

## **TROCAIRE WISE PHASE II PROJECT PROGRESS REPORT**

**Project Title:** WOMEN IGNITING THE SPIRIT OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP (WISE PHASE II)

Donor: Irish Aid through TROCAIRE

Project implementing partner: SEND SIERRA LEONE

Project location: Western Area Rural District

Duration: 9 months (1<sup>st</sup> April – 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2019)

Project budget: 55,000 Euro

Project thematic area: Governance

Contact details and contact person: Social Enterprise Development Sierra Leone (SEND SL), Mariama Jalloh, Program Support Officer, SEND SL, 59 Fraser Street, Off Wilkinson road, Freetown, Sierra Leone.

### **THE PROBLEM**

The Western Area Rural District has a total population of 442,951 of which 219,542 and 223,409 are respectively men and women. Despite being more than men, women's participation in decision making in the District Council is appalling. Out of the 27 district councillors, only three are women. Of the 8 MPs, only 2 are women, and only 5 women are among the 121 tribal heads who constitute the traditional governance structure in the District.

Poor road network hinders women access to market centres for local trade. This limits their income earning capacity to support themselves and their dependents. Lack of regular electricity hinders their trade in perishable goods such as fish, and agricultural products. The lack of social awareness and available social options greatly contribute to the increasing rates of Gender Based Violence in homes and in schools, which expose them to sexual and reproductive health risks such as STIs.

Low education among women in Western Rural District also limit their choices and options, contributing to inferiority complex among them, and their inability to unite as a group to fight for the empowerment and liberation of themselves. As a result, there is widening gender inequality in slum communities and rural villages, increased sexual harassment, and stigmatization of women, early marriage as a source of livelihood, which contributes to their overreliance on men. Lack of skills trainings put women in the communities around the district in the lower scale of economic rankings of men and women. The associated consequences are increased poverty among women and continuous marginalisation.

These major challenges women face are aligned to the challenges identified in the patriarchal nature of Sierra Leone society. Discriminatory customs continue to dehumanize and marginalise women across communities in the country. It confirms early marriage, increasing rates of GBV, high illiteracy among women, and their limited options to employment as other major challenges that affect the empowerment and progress of women. Women's access to education, health care and political decision making are limited. It is estimated that in the just concluded national elections, women constitute only 13% of the number of MPs in the Country's Parliament. As result, national development and cohesion is threatened by the disparity between men and women in the governance of the country.

## **THE SOLUTION**

Given the alignment of community and national challenges, this project proposes to address some of the challenges identified above. Representatives of communities proposed the following solutions to contribute to their empowerment: Focus on capacity building ranging from skills training, business trainings and development, agricultural support, financial support, and support for women to access vocational, adult and tertiary education to empower and prepare them to seek opportunities in the job market. Other proposed interventions include provision of storage facilities to support the expansion of businesses on fish, construction of market centres with adequate sanitary facilities and encouraging women participation in decision making process in the community.

These communities proposed solutions are aligned to Trocaire Sierra Leone strategic objectives of improving the income levels of women and girls, while working with them and institutions to protect their rights to and control of resources earned individually or jointly. They also support the women empowerment objectives of the Country Program which aims at reducing violence towards women and protecting their rights through the promotion of access to financial resources and business development and expansion.

This project's theory of change centre on the goal of increasing women awareness on gender, their entitlements and responsibilities, and enabling them have access to financial resources and business skills to have increased income to enhance their effective participation in decision making at family, community, district and national level.

It proposes first to ensure that women have more secure and sustainable livelihoods as they are limited in terms of access to land to produce food crops that women mostly rely on given their challenges to enhance their economic participation and empowerment. Men also continue to possess and dominate the access and control of resources and other business channels that women can earn income to support their economic livelihood. Around WARDC, women are unable to travel to rural communities where agricultural activities take place to buy agricultural produce for trading in the western areas urban and rural to support their empowerment due to poor road infrastructure in the rural areas and poor transportation system.

The following strategies are initially proposed to contribute to achieving this outcome: women will be educated on resource mobilization and encouraged to save their own resources to embark on business ventures. In 2019, the WISE Project will provide them with saving boxes and refresh their minds on owned resources mobilization to enable them develop the culture of saving their own resources for investment in business development and expansion.

The project also proposes to see that women have increased voice and influence in the public sphere. This desired change is developed on the assumption that if women and their husbands are mobilised through gender education, and leadership development, they will understand their own roles and take the lead to empower themselves politically and economically to contribute to local development. If men and boys trained from the Gender Model (GMF) concept develop awareness on the traditional practices that limit the empowerment and contribution of women, they will form allies and partnership with women in fighting inequality and hunger.

To achieve this outcome, the project will mobilise target women and provide them with gender education to enable them understand their entitlements and responsibilities, while also using the Gender Model Family (GMF) Concept to support husbands, wives and their children who use their understanding of gender and power, resource mobilization, access and control to be models for social change and transformation in society by challenging traditional notions of gender roles and responsibilities.

## PROJECT ACTIVITIES

### Outcome 1: Women have more secure and sustainable livelihoods

To achieve this outcome, the project proposes the following activities:

- Project inception meetings in 5 wards, covering the 14 targeted communities.
- Mobilize and form 14 new VSLA groups in the communities.
- Procure and distribute VSLA toolkits to the 14 new women's groups.
- Train 280 VSLA group members on the VSLA model, business and financial management, recording keeping and resource mobilization
- Organize leadership and group management training for 70 women leaders of the 14 new women's groups

### Outcome 2: Women have increased voice and influence in the public sphere

The following activities will support the realization of this objective:

- Conduct orientation with the 14 year 1 women's solidarity groups on the unconditional cash transfer approaches.
- Support groups to develop their constitutions and elect -group leaders.
- Register women's groups with the respective line ministries and local council.
- Open bank accounts for the women's solidarity groups.
- Conduct refresher training for 196 women's group members on business development, record keeping and financial management for the year 1 women's groups.
- Organize leadership and group management training for 70 women leaders of the 14 old women's groups
- Organise Gender Model Family trainings for the 28 old and new women groups in 14 communities
- Hold District consultations with women groups in Kenema, Kailahun, Kono and Bonthe Districts on the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment policy.
- Hold meeting with religious leaders as a standalone group in Western Rural Area.
- Produce jingles in local language on the GEWE policy to be aired in all the districts across Sierra Leone.
- Conduct Report writing, M&E, GMF, VSLA and Business Development training for SEND staff.

## TARGET BENEFICIARIES

The target groups for the project include poor and vulnerable rural adult women, community stakeholders and district stakeholders.

**Rural adult's women (18 or older):** The in-direct beneficiaries for the rural adult's women are calculated by multiplying total number of women reached by 7 household members. Therefore, the total number of in-direct beneficiaries reached by rural adult women will be  $(676*7)$  4,732 for year two project.

**Community Stakeholders:** The in-direct beneficiaries for women leaders is calculated by multiplying total number of community stakeholders reached as direct beneficiaries by 13 community members (76 community stakeholders x 13 community members). Therefore, the total number of in-direct beneficiaries reached by community stakeholders will be 988.

**District Stakeholders:** In-direct beneficiaries for district stakeholders is calculated by multiplying total number of district stakeholders reached by 13 community members (15 district stakeholders x 13

community members). Therefore, the total number of in-direct beneficiaries reached by district stakeholders in the year two project will be 195.

### **PROJECT ACTIVITIES COMPLETED SO FAR (April to early October, 2019)**

#### **PROJECT INCEPTION MEETINGS**

The Project Inception meetings were held in Five (5) wards in the two targeted chiefdoms (York and Koya) in the Western Area Rural District for Five (5) days. A total of 264 participants were in attendance of which 187 were female and 77 were male. The project approach and contents was explained to participants to

enhance effective targeting, recruitment, collaboration and support for successful project implementation.



#### **MOBILIZATION AND FORMATION OF 14 VILLAGE SAVINGS AND LOAN ASSOCIATION (VSLA) GROUPS IN OPERATIONAL COMMUNITIES**

The mobilization and formation of new VSLA groups for WISE Phase II project was done in the 14 operational communities in both the York and Koya Chiefdoms in the Western Area Rural District. A total of 301 women were in attendance.



The purpose of this activity is to explain to participants about the new VSLA women groups of the WISE Phase II Project and to ensure other women eg the most vulnerable in those communities are now included, as this new VSLA women groups will be receiving VSLA toolkits and training on business, group management, record keeping activities to start the new VSLA women group scheme developed by SEND and tested in the Eastern region to empower themselves economically. The VSLA scheme is a self-fund saving group to help themselves in addressing their felt needs.

There was cooperation from community people in forming the new VSLA women groups.

#### **PROCURE AND DISTRIBUTE VSLA TOOLKITS TO THE 14 NEW WOMEN'S GROUPS**

SEND procured 14 VSLA boxes (1 for each community) and the necessary toolkits (Calculator, stamp pad, stamp, red and blue ink pens, ledgers, exercise



books, rulers, padlock and keys etc) as suggested by the VSLA working group. The objective of the saving box distributed to the groups is to encourage saving activities that is safe and within their reach of control. The saving materials boost their saving activities as it serves as a good start-up kit.

### **TRAIN VSLA GROUP MEMBERS ON VSLA, BUSINESS & FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT, RECORD KEEPING AND RESOURCE MOBILIZATION**



A total of 280 VSLA group members from the 14 operational communities have been trained on the VSLA model, business and resource mobilization and record keeping for 3 days at each community. This is to ensure that group members are taken through the various concepts to ensure they have knowledge on how the group operates. An evidence of knowledge gained demonstrated by the groups is

the increase in savings amount and the loan routine understood by them. The accuracy in the record of savings in the ledger book also demonstrates knowledge of the concept of the VSLA.

### **GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT POLICY ENGAGEMENTS WITH RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN THE WESTERN AREA RURAL DISTRICT**

The Western Area Rural District Council Hall at Waterloo was on Friday, July 26, 2019, the venue for a one-day engagement with mostly Religious Leaders on the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Policy, a policy developed by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs (MSWGCA) with Cabinet Approval already in the offing.



The engagement was an interactive session organized by SEND SIERRA LEONE with support from Trócaire under the WISE Phase II project. It was noted that the "overall goal of this activity is to engage and mobilize support from the religious leaders in helping popularize the GEWE policy within their respective communities."

During the interactive session, meaningful contributions were made by religious, traditional and political leaders on the way forward for the GEWE Policy with strong statements of commitment coming from especially the religious leaders to use their services to disseminate the key messages from the engagement by way of supporting and popularizing the content of the GEWE Policy.

Madam Umu Kamara, Head woman of Morabie community said that “political parties are the major players restricting symbols to women. They should be one of the main targets for this policy”. Kadijatu Wellington of 5 mile said that “discussions on gender should start in schools from the primary stage and that building confidence in girls should start from the homes”.

One important action plan that resulted from this engagement is the creation of a whatsapp group to share ideas and give update of popularizing the concept in religious gatherings.

### **CONDUCT ORIENTATION WITH THE 14 YEAR 1 WOMEN’S SOLIDARITY GROUPS ON THE UNCONDITIONAL CASH TRANSFER APPROACHES**

Orientations were conducted for the Year 1 women solidarity groups (Gender Model Families) of the WISE PHASE II project on the unconditional cash transfer approaches.

The purpose of this activity is to ensure that members of the groups are well familiarized with the new processes for year 2 which includes registration of the women groups with the Western Area Rural District council, formation of group executives, opening of bank accounts and disbursement of unconditional cash to the registered groups. Capacity building trainings which includes: Refresher training on Gender Model Family concept, training on book keeping and leadership for executive members and business management trainings to ensure objectives are sustained. The orientation activity lasted for one day per community.

### **HOLD DISTRICT CONSULTATIONS WITH WOMEN GROUPS IN KENEMA, KAILAHUN, KONO AND BONTHE DISTRICTS ON THE GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT POLICY**

Women groups in four (4) Districts (Kenema, Kailahun, Kono and Bonthe Districts) along with their gender focal persons have been discussing the Gender Equality and Women Empowerment (GEWE) policy in a bid to popularize and capture their views on the policy.

The engagement was an interactive session organized by SEND SIERRA LEONE with support from Trôcaire under the WISE Phase II project, a project that is aimed at empowering women from a multi-faceted perspective. It was noted that the “overall goal of this activity is to ensure women in these districts are engaged on the process and their views included in the wider national engagements on the policy and also further help to mobilize and build allies across the country on the GEWE policy”

The purpose of the GEWE policy is to provide mechanisms and guidelines that enables stakeholder to plan, implement and monitor gender equality programs and strategies, create an enabling environment to ensure women’s empowerment and active participation in public and private spheres. The sessions were interesting and group work and presentation in all districts was done to ensure the participants discuss issues and come up with ideas together.

Consultation tool developed by Trocaire GEWE partners was used to capture the views of the women. Some of the popular views shared by the four districts are that meetings are now well planned and both women and men attend these meeting and the women are sometimes allowed to talk, some of the discrimination faced by girls in school includes: pregnant girls are not allowed to write to any public exams, no enough government schools for girls, high level of interest rate when it comes to accessing microfinance loans, conflict between husbands and wives in homes as sometimes women abandoned their families to other location when they are unable to repay the loan and finally, if women are included in both the local and national budget making, their needs will be easily addressed.

The report was captured and shared to Trocaire.





### **District consultation with women groups in Kenema**

#### **SUPPORT GROUPS TO DEVELOP THEIR CONSTITUTIONS AND ELECT GROUP LEADERS**

The year 1 women solidarity groups were supported by SEND to develop group constitutions and elect group leaders, which is a requisite for registration with line ministries and local council. The activity was done in the 14 operational communities, covering the 5 wards in the two chiefdoms in the Western Area Rural District.



### **Brama Town women group constitution development**

#### **SEND AND TROCAIRE JOINT MONITORING VISIT**

SEND and Trocaire did a joint field visit to five communities on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> September, 2019. The following communities: Kpoubu, 5 Mile, Joe Town, Morabie and Madonkeh were visited with the target group comprising of VSLA group members, GMF men and women and key stakeholders.

Dominic Boima represented Trocaire, while SEND WISE team and M&E officer represented SEND. In all communities, the VSLA groups were engaged separately from the Gender Model Families group. The purpose of the field visit is to know the beneficiaries understanding of the project content and approaches, to know what worked well and what need to be improved. To also know what form of support they need to be included in the project.

In general, the outcome of the visit to the 5 communities was good with progress being made as compared to the first phase of project implementation.

### **REGISTER WOMEN GROUPS WITH THE RESPECTIVE LINE MINISTRIES AND LOCAL COUNCIL**

SEND supported the women groups to register with the Western Area Rural District Council to ensure that the groups are formalized to operate within the confines of the laws in Sierra Leone. The registration forms and fee are being given to the women groups and they take the lead to do their registration. The field officers, however, monitor the process to ensure the correct channel for registration is being used and also give advice on the group requirements to be met before qualifying for registration with the Western Rural District Council.

### **CONDUCT REFRESHER TRAINING FOR 196 WOMEN'S GROUP MEMBERS ON BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT, RECORD KEEPING AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT FOR THE YEAR 1 WOMEN'S GROUPS.**

This training will further strengthen these groups to be able to effectively operate the unconditional cash transfer model with minimal support from the SEND. This training is ongoing at the moment.

### **PRODUCE JINGLE ON GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT POLICY**

Produce jingles in local language on the GEWE policy to be aired in all the districts across Sierra Leone. This will further ensure that the wider community is informed about the policy. SEND is responsible to produce the jingles whilst CGG will cover the cost for airing of the jingle. The jingles have been produced in 7 local languages and will be given to Trocaire who will ensure it reaches CGG for airing in all Districts across the country.

### **VSLA GROUPS SAVINGS**

The 14 VSLA groups established in the phase II project have made immense progress in savings and loan in 8 weeks (2 months) of savings activities. In total, a sum of Twenty six million, six hundred and fifty thousand Leones (Le 26,650,000) have been saved by the 14 communities with 80% of the communities already giving out loan to members.