



EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH COLLECTIVE ENTERPRISE:

THE INSPIRING JOURNEY OF GBOTIMA AND SINAVA VSLA GROUPS



In the green hills of Mbahunyehun community in Peje Bongre Chiefdom, Kailahun District, the women depend on agriculture for their livelihood. However, they faced significant constraints in processing their agricultural produce due to the absence of a rice milling machine in their community. This forced them to travel to other communities by motorbike, which was both capital-intensive and time-consuming, adversely affecting their livelihood.

FORMATION AND TRAINING

The journey of the Gbotima and Sinava Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLA) groups began in 2020 when SEND Sierra Leone, with the support of the Irish Embassy, introduced the VSLA resource mobilization scheme in their community. *The women received business training, leadership and advocacy training, and ASSET/SALT training, among others.* These trainings equipped them with knowledge on financial management, resource mobilization, and entrepreneurship, *fostering a deep sense of belonging and solidarity.*

FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE AND INNOVATION

With the knowledge acquired from the trainings, the women embarked on a path towards self-reliance. *They pooled their resources, diligently saved in their VSLA box, and accumulated Le 20,000.* They leveraged their social fund to establish a group rice farm. Despite the challenge of processing their harvest without a nearby rice milling machine, they turned to innovation. *They registered with the credit union established by SEND Sierra Leone in the district, secured a loan of Le 37,000, and invested in a rice milling machine.* This entrepreneurial venture freed them from the burdensome journey to distant communities for rice processing. They devised a cost recovery mechanism to ensure sustainability and ease the financial strain on individual members.

TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT

The impact of the rice milling machine has been transformative. It not only processes the rice harvests of the women swiftly but also *extends support to neighboring communities, embodying the spirit of solidarity and community upliftment.* Their warehouse now *overflows with 45 bags of rice generated from their agricultural work, showcasing their hard work and determination.* With each grain, they cultivate not just sustenance but also dreams of a brighter future.

“We may have started with just seeds in our hands, but together, we’ve grown fields of opportunity. Through unity and determination, we’ve turned challenges into triumphs, proving that together, we can cultivate a future where every dream can flourish,” said the VSLA chairlady.

FUTURE ASPIRATIONS

As they near the completion of their loan repayment, their aspirations soar ever higher. Buoyed by their success, *they envision expanding their enterprise by acquiring a palm oil processing machine to complement their efforts and further enrich their community.*

CONCLUSION

The story of the Gbotima and Sinava VSLA groups is one of triumph over adversity, unity in diversity, and women empowering themselves and their communities. It is a story that inspires, uplifts, and reaffirms the boundless potential of collective action in creating a better tomorrow.

