

### **Standing out as a Gender Model**

“I have been exposed as a bias husband. The whole community now sees me as one who loves one wife more than the others, ever since my youngest wife registered my name and hers into the Gender Model Family approach”. These were the words of Allie Kamara, a 45 year old man who has managed two wives since 2002 until a third one came in 2016: existing tensions among the wives intensified.

The BMZ funded food and nutrition security project which SEND and Agro Forestry Farmers Association (AFFA) are implementing in Gaura, Nomo, Tunkia and Barri Chiefdoms call LANN+<sup>1</sup> targets especially households who, at the start of the intervention in 2018, had pregnant women, lactating mothers and children under-two. These categories of targeted beneficiaries are, according to the 2015 WFP Report, most affected by malnutrition in especially Kenema District. The government of Sierra Leone Health Survey (2013) adds that inadequate access to [food and nutrition] education and information also plays a major role in the decreasing the rate of dietary diversity and frequency of food intake of children under five years of age.

The Kamara household had, at the project’s onset, two lactating mothers, one pregnant wife, eleven children and the husband. All the wives were qualified to have registered as direct beneficiaries for the project. But, the implementing partners were limited to register 900 families with an average of seven members per family. The youngest wife in the Kamara household, twenty, who is three years younger than the eldest wife’s first daughter, happened to be the first to register her name with their husband. The eldest wife appeared later only to be told that the husband had already been enlisted with one wife. Therefore, she, like others in a similar condition, would only benefit from the project’s inputs and trainings indirectly from the husband and registered wife.<sup>2</sup>

SEND uses an approach in its interventions known as Gender Model Family (GMF). The GMF approach is originally based on monogamous households whose capacities around household resource mobilisation and expenses, joint household decisions on child care, farming, health seeking, etc., are built in the life span of a project. These capacities are usually spilled over from direct beneficiaries (husbands and their GMF-registered wives) to their children and other households with a view of enhancing more equitable relations on grounds of gender.

Allie’s “bias exposure”, he says, started showing up in February 2018 when SEND introduced the Gender Model Family concept for the first time to his family, and to Jene, Tunkia Chiefdom.

---

<sup>1</sup> LANN+ stands for Linking Agriculture, Nutrition Natural Resource Management Plus WASH

<sup>2</sup> Sources here are from the project document. May need to find those reports for ease of reference.

His 40 year eldest wife with whom he had been married for 25 years, disagrees. “The tensions have always been here”, she says, adding furiously. “this girl lives in her family home, doesn’t work in this household to mobilise resources, but our husband spends our money on her and her child”. The second wife agrees and supports her senior mate while the youngest wife comments that “that is their view”.

Polygamy is common in rural Sierra Leone, where, in many cases, more women don’t mind bearing the same husband’s surname for as long as he takes responsibility of them and their children. As SEND’s GMF approach takes root in very many communities in Eastern Sierra Leone, SEND West Africa has plans to introduce a separate gender approach and tools for polygamous households. While that plan is yet to be finalised, this Kamara and other polygamous families are, however, being enlisted and every sister mate of such households encouraged to participate not as Gender Models but as beneficiaries in ongoing project activities including trainings. Jene Tunkia is about 55 kilometers from the eastern capital, Kenema and just about one kilometer from the main Zimmi Highway from Taninahun Tunkia. The community is surrounded by eight other communities within two to six kilometer radius that have been exposed to the GMF approach in a previous project and are still part of the