak out about this and other gender issues are severely limited due to a culture in which women are marginalised. Although many organisations in Sierra Leone are campaigning nationally to increase women's political representation and participation, SEND Sierra Leone is focusing all its activities on its Women in Governance project in Kailahun, one of Sierra Leone's poorest districts.

SEND Sierra Leone's strategy is threefold. It aims to persuade local government and political parties to take gender issues more seriously, while campaigning for more women to get elected to parliament and local government in the 2012 elections. Finally, it is building a network of local women's groups, as well as women politicians and local leaders – called the Kailahun Women in Governance Network.

Assessing equality in local institutions

One method they have deployed is an audit to review gender equity in political parties, the local council and ward development committees. This comprised interviews with representatives from these institutions, as well as women who are in, or running for, political office.

The questions explored whether gender policies and strategies are in place, the number of female employees/members and the roles they hold, and how far organisational culture promotes or inhibits gender equity.

The audit provided a revealing picture of the current state of women's participation in Kailahun:

- there is only one female Member of Parliament and three women councillors
- the council has no female employees and no gender policy
- lack of education and harassment are barriers to women's involvement in local politics.

Commitment to change

This process helped build a constructive dialogue between SEND and the institutions it is targeting, and institutions involved in the audit have signed up to plans to increase gender equality.

But getting people to make commitments is only half the battle. The next step is ensuring they are taken up. Therefore the action plans will be regularly monitored by teams consisting of selected representatives of political parties, the council and the women's network, and presented to the leadership of the various institutions concerned.

'I have been overwhelmed by the discussions – those between the political parties have been a novelty. Let's treat [the issue of gender equity] with the seriousness it deserves'

Local political party representative involved in gender equity audit in Sierra Leone

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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NIGERIA: MAKING VOTES COUNT



Women wait to cast their vote at an Anambra state polling station

In countries such as Nigeria where marginalised communities are often unaware of authorities' important commitments to them elections are a key opportunity to provide people with information and allow them to vet candidates.

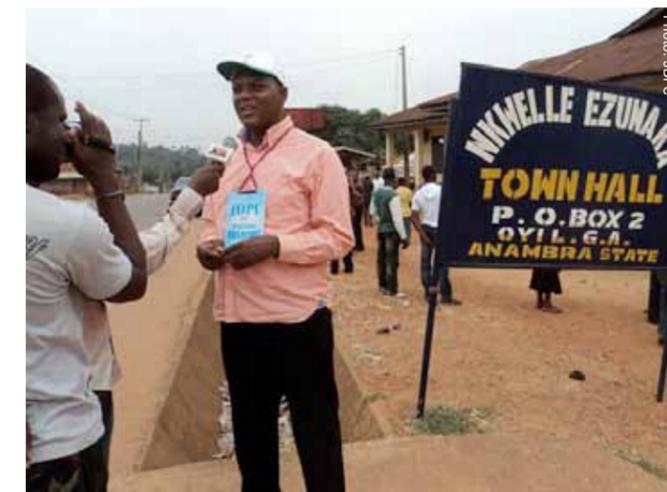
Nigeria has a poor history of democracy – international observers deemed its 2007 elections to be hugely flawed, with widespread corruption and low voter confidence, while global press coverage of polls in April 2011 focused on regional violence and delays. Yet our partner the Justice Development and Peace Commission (JDPC) Onitsha, working in Anambra state, southeastern Nigeria, has had a much more positive experience.

JDPC has focused on voter education and registration, providing opportunities to question candidates and posting election monitors. Its voter education campaigns in churches, markets and other public places since December 2010 have specifically targeted marginalised groups least

likely to vote, such as young people, women and the disabled. Activities with women's organisations in particular have led to a substantial increase in the number of women registering to vote.

Training election observers has helped ensure elections – in Anambra at least – have been free and fair. As JDPC's director Very Rev Fr Martin Onukwuba said: 'These are the most credible elections held so far in Nigeria. For the first time the process was without hitches and the participation of women and youth was found to be encouraging. We have seen the relevance of voter/civic education, which has translated into this massive participation. I visited more than 15 polling units and discovered that everyone is interested in the electoral processes.'

It is important that election activities are not seen as separate from other governance work. That is why JDPC has included its election work in its broader GTF project on local accountability and citizens' voices. Building on its success so far to boost the project's impact will be a priority in the coming months.



The director of GTF partner JDPC is interviewed by local media at a polling station

GTF: TAKING STOCK HALFWAY THROUGH

'The Mid-Term Review has brought us into contact with a great deal of inspiring, committed people and energetic, strategic, promising work, often in difficult circumstances'

Rosemary McGee and Patta Scott-Villiers, IDS

Christian Aid staff and partners had an opportunity to evaluate the programme as part of the Mid-Term Review, conducted by Patta Scott-Villiers and Rosemary McGee from the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Sussex. While the review endorsed much of our work on governance and accountability, it also highlighted some important areas in which we can improve.

What went well?

Partnership work – the evaluators highlighted Christian Aid's commitment to 'building a programme based on long-standing partnerships and partner work' as preferable to the easier approach of running similar projects across different locations. They saw the benefits of this during their visits to Brazil, Sierra Leone and the Dominican Republic, citing 'a very high relevance of the projects [there] to local social actors and their grassroots'.

Power – one of the 'boldest, most innovative and potentially transformative characteristics of the [programme] is that it has put power issues squarely into the frame', through helping partners participate in power analyses, the review said.

Support to civil society – the programme has made greatest progress on this, said evaluators, noting 'a thickening of civil society cooperation in almost all cases'. But while they noted interaction with other actors – such as media, parliament, ombudsmen, courts and research institutes – they found few examples of collaboration.

Increased dialogue – the review found evidence of new and slightly improved opportunities for dialogue between marginalised communities and authorities in most countries.

Rights claiming – overall, the programme is building the skills and confidence of the individuals and communities it is working with, but the consultants also noted 'a long



GTF partner Rights and Prosperity in Tajikistan supports people to access legal support to claim their rights

road between skills and confidence and the achievement of accountability'.

Changing lives – the consultants found that 'in every case there have been changes in the lives of beneficiaries', but also 'enormous variation in what these are and how significant or useful [they are] to people on the margins'.

GTF: Mid-term reflections

Christian Aid felt strongly that progress evaluation should involve partners as well as consultants. Therefore, partners were asked to complete a mid-term reflection exercise, enabling them to consider progress with their own stakeholders. Francesca Scott from Christian Aid supported this:

'During group sessions, community members looked back at important changes that had happened in their lives in recent years to understand how the GTF had supported them to take positive action. They also piloted an innovative scorecard, to understand how communities were coming together to develop common agendas of action and engaging with authorities to achieve those agendas.'

'These reflections produced a wealth of information that will help inform our governance and transparency work through the GTF, but also more widely throughout all of Christian Aid's programme work. We are currently analysing the information to make the most of this learning experience. Many thanks to all country programmes for their dedication and hard work throughout this process!'



GTF partner SJRM works on projects to improve the situation of Haitian migrants and their descendants in the Dominican Republic

What could have been better?

There have been clear challenges in running this programme, mainly due to its design (it is thinly spread, across 16 partners, in 10 countries), delayed start-up and shifts in donor accountability demands.

Consequently, Christian Aid has struggled to balance accountability to donors with accountability to partners. To meet donor requirements, partners have had to produce large amounts of monitoring and evaluation, thus limiting the opportunities for partner learning and evaluating impact, risks and unintended consequences of partner projects.

Evaluators also noted that we can improve the way we share learning from the programme with the rest of the organisation.

Our planned response

The consultants endorsed our plan to help partners integrate power analysis into their work for the remaining two years of the project. They also proposed a useful framework to start measuring the differing impacts of these governance initiatives.

The framework extracts results in the following areas: actions taken by citizens, collaboration with allies, changes in the balance of power, successes that stimulate more civil society action, and the degree to which sustained changes are evident in institutions themselves. We plan to use this framework with partners to gather this information, which will then be used to refine the programme.

Questions arising from the Mid-Term Review

- Are we reaching the marginalised? While access to basic government services helps individual citizens and communities, the degree to which marginalised groups benefit is not always clear.
- Are we practising what we preach? Very few of the most marginalised are involved in project design, decision-making and results assessment.
- Are we alert to the risks of our work? In many projects, while women, indigenous people and other marginalised groups benefit from participating, participation brings challenges due to lack of money, time or means of self-protection – many take risks to be involved in projects.
- Is our work sustainable? Across the programme, there have been significant gains in governance, civil society capacity and strengthening citizens' voices, however, 'improvements may not be sustained unless Christian Aid and partners pay close attention to fostering sustainability [for the rest of the programme]'.