Irish Aid
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PROMOTING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN

DECISION-MAKING, GOVERNANCE, AND POLITICS

A RESEARCH ON THE COST OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

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SEND
SIERRA LEONE
Working to promote good governance and equality of men and women in Sierra Leone

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ABSTRACT

This report – SEND Sierra Leone's Model for Promoting Women's Participation in Decision-making, Governance, and Politics – documents and analyses strategies, programmes, and resources applied by SEND Sierra Leone to enhance women's participation in politics and governance. The findings discussed in the report are based on the Consultant's extensive review of literature and knowledge about women in governance in Sierra Leone, a rapid survey conducted with 221 respondents, and dozens of key informant interviews and focus group discussions. The report elaborates key findings on the social, institutional, and financial barriers women face and how the SEND-SL Model is effectively addressing them. The report shows how societal barriers hinder women from entering politics and governance. Once they are in elected positions, they are challenged to express themselves and achieve their aims fully. The report notes the model's achievements, strengths, and gaps created to address women's barriers and challenges. The study outlines critical lessons and offers suggestions on improving both women's entry into politics and their governance performance in the short, medium, and long-term.

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SEND would like to thank all those who participated in the study, including the key informants, participants of the focus group discussions, and respondents to the rapid survey. Your experiences and perspectives are the heart and soul of this report. While recognizing the many's contributions, SEND takes full responsibility for the contents in this report.

SEND Sierra Leone commissioned the report and would like to thank Ms. Sheriff-Doe for undertaking this research study and contributing to the literature on women in politics in Sierra Leone.

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Several other people contributed to the production of this research document. The staff members of SEND who supported in the review and editing of the final report included Joseph Ayamga (Country Director) and Brima Mansaray (Project Manager). Edward Kamara supported the graphic design of the content. The document would not have been possible without the contributions of all of the women aspirants, candidates, female elected leaders, political parties' representatives, local stakeholders, and the media. They shared their stories with SEND to enhance learning and to promote women's participation in decision-making, governance, and politics.

Sincerely



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Joseph Ayamga
Country Director
SEND Sierra Leone



ACRONYMS

APC	All People's Party
C4C	Coalition for Change
CAFOD	Catholic International Development Charity
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DfID	Department for International Development (UK)
EU	European Union
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
GMF	Gender Model Family
GIZ	German Agency for International Cooperation
GoSL	Government of Sierra Leone
HOGGs	Hands Off Our Girls
IRC	International Rescue Committee
KIIs	Key Informants Interviews
KWIGN	Kailahun, Kenema, Kono Women in Governance Networks
MDAs	Ministries, Departments, and Agencies
M4W	Men For Women
MP	Member of Parliament
NEC	National Elections Commission
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SEND-SL	Social Enterprise Development - Sierra Leone
SGBV	Sex and gender-based violence
SLP	Sierra Leone Police
SLPP	Sierra Leone People's Party
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
TRC	Trust and Reconciliation Commission
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	US Dollars
VSLA	Village Savings and Loan
WIGN	Women in Governance Network
YWGN	Young Women in Governance Network

INTRODUCTION AND APPROACH TO THE RESEARCH

Introduction

This report presents the findings on the effectiveness of the SEND-SL Model – "Promoting women's participation in decision-making, governance, and politics in Sierra Leone" – as a strategy and resource for mobilizing women. The study, which took place from 14 July to 31 August 2020, was commissioned by SEND-SL and funded by Irish Aid. SEND-SL applied this Model in its operating districts ahead of the 2018 elections with support from Irish Aid and Christian Aid.

The study describes the high social, financial, and institutional costs that women bear to run for elected office and contribute to decision-making – and how the SEND-SL Model helps women overcome these challenges. The goal is to identify lessons emerging from the Model's application and inform SEND and development partners' programming decisions.

The Consultant hopes that the findings documented in this report will contribute to women's continuing struggle in Sierra Leone, break the glass ceiling, and take their rightful roles in politics, governance, and decision-making. The Consultant is keenly aware that numerous studies on the cost of women participating in politics and Government have been conducted in Sierra Leone since the civil war ended in 2002. These have helped further expand the discourse around women in politics in Sierra Leone and keep the discussion alive. However, this study is unique because it emphasizes what is working at the local level and what can be learned from it to inform efforts at the national level.

Notably, the study has taken place in a context where the wind of optimism on women in politics and governance is blowing stronger in Sierra Leone and across the world. Debates on the proposed Affirmation Action Bill in Parliament are strengthening; the current Government is making intentional efforts to recruit women in leadership positions in MDAs. The ward system at the local level now calls for a 50-50 representation of women and men. At the social level, norms and stereotypes that impose barriers to women's participation are weakening. Women who have managed to assume leadership roles continue to prove themselves worthy of their positions. There are still steep mountains to climb, but forces urging women on are strengthening, and victory is in sight.

Research Approach

The study aimed to achieve three interdependent objectives:

1. *Inform SEND-SL and its partners about the economic, social, and political costs women pay to participate in decision-making, governance, and politics in Sierra Leone*
2. *Identify lessons emerging from the application of the SEND-SL Model for promoting women's participation in decision-making, governance, and politics*
3. *Classify women's resource gaps and barriers to participating in politics and governance, and recommend how to fill those gaps.*

These objectives informed the three core questions posted to women who participated in the study:

a. *What is the cost of your involvement?*
b. *What role did the SEND-SL Model play to help you meet the costs?*
c. *What are lessons emerging from using the Model that could promote women's participation in politics, governance, and decision-making in the operating districts?*

The study was conducted in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which had limited social interactions. The Consultant, therefore, employed research techniques that were guided by the Government's protocols for slowing down the spread of the virus. These included:

- *More emphasis on desk reviews—drawing upon a range of reports and feedback which SEND- SL has documented since the launch of its Model*
- *A rapid perception survey conducted by telephone*
- *Key informant interviews (KIIs), also mostly conducted via telephone*
- *A reduced number of focus group discussions (FGDs) to comply with the rules of social distancing*
- *Case stories gathered from selected women, adhering to face-covering protocol.*

The Consultant engaged other women empowerment organizations working in the same operational area as SEND- Sierra Leone.

Through a participatory process and guided by the core questions, the Consultant proceeded with the research as outlined below.

Desk Review

Several institutions and development partners have conducted a range of studies on gender empowerment and women's participation in politics and governance in Sierra Leone. The Consultant began with mapping studies conducted in the last four electoral cycles since the end of the civil war in 2002 for some anecdotal comparability. Studies reviewed included USAID, DfID, European Union, Action Aid, Caritas, Oxfam, and the International Rescue Committee (IRC). The Consultant also reviewed relevant government policies: the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone, the Domestic Violence Act of 2007, the 2012 Elections Act, and the Sexual Offences Act of 2012. Manifestos of political parties were assessed for their gender equality and empowerment commitments. The Consultants referred to these materials throughout the study. (See References.)

Rapid Survey

A rapid survey was done to glean community members' views about women's participation in decision-making at all levels. SEND provided a list of chiefdoms and communities to be visited for the survey. A community cluster map was created to reach people in at least half of the chiefdoms representing each of the three targeted districts. From the 18 chiefdoms in Kenema, 8 communities were purposely selected for the survey. In Kono district, 7 communities were identified across the 14 chiefdoms, and in Kailahun, 7 communities represented the 15 chiefdoms. SEND-SL's database was used to identify participants for the survey. Phone contacts were made with the Women in Governance project's primary stakeholders and other projects implicated in the SEND-SL Model –168 women and 80 men. Because of the sensitivity of the subject and questions, the interviews were conducted informally to allow respondents to speak more freely and openly. Using the Kobo data analysis tool, the Consultant analyzed information about women's social pressures to participate in governance and politics in their communities. This helped to identify common themes that were used to compare other information gathered from KIIs and FDGs. (See Appendix 1 for Survey Questionnaire.)

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

The Consultant conducted in-depth interviews with both primary and secondary stakeholders. The Consultant defines primary stakeholders as women who directly benefit from the SEND-SL Model. Secondary refers to individuals (men or women), institutions, and communities that influence and benefit from women's leadership. The Consultant conducted 26 KIIs from the following organizations and institutions:

- Representatives from the following institutions were interviewed: Minister of Social Welfare, Women and Children's Affairs, All Political Party Women's Association (APPWA), All Political Party Association (APPA), and National Electoral Commission, district, and national level officials

- Political parties and actors interviewed were Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP), All People's Congress (APC), National Grand Coalition (NGC) representatives at the district level, and independent candidates.

- Individuals from international NGOs were interviewed, including Action Aid- Sierra Leone, World Vision International, Trocaire, UN Women, and Open Society Initiative West Africa (OSIWA).

- Key informants were interviewed from the following national organizations: Campaign for Good Governance (CGG), West Africa Network Peace (WANEP), Campaign for Human Rights and Development Initiative, Institute of Governance Reform (IGR), Network Movement for Justice and Development, and ABC-Development.

- Other stakeholders interviewed were Paramount chiefs, youth leaders, religious and traditional leaders such as mamie queens, women's group leaders, selected women from the SEND-SL Women in Governance Network, district elections officers, and representatives from the media representing and are based in SEND's operational areas. (See Appendix 2 for KII Questionnaire.)

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

The Consultant compared findings from the desk review, rapid perception survey, and KIIs with a select group of stakeholders through focus group discussions with participants selected from the Village Savings and Loans Associations, political parties, members of SEND-SL's Gender Model Family programme, and from its Men 4 Women network. The FGDs drilled down on how the SEND-SL Model is applied, its emerging impact, programme gaps, and recommendations for filling the identified gaps. (See Appendix 3 for FDG Questionnaire.)

Limitations of the Study

Although the Consultant made efforts to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the study's quality, some constraints were unavoidable. For instance, telephone surveys in mainly rural Sierra Leone are new and still unfamiliar to many. Besides, limited access to electricity and sometimes telecoms coverage made reaching some selected participants difficult for the survey and interviews. Some could not be reached at all, and substitutes had to be found. The crisis imposed by COVID-19 meant that many respondents had other life and livelihood imperatives to deal with and showed little patience for sitting through interviews on governance and politics. The Consultant and the enumerators had to plead with participants to cooperate. It is not unlikely that impatience and distractions drove some of the responses. The data quality was difficult to fully analyse because the data collected was not of a high standard. However, the researcher was able to inductively identify some common themes that are presented in the 'progress observed' section. The Consultants undertook several triangulation exercises to mitigate the impact of these constraints on the quality of the report.

FINDINGS: THE SOCIAL, INSTITUTIONAL AND FINANCIAL COSTS OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS IN SIERRA LEONE

Sierra Leone has survived many setbacks, including an eleven-year civil war , an Ebola outbreak, a devastating mudslide, rapid environmental degradation, and a ravaging effect of the COVID-19 pandemic . The challenges not withstanding, the country has made significant gains in its democratic and development strides since the end of the civil war. These include three successive peaceful transitions of power from one democratically elected Government to another, a steady economic growth, and consolidating peace . However, these remarkable democratic gains are not equally shared among women and men.

In all the post-war democratic elections and political governance, women's representation has been deficient, even though they are 52% of the population. Currently, women constitute only 12.4% of Parliamentarians, 18% of Local Councillors, and 6.6% of Paramount Chiefs. Scholars have found a correlation between participation and voice, on the one hand, and access to socio-economic benefits, on the other . This is evident in Sierra Leone, where the economic and social systems disadvantage women. A staggering 84% of rural and 63% of urban women operate in the informal sector with no social protection, low wages, and poor working conditions. Over 80% of rural women are multidimensionally poor , and at least 70% of all Sierra Leone women have experienced gender-based violence in their lifetime .

84% **Of Rural Women**
have no social protection and are multidimensionally poor

There are several factors attributable to the under-representation and the marginalization of women's voice in decision-making, governance, and politics in Sierra Leone. Some blame the dominant patriarchal culture, others, the over-centralization of power in Government and political parties, and yet others, the weak economic and social standing of women.

This study focuses on Sierra Leone's eastern districts of Kenema, Kailahun, and Kono—SEND-SL's operational areas. Based on the literature review and the perception survey findings, the Consultant has organized the cost of women's participation in three categories: social, institutional, and financial. The remainder of this section reviews how these factors impact women in the districts, as found during the study, and the resources needed to address them.

Social Cost of Women's Participation

Sierra Leone, particularly the Eastern Province where the study was conducted, has a strongly patriarchal culture that is sustained by two ancient fraternities (commonly known as secret societies)—the Poro (for boys) and the Bondo (for girls). More than 90% of the Eastern Province inhabitants are said to be members of these fraternities. The Poro makes leadership outside the household the prerogative of men, while the Bondo teaches girls to be good wives and caretakers for the family. Religion is a second factor that imposes a high social cost on women aspiring to decision-making roles, governance, and politics. Seventy percent of those interviewed during the study indicated that "their religion frowns upon women participating in politics or speaking in public." For centuries these gender roles continued to be strongly guarded, and crossing over would provoke social rebuke, especially for women. They are arguably the drivers of the social barriers and costs catalogued during the study, as elaborated below.

70% **Of Respondents**

indicated that their religion frowns upon women participation in politics

Discrimination in Secret Societies

While the powers of the traditional systems are gradually weakening and women's presence in public, outside the home, is progressively tolerated, men who women challenge during elections tend to revert to the norms holding women back. In one of the focus group discussions, women informed the Consultant that during elections, their male opponents, who are threatened by the women's popularity, would sometimes call on the Poro priest to come to town during campaigns. Since women are not allowed to be outside when the Priest appears, they would have to abandon their campaigns. Also, since women cannot become members of the Poro society, and the Poro secret society is where the allocation of party symbols is decided, opportunities for women to engage in mainstream politics are almost none. In special circumstances, men make women join the male-dominated secret societies as a pre-condition to becoming paramount chief. These are extreme situations that women interviewed pointed to as systemic discrimination against women, actively preventing them from participating in political life.

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[1] https://www.e-ir.info/2012/10/25/the-causes-of-the-sierra-leone-civil-war-underlying-grievances-and-the-role-of-the-revolutionary-united-front/ https://sl.usembassy.gov/sierra-leones-path-of-resilience-helping-democracy-deliver/

[2] Sierra Leone is 46th most peaceful country in the World according to the 2020 Global Peace Index. While this is a slight decline from the 2019 status the country stills guard its hard-won peace.

[3] National Electoral Commission (available on: http://necsl.org/)

[5] Kamau 2010, 2008

[6] Sierra Leone Housing and Population Census-2015

[7] UNDP Multidimensional Poverty

[8] Government of Sierra Leone "Country Report By Sierra Leone on "Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and the Outcome of the Twenty-Third Special Session of the General Assembly (2000) June 2014 available https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/13190Sierra_Leone_review_Beijing20.pdf

[9] A party symbol in Sierra Leone means the selection of a candidate by a political party to represent the party in a political contest.

To prevent these traditional practices from deterring their participation in nominations, women called for the suspension of all secret society activities during election season. While this may seem challenging to achieve, the women reminded the Consultant that the Government, in several instances, suspended secret society activities for other reasons. *"They can do the same during elections to ensure a level playing field,"* said one respondent. Women in the FGDs believe that ongoing education should re-socialize men to respect women's rights and gender equality.

Capacity and Confidence

The pervasive view about why women cannot participate in politics is that they are not prepared to engage in political life, governance, and decision-making processes – primarily because they are illiterate.

A key informant from one of the political parties in Kenema noted that *"women in the district have a low level of literacy – they cannot understand their rights, not to mention the complexity of politics. They lack public speaking skills and the confidence to engage the media effectively. It is, therefore, a risk to give them a party symbol because electability is vital to the decision a Party makes to award its symbol to an aspirant."*

In Sierra Leone, girls and women have limited access to education opportunities compared to boys and men. Early marriage is the most critical factor that prevents women from pursuing education beyond the primary school level. Sixty percent of girls in Sierra Leone are married before 18, and in the eastern districts where this practice is powerful, the number is over 70%. Young women who are forced into marriage, usually to older men, tend to be subjected to subservient status, undermining gender equity in household labour, access to and control of resources and decision-making, and their confidence to engage in power spaces, whether at home or out in public. There also needs to be a massive campaign against early marriage, starting with passing the child marriage Act, which has been in Parliament for several years, engaging young women and men to create awareness in all communities against the practice.

70% **Of Girls Below 18**

are married in the eastern region where early marriages are prevalent

In one of the FGDs, a young female political aspirant informed the Consultant that she was denied a 'party symbol' to compete for a local councillor position because the Party leadership claimed that she did not have a college education and would not understand the complexity of politics and governance. The young woman took up the challenge and has enrolled in a university, pursuing her diploma. It is important to note that the Consultant found no evidence that male aspirants were held to similar standards as women. This notwithstanding, participants recommended an intentional campaign to strengthen women's capacity, including a scholarship fund to encourage girls to complete secondary schools and pursue college degrees. They also recommended continuous political education, including public speaking and engaging the media, for all secondary school-going girls and women political leaders. Moreover, they suggested peer learning programmes that link aspiring young women to successful female politicians or influential positions in Government. SEND-SL's leadership reported to the Consultant that nearly all the women who participated in the 2018 elections and failed had gone back to school to get a degree at their own cost. The Consultant finds this move laudable and evidence of the women's determination, which all champions must support for women in politics. As will be discussed in the next section, SEND-SL has begun a programme to support women's education for politics. It needs more resources to take it to scale.

Social opportunity cost

Women are expected to care for the home, and pursuing elected positions means more time away from home for campaigning. This trade-off has made it difficult for most men to assist their spouses in pursuing elected positions or becoming active in decision-making processes in their communities because they need to take a supportive role. Many of the female aspirants during the 2018 elections who were interviewed for this study indicated that they did not get support from their spouses. They also did not belong to a women's Network on which they could count for acceptance and approval. Others noted that their spouses imposed temporary separation, forcing them out of their homes and from their children because they were afraid other men in the communities would harm them. Election-related violence is rampant, especially in rural Sierra Leone, and women are mostly targeted during elections. Women aspirants were left alone at the time they needed support from their husbands. This trade-off is too costly for most women, and they would prefer to stay away from politics and governance to safeguard their marriages and families. As will be discussed, SEND-SL has introduced two networks, the Gender Model Family and Men for Women, to address this challenge. Some women noted that the networks are making a difference, tracing their success in the last elections to this support. The overall view is that women who aspire for political positions need to forge a strong partnership with their spouses and children. They need to plan it together and commit to the process. The women said that external assistance to reduce the family's financial burden could serve as an incentive to get men on their side.

Violence and political thuggery

Historically, politics in Sierra Leone is characterized by violence and thuggery. Whether men or women, anyone who aspires for political positions must be ready to pay this price, especially women. Eight percent of those interviewed indicated that *"women are more likely to be exposed to violence when they run for office than men. Moreover, women are more likely to experience political slanders, such as having their morals questioned and their private lives exposed. They are likely to suffer physical and verbal abuse."*

All of the women aspirants who participated in this study reported that they suffered physical and verbal abuses during and after the 2018 elections. This was substantiated by the Sierra Leone Police (SLP), who confirmed the high numbers of violence incidents against women during the 2018 elections. Even though some of these cases have been prosecuted in courts, women were rarely successful in working them. All women said that the fear of violence and the impunity men enjoy perpetrating violence is the primary factor deterring them from pursuing elected positions or engaging in governance activities in their communities. They recommended non-violence education be conducted for all political parties, especially their youth wings, and that SLP dedicates more resources to protecting women candidates during elections. Just like they provide security for candidates running for the presidency, the police need to assign all female candidates security. The women recognized that this would be costly, but they maintained it should be the state's price to ensure greater gender parity in national and local governance.

Progress Observed

It is gratifying to note that the perception survey found a gradual mind-shift from the old culture, norms, and practices:

90% 90% of respondents acknowledged that a prosperous household is one in which husband and wife jointly decide.

80% 80% of men surveyed stated that the opinion of women is valuable in the household.

87% 87% of women surveyed said that their male counterparts in the communities and their workplaces seek their opinions on important matters.

70% 70% of women in the study acknowledged that there is more support to promote violence against women during elections, but this comes mainly from NGOs. They would like to see more government efforts, especially from the police and the judiciary, to address this challenge.

During the FGDs, some male key informants confided to the Consultant that *"women can do better when in a position of trust than men."* They observed that women are getting bolder and preparing themselves to achieve in elected positions.

The social challenges outlined in this section are still pervasive in how women are viewed when it comes to decision-making, governance, and politics in Sierra Leone. Some male politicians remain resistant to more women in politics, seeing it as a threat to their power base and social standing. However, there is encouraging progress by women who are proving their worth. This contributes to the mindset shift among men and women in communities.

This progress proves that culture and norms are learned social phenomena and that communities can unlearn negative stereotypes and strengthen the positive enablers to mitigate the social cost women pay to participate in decision-making, governance, and politics. We need to build on this progress through continued education, strong women's networks, and men champions for women in all political parties. Some of these are already implemented as part of the SEND-SL Model discussed in the following section.

Institutional Cost of Women's Participation

The 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone affords all citizens, women and men, the right to be involved in politics and governance. Women have the right to participate in politics, to contest in elections as president, parliamentarians, and local councillors. They also have the legal right to serve in all positions of governance, including cabinet ministers. While the constitutive and regular basis are beyond dispute, institutional and structural barriers impose severe costs on women. For instance, customary laws and practices bar women from owning land—the primary source of finance and social standing in rural communities. They also negatively impact on women's ability to pursue higher education as they are forced into early marriage. These barriers notwithstanding, the study found that the political party system is the dominant structural barrier to women's political success in the districts under review; and this is elaborated below.

Political Party System

Sierra Leone has a rich history of the party system in its democracy. Two parties — the Sierra LeonePeople's Party (SLPP) and the All People's Congress (APC) — have dominated politics since independence in 1961. The country is split along the lines of the two Parties, with the northern and western regions considered the APC stronghold and the southern and eastern regions (where the study was conducted) as the SLPP stronghold.

Both Parties have an overwhelmingly strong patriarchal orientation. Except for the 2012 elections when SLPP had a woman as running mate, in general, there is hardly any evidence of women in the higher echelons of leadership in the two main political parties. Women are confined to the parties' women's wings.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission set up at the end of the 11-year civil war drew a correlation between women's absence in governance and the grievous violence perpetrated against women during the civil war—violence that blighted the national conscience. The TRC recommended that political parties add a quota system into their constitutions to allocate women 30% of their senior positions. Moreover, women should be given 30% of party symbols for elected positions. No party has implemented these recommendations. Consequently, women are left to compete with their male counterparts in a political space that favours men, disadvantages women, and exposes them to gender-based violence within the political sphere.

The two dominant parties have firm grips on political life in Sierra Leone. It is difficult, if not impossible, to compete for and win an elected position if not through these two parties. Since they hold sway in their respective regions, winning a seat in their strongholds is almost certain if one is nominated. Therefore, the fiercest competition is obtaining the party nomination.

In an interview with a district party leader, the Consultant was informed that SLPP has a set of criteria for awarding its symbol to any aspirant, whether male or female. Key criteria follow:

- Be an electable candidate by demonstrating a favourable standing in his/her constituency.
- Have enough financial resources to contribute to the party's overall campaign and his/her campaign. The parties charge fees for each symbol. This is in addition to National Electoral Commission (NEC) charges.
- Commit to accepting that the party leadership makes the ultimate decision of awarding symbols.

The Consultant interviewed female aspirants from the 2018 elections to compare their experiences and perspectives with party executives' views. The women identified deeper layers of discrimination embedded in party politics. The women acknowledged that the first hurdle they face in pursuing politics and elected offices in Sierra Leone is obtaining the party symbol. This in itself is riddled with intrigues and maneuverings. For instance, campaigning for a local council position costs 30 million Leones (about 3,000 USD), after which no guarantee paying for the symbol and demonstrating electability would lead to being awarded the symbol. They said, *"If you do not get the symbol, you do not get the fees back."*

According to the women, the catch is the last criterion—accepting party leadership's decisions on the awarding of symbols. This is because leadership has other considerations that are not known to the aspirants. A female aspirant reminded the Consultant that party leadership comprises men only. Women rarely stand a chance when competing against men. In some instances, as earlier pointed out, the decision to award a symbol would be taken to the male secret society.

Party executives and female aspirants alike acknowledged that women are disadvantaged to a great extent in politics at any level in Sierra Leone. They noted that the only remedy for this problem is to institute a quota system across the board. *"If women in Sierra Leone are to achieve equality in the political space, we must begin with a quota system,"* a party executive noted and reiterated the TRC recommendation of a 30 percent quota. Other measures, such as investing in women aspirants' education, providing financial support, and mobilizing family support, may improve the situation in the long term, but to address short-term gains for women, meeting quotas is more effective.

However, as observed in other African countries where patriarchy drives politics, the quota system can also be abused by political parties who would only award the most "difficult" seats to women. In contrast, "safe" seats are awarded to men. This, as observed by a female aspirant, *"sets women up for failure and to further justify the stereotype that women are unprepared for politics and governance."* Therefore, they added that if the quota system is instituted, parties should identify safe seats for women at all levels of the political landscape.

We found a wide range of skill and knowledge gaps among women aspirants and even among successful women representatives across all levels. Participants who took part in the FGDs recognized that soft skills and attitudes were essential to developing to guarantee success. These include verbal and non-verbal communication skills, emotional intelligence (self-awareness, self-regulation, and empathy), negotiation skills, confidence, assertiveness, and trustworthiness.

Given the above, participants of the study recommended that SEND-SL and its partners should continue to invest in the following:

- Establish platforms for women to interact, exchange ideas, and Network. To ensure success, women must first establish trust among themselves and forge a strong sense of solidarity. Women's shared space can also foster shared learning and peer support. Already, SEND-SL has found a woman in the politics and governance network. The women noted that the platform has been a powerful tool for building their confidence, advocating for change, and inspiring them to follow the leadership examples of already successful women in the Network. The Network should be taken to scale and institutionalized. For instance, setting up and investing in a secretariat for the Network for at least five years will strengthen the Network and create a formidable force for women in rural Sierra Leone politics.

- Support women in developing essential political skills, including public speaking, working with media, engaging constituents, and creating political strategies and negotiation skills. The SEND-SL Model has laid the groundwork for this kind of political education. Training modules need to be reviewed, improved, and expanded to the national level. SEND should include relevant academic institutions as a potential source of trainers.



Members of different women network groups engaged in capacity building sessions

- Encourage women to engage in the public sphere so that they can practice their new skills. Facilitate women's participation and visibility in charitable activities, community development meetings, and ward-level committees so that they can serve as learning grounds for higher-level opportunities. Women can also use local platforms to build their brand as political leaders. These community-level opportunities should also be supplemented by periodic refresher training and reflection sessions led by experienced mentors or coaches. Having dedicated resources to build women's skills over at least two years in an electoral cycle is the best way to match the development investment with tangible impact.



Members of different women network groups engaged in capacity building sessions

- Mobilize the support of families in households of political aspirants to better understand the costs of running for an elected office. This is where SEND-SL's Gender Model Family is an adequate response in laying the foundations for galvanizing family support through gender-equitable sharing of labour, resources, and decision-making. The approach needs to be extended to include critical stakeholders in the community to promote their understanding of women's rights and empowerment. For example, women tend to seek older women's advice in their communities, some of whom are also guardians within the secret societies.

Financial Cost of Women's Participation

As in many democracies in Africa, Sierra Leone elections are costly for candidates, whether women or men. During the 2018 elections, campaign expenses for the local councillor position ran from 35,000,000 to 50,000,000 Leones (3,500 to 5,000 USD), while for a Member of Parliament, the cost was as high as 250,000,000 (25,000 USD). As indicated in Figure 1, the price includes securing the Party symbol, buying t-shirts and other materials, renting vehicles for campaigning, among other costs. Some candidates even paid to research their constituencies and hired teams to manage their campaigns. The table also does not include legal fees, which candidates may need to pay if the election is in contention. For an independent candidate with no party support, additional costs such as campaign management could be an added burden.

Description	Amount (Le)
Membership	100,000
Symbol	500,000
Campaign materials	5,000,000
Police Clearance	300,000
Phone	1,000,000
Transport	3,000,000
Food	8,000,000
Network	2,000,000
Gifts and handshake	5,000,000
Personal grooming	4,000,000
Total	**26,000,000**

FIGURE 1: ILLUSTRATIVE BUDGET FOR LOCAL COUNCIL CAMPAIGN

The Consultant did not explore the cost of women running for the presidency because the study only included women aspiring to be elected on local councils and as Members of Parliament. The study also did not find any cost differences based on the political party on whose ticket the candidate was running.

In addition to campaign costs, there are opportunity costs which the women incur when they participate in politics. Some of the expenses include forgoing livelihood and income-generating activities that are critical to supporting their families. Being a political aspirant and running for office means that essential resources of the family are diverted to invest in campaigning. For a time, women aspirants will pay less attention to the running of their homes and taking care of their children. When these opportunity costs are quantified, they take the financial disincentives for women's participation even higher.

The study found that the increasing financial costs for elections affect women disproportionately for the following reasons:

- Women do not have equal access to sources of financing compared to their male counterparts. The small advances women have made in the economic sphere have not allowed them to achieve financial security and break free from the cycle of economic survival. In the formal labour sector, they mostly occupy low-paying jobs. A female respondent informed the Consultant that most women's average monthly income in the districts under study is 800,000 Leones (80 USD).

- Even with the low levels of income, women's spending patterns contrast with those of their male counterparts across Sierra Leone. In one of the FGDs, a female participant illustrated this point: *"If a man gets paid, most of the money goes to his pocket and personal expenditures, but a woman's income is tied to the family's expenses – she will put her children first."* Women are expected to continue to meet many family expenses, no matter how their situation changes.

- Many rural families invest their resources in assets such as livestock and land. Respondents noted that it is common for a man to sell family assets to fund his campaign. However, *"while men can freely draw on the family properties to invest in anything they want, a woman will have to seek the permission of her husband to draw on the family properties –and in most cases, the men would not allow that to happen."*

- A clause in Section 76(1) of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone, which is imposed on presidential and parliamentary candidates, has complicated the situation for working women because it states that they must resign from their jobs twelve months before elections. Already underpaid, leaving from their only income source only adds to the high costs of running for office. It is a difficult trade-off for women working as teachers, counsellors, or nurses, who are paid from the consolidated government fund. It also puts pressure on elected officials (men or women) to engage in corrupt practices to finance their stay in power.

As discussed in this section, the critical factor in empowering women to stand for elected office is financial resources to cover campaign costs and maintain the running of their homes. In advanced democracies, candidates are not expected to personally fund all the expenses related to their participation in elections. Political parties mobilize resources to sponsor their candidates. This is not the case in Sierra Leone. Aspirants are expected to finance their campaigns and, at the same time, support the running of their party. This has made standing for elected office more about how much money you have rather than how popular and attractive your ideas are. SEND-SL started some initiatives around the 2012 and 2018 elections, which included covering some of the women's campaign costs through in-kind donation of t-shirts and other campaign-related supplies, investing in businesses of women with political ambition at least two years ahead of elections so they could mobilize required financial resources, and establishing women's networks to support female candidates. These are excellent foundational efforts that need to be taken to scale.

Financial resources are critical to women's empowerment to participate in elections and vie for elected positions. Deliberate support to strengthen women's financial base is essential to the initial stages of their political involvement. The study found SEND-SL's support in this area to be strategic and have contributed to the number of women who have come onto the districts' political stage. This will be discussed in-depth in a subsequent section.

These efforts are not without challenges. First, few donors are willing to take the risks of directly engaging in local politics to the extent of providing campaign funds for women. Second, there are no guarantees that such financial support would be adequate to cover women's participation or that financial capability would be enough to guarantee electability. There are numerous instances where huge financial investments in campaigns did not result in women being elected. Measures of success should be determined at the outset, i.e., the number of women aspirants, in addition to the number of women elected. All women who step out to engage in the political sphere should be considered successes, especially in Sierra Leone.

FINDINGS: THE SEND-SL MODEL FOR EMPOWERING WOMEN FOR ELECTED POSITIONS AND GOVERNANCE

Since 2010 SEND-SL has implemented wide-ranging women empowerment strategies that promote women's access to finance, education, health, and governance participation. It also established the Kailahun Women in Governance Network (KWIGN), which champions gender equality by promoting women's voices in all significant decision-making bodies and processes in the districts in which it has members. Collectively, these interventions have contributed to increased women's political capacity. Specifically, SEND-SL's work in Kailahun district during the 2012 presidential, parliamentary, and local council elections resulted in that district being the only one in Sierra Leone with 12 female councillors (41% of the local councillors in the district). The EU Observation Mission recognized the work SEND-SL did for the high number of women who were elected in Kailahun.



Hawa Moriba
Former Councilor elected in 2012 in Kailahun district



Former Councilor poses with students in her skills development center

Leading up to the 2018 General elections, many partners encouraged SEND-SL to scale up its women in governance programming to other districts in the East of the country. These expanded interventions contributed to Kono District's election of its first woman Member of Parliament. Kailahun district elected its first-ever female independent MP. Overall, four female Members of Parliament were elected from the eastern districts—one from Kono, two from Kailahun, and one from Kenema. The work also led to a record number of female candidates – 165 were awarded Party symbols and contested them. Of this number, 12 women competed as MPs, and 4 won; 153 women contested for councillorship, and 25 won.

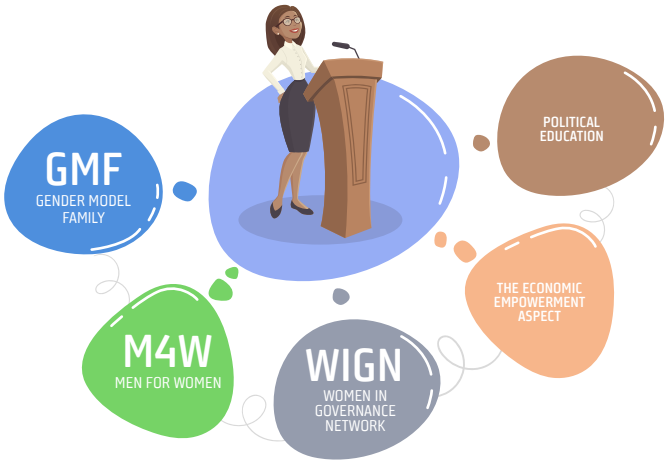


FIGURE 2: SEND-SL MODEL: WOMEN'S POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT

As illustrated in Figure X, the Model has three dimensions—the Women in Governance Network, the Gender Model Family programme, and the Men4Women programme. Economic empowerment and political engagement strategies underpin the functioning of these interventions. The Model's success is how it integrates all of its parts, which should be delivered together for the best outcomes.

In this section, the Consultant describes how the Model is applied and understood by the respondents and how it has contributed to women's political empowerment. Also highlighted are the resource and strategic gaps that must be filled to ensure the Model's success.

Women in Governance Network (WIGN)

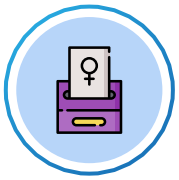
Women political aspirants overwhelmingly expressed the feeling of "being alone" in their political endeavours. In response to this challenge, SEND-SL in 2009 established the Kailahun Women in Governance Network (KWIGN). Drawing on the success of the KWIGN, in 2018, SEND-SL established Women in Governance Networks in Kenema and Kono. All in the Eastern Province, the three networks are under the umbrella of the Women in Governance Network (WIGN). This Network, which now has 18,134 members in the three districts, is designed to provide mutual support and strengthen solidarity among women. It brings together grassroots women who aspire to elected positions and are already engaged in their communities' decision-making. The Network provides a structure and approach for empowering women and advocating on their behalf. It carries out a broad range of activities to champion women's issues, including radio programmes, education, and awareness-raising on gender-based violence, supporting its members' economic empowerment through village savings schemes and profiling emerging women leaders among them.



Past executives of the Kailahun Women in Governance Network

To grow and strengthen the Network, SEND-SL offers a range of leadership training workshops to build members' capacities in political engagement, work with the media, and engage authorities, including traditional leaders. The training modules include gender and power analysis, political education, resource mobilization, and media engagement. Some women went on exchange visits to Ghana, Liberia, and other parts of Sierra Leone to learn from other successful women's networks and initiatives. Some women and other CSO actors from Ghana and Nigeria visited Kailahun in 2013 to learn from the Kailahun Women in Governance Network's success through Christian Aid under the Governance and Transparency with support from the DFID. According to the members of WIGN, the training sessions have helped them develop a leadership mindset, confidence in engaging the media, and teamwork in advocating for issues that affect them in their communities. Communities where they operate now see them as 'champions for change.'

Ahead of the 2018 elections, SEND-SL and other partners supported the WIGNs to develop the Eastern Women's Manifesto, which details women's political, social, and economic aspirations in the Eastern Province. The Manifesto is the women's campaign document. The objectives of the Manifesto were to:



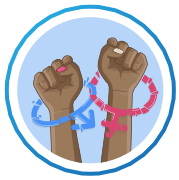
Educate and mobilize women to register and vote during the 2017/18 elections



Have political parties adopt pro-women and gender equality promotional policies and programmes



Inform the men and women voters on the priorities, issues, and concerns of women in the districts



Serve as the baseline to hold the district and city councils, political parties, traditional authorities, and civil society organizations accountable for promoting gender equality in the districts.

The Eastern Women's Manifesto inspired the national level manifesto that CSOs developed at the national level. The women credited the WIGN and the Manifesto for the record-breaking number of women elected to District Councils of the Eastern Province. For instance, Kailahun District Council is the only district in Sierra Leone, with 41% women elected as councillors.

The large presence of women in the District Councils of the Eastern Province has also led to a growing commitment to address social issues. Recently, both the Kenema and Kono Women in Governance Networks were recognized by the First Lady's initiative, "Hands Off Our Girls" (HOGGs), as champions against rape and early marriage. Sierra Leone has one of the highest rates of child marriage and sexual violence on the continent. The First Lady's initiative was set up to lift the lid of silence, taboo, and stigma surrounding rape and early marriage. WIGN is among the first groups of women to join the

HOGGs campaign. Since its launch, the Network has worked effectively with the Sierra Leone Police, Family Support Unit, and other community-based structures to bring sexual violence offenders justice.



Concerned citizens protesting at the Hands off our Girls march

WIGN has become a powerful platform for galvanizing women's political aspirations and accelerating individual women's empowerment as they draw energy and resources from the collective. It has become influential on policies that affect women in Eastern Province – the Consultant is not aware of a similarly successful mechanism in other parts of the country. Through its Manifesto, the Network has demonstrated the effectiveness of bringing together women's voices and resources. Because the women have worked closely together over the years, there is a high level of trust between them which has served as a basis for building civic trust in communities.

While the Network has achieved some impressive results, the members, SEND-SL, and other partners that support the Network need to strengthen the following areas to elevate its influence:

- Network members need more training on the critical policies that directly affect women, such as the Sexual Offenses Act, the Draft Affirmation Action Bill, and others. Advocacy strategies focusing on these issues should be designed so that the training has a direct application. The courses SEND-SL currently offers are well in place, but due to limited resources, provided sporadically. More resources are required to ensure training is systematic and continuous, especially as the networks' membership grows.

- ·Expand the Network's reach beyond Sierra Leone to establish a working partnership with women networks in other African countries. Particular focus should be on women's networks in the other three Mano River Union countries. Although the Consultant was informed that there were exchange visits to some countries, there was no evidence of continuing links with women in those countries.

- Financing of the Network is limited, which affects the day-to-day operation of the leadership and management structures. The Network needs to be continuously engaged with issues in their communities, monitor development efforts, and create awareness through the radio and community forums. Without sustained financing, the Network's momentum and the potential to achieve more results could be undermined.

SEND-SL also established a Young Women in Governance Network (YWGN) of 500 women between 18 and 35. Fully operational in Kenema, Kono, and Kailahun, YWGN aims to lay a solid foundation for women's participation in decision-making at all levels. These young women were mentored and trained on leadership skills and political engagement strategies. Their interest in politics and governance has grown because of the support. More young women are enthusiastic about participating in political processes. They are taking advantage of further education and opportunities to build their capacity. More than 30 women are enrolled in tertiary institutions to further their studies to improve their chances for elected positions.

Gender Model Family (GMF)

In many households in the operational areazs of Kono, Kenema, and Kailahun, culture and religion play a significant part in determining the role and behaviourur of men and women. The social practices subject women to subservient roles. Throughout the study, women identified the inadequate support they get from their husbands as a barrier to their political aspirations. This was because women challenged traditional ideas of gendered roles, responsibilities, and norms. Some women who decided to run for office were abandoned or forced to separate or divorce, leading to their children's permanent loss. The GMF is the second modality in the SEND-SL Model to directly address the barriers to women's political empowerment emanating from their families.

In 2001 as part of its women's economic empowerment programme, SEND-West Africa conceptualized the Gender Model Family (GMF) to address the issue of women's inequitable access to and control over household resources and benefits. The GMF is built on the premise that development projects should start on the foundation of gender equity. Husbands and wives, sons and daughters should all participate in household labour and share in decision-making about using resources. GMF is a Gender Transformation Approach. The following principles guide the GMF:

- Each household member has equal rights and is entitled to opportunities to be empowered, including equal access to education.
- Men and women experience transformation through shared household labour, shared resources, and shared decision-making.
- All members share family chores, and no task is gender specific.

SEND-SL also established a Young Women in Governance Network (YWGN) of 500 women between 18 and 35. Fully operational in Kenema, Kono, and Kailahun, YWGN aims to lay a solid foundation for women's participation in decision-making at all levels. These young women were mentored and trained on leadership skills and political engagement strategies. Their interest in politics and governance has grown because of the support. More young women are enthusiastic about participating in political processes. They are taking advantage of further education and opportunities to build their capacity. More than 30 women are enrolled in tertiary institutions to further their studies to improve their chances for elected positions.

The Model reduces the burden of work for women and girls as it encourages men and boys to get involved in household tasks. This action ultimately allows women to engage in community projects that will eventually lead to their increased participation in decision-making, governance, and politics. Families in which husbands and children are willing to assist women in engaging in politics and governance are further resourced and showcased in the communities as good examples.

Some successful women politicians described the benefits of the GMF approach in transforming their husbands and children as their champions. The GMF offers husband, wife, and children the chance to challenge traditional gender roles and responsibilities. Over time, because GMF families pool resources and share workloads, the approach has significantly increased their capacity to earn income. Simultaneously, the study finds more families are living peacefully and committed to combating gender-based violence. According to the women in the FGDs, being part of a GMF has helped boost their confidence and self-esteem because there is unity and better understanding between men and women in GMF households. Women from GMF households told the Consultant that their families' support was the impetus for them to pursue their political aspirations. Their men were supportive and willing to use family resources for the women's campaigns.



IB Mustapha and her husband are a proud GMF

The GMF's success is widely recognized – the UN Food and Agriculture Organization has adopted the Model to promote gender equity for improved agriculture productivity and household food security. The GMF is transforming gender relations of power and control in tens of thousands of families in the districts where SEND works. The Consultant finds this approach to be instrumental in the gender transformation agenda. Community recognition for GMFs has the potential to sustain and scale up the transformational gains.

An additional in-depth study would be required to assess the GMF's overall impact and its applicability across the country. So far, the Consultant believes that it has the potential to contribute to the gender and women equality agenda in the districts and Sierra Leone as a whole.

Men for Women (M4W)

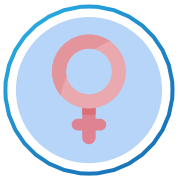
Men in Sierra Leone have power over every aspect of life—from personal decisions, family size, family finances, control of land and other family properties to decisions made at all governance levels in the districts. A key informant reinforced this reality by underlining that *"involving men as allies, and not as adversaries, is the most effective way to transform the patriarchal culture that has denied women the right to achieve their full potential for centuries."*

The culture of violence against and exclusion of women is perpetrated by men who lack awareness about the value of women's inclusion in decision making. A key informant asserted that "*men who are unaware and insensitive to women's role in society are the leading drivers of violence, discrimination, and marginalization."* It is, therefore, important to educate men and mobilize them as change-makers for women's empowerment.



Members of the Men4Women group in Kailahun

The third programme in the SEND-SL Model is Men For Women (M4W). Using the positive masculinity approach, the M4W promotes male role models, educating and enabling men and boys in the family and outside in the communities to:



Become gender-sensitive, acknowledging gender inequities and promoting women's rights



Foster respect for women and girls, condemning violence against them



Champion women's roles in leadership and decision-making.

SEND-SL believes that to achieve fundamental changes in the way women are perceived in the target districts, engaging men as partners in confronting structural barriers to women's progress is a necessity.

SEND-SL undertakes a range of activities to establish and operate M4W networks. Through training and peer support, SEND-SL seeks to achieve the following behavioural changes:



Strengthen boys and men's communication skills to communicate non-violently and collaboratively with women and understand the value of shared responsibilities and equal partnerships with women.



Facilitate introspective exercises that enable men to explore their sensitivities and insecurities masked by macho behaviour. Men are empowered to connect with their emotions, allowing themselves to identify and validate their vulnerabilities, learn to treat women with respect, and become empathetic listeners.



Support graduates from the training sessions and forums to organize themselves in M4W groups and networks with a commitment to championing the cause of gender equality, including women's participation in politics, governance, and decision-making, in collaboration with the WIGN and the GMF networks.

The Consultant observed that the M4W programme is showing some positive results. In the FGDs and from some key informants, M4W is recognized as a useful programme for mobilizing men as allies. Some concluded that positive feedback from men during the perception survey could be partly attributed to the positive experience of M4W members across the districts. However, M4W's success is still in the early stages because of the following:

- There are only a few M4W groups, the size of which and activities are fewer compared to WIGN and the GMF programme. Ironically, just like women are rebuked for venturing out in public in some communities, M4W members are criticized for being weaklings and puppets of women, according to one of the members. *"We are fighting against the long-held belief that a true man is one who displays macho behaviour and puts his wife or women in their place."* Some members' personal transformation takes time – some will relapse, and some eventually withdraw from the group.

- In the districts where SEND works, men are socialized to view women as subordinate. Their sense of superiority over women defines Their masculinity. These unequal gender relations of power and control embedded in societal norms have disadvantaged both women and men differently. The success of M4W requires a paradigm shift in the prevailing ideas about gender roles, freeing men from identities and emotions impressed upon them by their socialization. This transformation does not come from a few workshops and dialogue forums. It requires sustained efforts over an extended period. SEND-SL and its partners will need to invest in a range of activities to ensure that transformed and positive masculinities will have a broader impact on communities in the districts and eventually on social, economic, and political equality between men and women.

- The practical aspects of transformation need additional attention. That is, men may be more open to supporting women's cause if they understand how their lives and even economic situations will improve with transformed gender relations of power and control in which labour, resources, and decision-making are equitably shared.

M4W also addresses election-related violence against women through the voices of men who advocate for women's place in politics and governance. M4W also addresses the challenge of marginalization and exclusion of women in public decision-making. There is a strong link between the men in GMFs and members of M4W groups, both of whom champion women's public participation and leadership.

So far, M4W operates at a limited scale and will need more resources to carry out its activities, expand, and undertake peer learning exercises ahead of the next electoral cycle.

Economic Empowerment

The high financial burden women incur by participating in politics and governance has been elaborated earlier in the paper. The Consultant indicated that economic empowerment is critical to addressing women's financial barriers. Women are economically disempowered, just as they are politically disempowered. In Sierra Leone, rural women rely on agriculture as their primary income-generating activity; yet they do not own and control land. The exclusion of women from the primary sources of agricultural production is enshrined in statutory and customary laws. With over 80 percent of rural women relying on agriculture as their primary source of livelihood, men's exclusive control over land means that men also determine which economic opportunities can be made available to women. Given the state of Sierra Leone's agriculture sector, which is undermined by land degradation, lack of improved inputs, and post-harvest losses, rural women's potential source of income is at risk.

In 2008, SEND-SL introduced several alternative income-generating activities to improve women's economic and social status in their communities. SEND-SL began by training grassroots women to form credit unions. In 2015, SEND introduced village savings and loan associations. By creating groups, the women enhanced their access to microfinance loans, which they used to start and expand their small businesses. With agriculture being the main livelihood activity in Kenema, Kono, and Kailahun, most women use their loans to procure seeds, pay for farm labour, and transport agricultural produce to profitable market areas. Some communities have had access to technologies for value-addition through which women have increased their income, production, and savings. In some cases, the groups have drawn on their savings to support women who contested for elected positions.



Members of a VSLA in Kailahun District



Members of a VSLA in Kenema District

For young women who missed out on school because of early marriage, SEND trains them in business development. Some of these young women have applied their skills to growing businesses, and they are increasingly earning the respect of their communities. Some have taken advantage of their new social capital to venture into politics and governance by running to become members of their local councils or representing their constituency in Parliament. Across the three districts, there are currently sixty young women aspiring to stand for elected offices. These young women are also active members of the Women in Governance Network.



Isatu Koroma, a beneficiary of the WISE project



Marie Kamara, a beneficiary of the WISE project

Some of the young women told the Consultant that their participation in SEND's economic empowerment programme has changed their lives and outlook on society. They feel more confident, are recognized as leaders in their communities, and are now engaged in community decision-making. Women's improved business acumen demonstrates the potential of the links between economic and political empowerment. Their newfound confidence, financial standing, and community recognition facilitate women's engagement in the power corridors and their elected positions' pursuance.

Unfortunately, many of the women engaged in businesses with support from SEND-SL and other NGOs have lost their capital because of the COVID pandemic, and the preventive measures put in place by Sierra Leone's Government inter-district lockdowns. The resulting financial constraints cause tension, conflict, and violence in households, jeopardizing women's prospects to become actively engaged in the next electoral cycle. There is a need for SEND-SL and its partners to develop COVID economic support plans, especially for rural women. This will contribute to keeping up the momentum for women's political empowerment.

Political Engagement Strategies

SEND-SL is aware that the degree to which women can participate in decision making, governance, and politics is strongly influenced by the policies, programmes, and activities of elections' stakeholders, namely political parties and NEC. Most political party leaders are men significantly reducing women's successful participation at the party level and national level. Moreover, political party policies and procedures still favour men, resulting in low support for women candidates and few symbols to women. These issues were elaborated upon earlier in the paper.

SEND-SL has engaged political party leaders, the National Elections Commission, and media groups to address this institutional barrier. In early 2009, SEND-SL initiated a consultation workshop attended by District Councils, women councillors, and political parties. A collective agreement was made among stakeholders to collaborate with SEND-SL to increase women's number in elected positions in the 2012 elections. Signatories to the agreement adopted strategies that focused on:



Building the capacity of the stakeholders to advocate for gender equality and equity



Increasing women's ability to hold the District Council accountable for decisions it makes in the interest of marginalized groups



Enhancing the legitimacy of women's voice District Council decision-making processes.

Although this was set up in 2009, the MOU content remains relevant for improving women's participation in decision-making, governance, and politics. As such, it has inspired confidence and trust among stakeholders and strengthened SEND-SL's ability and freedom to support women's aspirations without being viewed as partisan. The MOU allows SEND-SL to support the following critical activities:

- Voter Registration: to help remove the barriers to voter registration for women, SEND-SL collaborated with the National Elections Commission (NEC) to sensitize women in rural areas to register to vote in general elections in 2009, 2012, and 2018. Across Kenema, Kono, and Kailahun, SEND-SL developed targeted civic and voter education messages which were disseminated to every village and town across the districts. SEND-SL launched campaigns such as 'Women Register to Vote.' As a result, during the 2018 elections, a record number of women registered to vote in SEND's operational districts.

- Electoral dispute resolution: After the highly contested 2018 elections, SEND-SL worked with WIGNs to settle elections-related disputes, especially those involving female contestants. In Kono, for instance, a new party, C4C, won many seats in Parliament. After the elections, there were tensions and violence among rival parties and contestants. SEND-SL organized mediation meetings and peacebuilding workshops for the disputing sides.

- Support elections operations: SEND-SL collaborated with members of a civil society consortium National Elections Watch (NEW), to create conditions to maximize voter turnout and enhance the electoral process's integrity. In partnership with Radio MOA and Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service (SLBC), Star Line radio station, and Eastern Radio, the "Women on the Move" radio programme started in Kailahun District was expanded to Kono and Kenema. In no time, the radio programme attracted support for training and mentoring women presenters. The radio series addresses structural barriers to women's participation, gender audit issues, stakeholder gender issues, GoSL's three Gender Acts, and profiles the achievements of women Members of Parliament and women Councillors. From inception to now, SEND's partnership with community radio has expanded to the regional SLBC station, which has more coverage and listeners. The success of the radio programme has strengthened links among network women.

SEND is the only NGO that has intentionally worked with political parties on promoting women's participation. Other NGOs have shied away from engaging political parties on gender issues. While SEND-SL has made considerable progress in engaging political parties, the impact could be more significant had SEND worked with a like-minded coalition of NGOs.

LESSONS EMERGING FROM THE SEND-SL MODEL

The relative success of the application of the SEND-SL Model for promoting women in decision-making, governance, and politics, coupled with the growing determination of women to break the social barriers that limit their involvement, offer useful lessons on what is working, what gaps need to be filled, and the prospects for women's political empowerment in the Eastern Province and the rest of Sierra Leone. These are discussed as follows.

Culture And Beliefs Are Learned; They Can Be Unlearned

The idea that tradition cannot be changed is fading fast in Sierra Leone. The power of social structures that society uses to justify women's discrimination and exclusion is breaking down. The study shows that just as these are learned over the years, they can be unlearned. Some of the women who challenged the status quo have succeeded, proving that change is possible. SEND-SL has effectively focused on awareness-raising, education, and many processes to foster critical thinking about gender and resocialization of gender roles. These should be sustained and scaled up to promote societal transformation. For example, peer learning should be encouraged, from which men and women in the workplace can benefit from those who have already attended workshops. Identifying and resourcing champions in various social spaces can be useful in advancing the gender transformation agenda.



Beneficiary receives a certificate after her successful completion of the MASIDAMA approach promoting self-reliance

Multiple Factors Drive Women's Disempowerment

Just as various factors contribute to women's exclusion and marginalization in the public sphere, the intervention must take a multi-pronged approach. The SEND-SL Model is comprehensive, and its different parts are well aligned to foster synergy between them. The Women in Governance Network provides a women's only space to promote empowerment and self-reliance. The Gender Model Family programme demonstrates how gender equity brings about new non-traditional opportunities for men and women, boys, and girls in private and public spaces. The Men for Women programme allows men to address their fears and vulnerabilities related to gender equality and women's empowerment. Together these programmes transform gender relations of power and control in society, opening the way for women's access and participation in politics and governance.

Involving Men As Champions For Women's Empowerment Is Among The Best Approaches To Breaking The Barriers To Women's Political Engagement

SEND-SL's two-pronged strategy of engaging men in positive masculinity programmes, i.e., GMF and M4W, is useful in facilitating cooperation and collaboration between men and women to advance gender equality. A member of the GMF told the Consultant, "Pooling resources, working together, and supporting each other with housework and business has increased our income and given me a new respect for what gender equity really means. My wife and I now share decisions and have decided to send all our children to school." Some men involved in both GMF and M4W told the Consultant that their wives are now engaged in community meetings, development projects, and political functions. Husbands also support their wives to attend and participate actively in party functions. Transformation happens through self-realization, and self-realization is enabled through personal actions. Unless men get involved, they will feel threatened and hide behind toxic masculinity tendencies. M4W and the GMF offer men the opportunity to get deeply involved in and committed to gender transformation.



Town chief encourages men to support their spouses who wish to participate in politics

Political Parties Hold The Key To Accelerating Women's Participation In Politics And Governance

In Sierra Leone, party politics have a strong influence. Efforts toward social transformation, such as those described above, may contribute to reforms in political party policies related to gender parity and women's empowerment. SEND-SL is already engaging political parties, mainly at the district level. However, most of the decisions are made at the central level by the parties' executives. SEND-SL has had some measure of success in accessing these higher-level bodies, but more significant influence should be exerted by a broad coalition of actors, including SEND-SL.



Members of Parliament, Electoral Officials and Political Parties representatives engaged in a workshop

Non-violence Education, Combined With The Rule Of Law, Can Sustainably Reduce Election-based violence Against Women

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Financial Investment In Women's Political Campaigns Is One Effective Way To Put Them On A More Level Playing Field With Men

As evident in the women's stories in Annex 1, financial resources can help women transcend social and institutional barriers. SEND-SL has adopted the local economic empowerment model, investing in women's small businesses in women aspirants' constituenciess. SEND also worked directly with women candidates to provide them with campaign materials to reduce their costs. Another more long-term option is to work with all political parties and NEC to reduce symbol fees for women over the next few electoral cycles – this would be consistent with growing calls for affirmative action and gender parity. All these options outlined are not without risks. Injecting cash in women's small businesses on the assumption that when women are economically empowered, they are more likely to support women candidates is not guaranteed. Contributing to women's campaigns may place NGOs such as SEND-SL at the centre of highly adversarial political processes that could lead to a backlash. Because men still dominate political parties, passing policies that specific measures to promote gender equity may require intensive and sustained engagement over an extended period—a least two to three electoral cycles. A thorough risk assessment would be needed to determine which combination of options is best suited to a given election and elected office. The risks notwithstanding, economic support for women is necessary if they are to participate in the public sphere. There is no level playing field when men control all the financial resources to run their campaigns



Kailahun Women in Governance Network representative presents Hon Zainab Brima with a donation to support her campaign

Success In Elections Is Sustained With A Strong Performance In Governance And Leadership.

While SEND-SL and others are succeeding in empowering women to take a seat at the table, how they navigate their way through to influence decisions has not received enough attention. Even though many women in governance feel proud and honoured to be elected, their management and policy engagement capabilities need to be further developed. The strength of the SEND-SL Model so far is its success in building women's capacity to become elected. It has not been as effective in increasing women's capacity to perform in their elected roles. For example, at the council level, the few women who are elected to positions feel they are not adequately equipped to understand their critical roles. Women Members of Parliament said that they think their contributions are limited because their male colleagues believe that they have a limited understanding of their roles and cannot fulfil them. This non-confidence exhibited toward women MPs is reflected in the type of committees to which they are assigned. Beyond promoting women for elected positions, there is a need to invest in programmes that help women understand how governance works, e.g., policy literacy, the government business cycle, managing the delivery of strategic initiatives in their areas, and other critical topics. SEND-SL has already observed this gap and has begun working on some activities and training modules to engage women councillors and MPs through the Women in Governance Network. SEND-SL is aware that it will take a broad coalition of civil society organizations and relevant training institutions, including the Civil Service Institute, to engage in such an ambitious capacity-building exercise.

Women's Political Empowerment Is Achieved Best Through Long-term Engagement

Supporting women's candidacy during elections can increase women's number in elected offices, but sustaining these efforts in transformative ways would require long-term attention. SEND-SL's Young Women in Governance Network (YWGN) established in secondary and tertiary schools, should be expanded. These young women should be linked to successful women politicians in and outside Sierra Leone, so they benefit from mentorship and other support. Building the capacity of these young women will go a long way to building a solid foundation for a cultural transformation that allows women to access elected offices and be placed in governance and decision-making positions at all levels.



Members of the Young Women in Governance network engaged in a reading session.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following summarizes the recommendations discussed throughout the report and especially in the lessons learned section. The recommendations build on the SEND-SL Model to address the three main barriers to women's political empowerment – social, institutional, and financial – as discussed in the report.

On women's social barriers, the Consultant recommends the following to strengthen existing strategies in the SEND-SL Model:

- Promote the rule of law to protect women from election-related violence. The Family Support Unit of the Sierra Leone Police was designed to address violence against women, mainly domestic violence. The unit does not have the know-how to deal with election-related violence against women. There is the need to work with the Sierra Leone Police authority to determine the appropriate mechanism for protecting women against election-related violence. The Independent Police Complaint Board in each district should be part of this mechanism. M4W should be empowered to undertake measures to prevent politically motivated violence against women. SEND-SL and its partners should scale up the Gender Model Family as a programme base to encourage women's involvement in politics with men's support.

- The Women in Governance Network organizes and empowers women in their political aspirations. SEND should do a capacity needs assessment of WIGN, including a review of its organizational, technical, and human resource capabilities, to strengthen the impact of its activities. There should be a long-term development and fundraising strategy to promote the Network as the hub for women in politics and governance in the districts where it operates. Lessons from the Network should be shared with other districts to encourage women aspirants in other parts of the country.

- The Gender Model Family and the Men for Women programmes empower men to champion women's political involvement. These programmes are currently running at a relatively small scale compared to their potential. They can be built upon to champion women in politics and governance and promote the elimination of discrimination and violence against women. SEND-SL should support men to develop their statement in support of the women's Manifesto.

- Working with girls in senior secondary schools and tertiary institutions on leadership skills may be viewed as long-term measures for women's empowerment. However, it will build solid foundations for transforming their mindsets about gender roles and women's involvement in politics and governance. The YWIG Network should be linked to the WIGN for mentoring and support. SEND-SL should organize 'shadow parliaments' with its government partners and women councilors, and MPs, in which students can apply their skills to analyse real issues in their communities. Young women leaders can learn and develop confidence from their participation in this model parliament activity.

On women's institutional barriers and strengthening women's capacity to maintain elected positions:

- Support women councilors and Members of Parliament through dedicated training on Parliament and District Councils' rules and procedures. A significant gap in current strategies for empowering women to contest elected offices is that many do not have sufficient capacity to perform once they are in office. The WIGN and Parliament's women's caucus should provide coaching, on-the-job training, and peer support.

- A long-term approach to women's political empowerment should be pursued, mobilizing all the necessary resources to ensure the Affirmative Action Bill's passing. Political parties should review their constitutions and adopt quota systems to elect women in party leadership and award party symbols to women.

- The Consultant is impressed with the ground-breaking work that SEND-SL is doing to empower women politically. In some instances, the Consultant observed that the organization takes considerable risks in pursuing this goal. It is essential that SEND conduct regular risk assessments and conflict sensitivity of its intervention to prevent backlash from existing male-dominated structures and institutions.

On women's financial barriers, these recommendations emerged from the study:

- Set-up a basket fund for financing women's political campaigns. Women's systematic exclusion from accessing and controlling economic resources justifies such support. The fund could be managed by a neutral body, such as SEND-SL, with roots in the respective districts and regions. It should be a non-partisan fund from which women who have received symbols can apply for support. The fund should be overseen by a governing body comprising representatives from leading women's organizations, political parties, and civil society organizations. The participation of all political party representatives in the running of the fund will mitigate backlash risk.

- Advocate for policy reforms that will create favourable economic and business environment for women. Measures include advocating for the repeal of customary laws that prevent women from owning land. Also, action should be taken to facilitate women's financial inclusion, i.e., their access to loans and seed money, training, and business development coaching. Women's engagement in financing their businesses should go beyond the village saving and loan schemes to loans from banks and other financial institutions. SEND-SL's dedicated programmes for women's entrepreneurship and local economic empowerment are indirect but effective avenues to women's political empowerment, which should be taken to scale.

While many of the proposed strategies may require long-term investment to achieve the desired impact, they can be planned to meet short-to-medium-term goals. SEND-SL and its partners should develop a programme drawing on the above recommendations to prepare for the 2022-2023 electoral cycle. A results-oriented strategy, drawing from this study and lessons learned from ten years of women in governance programming, should yield positive results, including increased numbers of women in Parliament and Local Councils.

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2010 Triple Role of Women Training Manual and Report

2010 Kailahun Women in Leadership Training Manual

2012 Kailahun District Women's Manifesto, A Road Map for Gender Equality in Development

2013 Gender Model Family Training Manual for Community Workers

2015 Power to the Women of Sierra Leone: SEND Sierra Leone case study on how to increase women's representation in elected public positions

2017 Food and Nutrition Training Manual for Gender Model Families in Sierra Leone

2018 Eastern Province Women's Manifesto

2018 Empowering Citizens to Make Sierra Leone Work for Equity, SEND Sierra Leone Strategic Plan 2019 to 2023

2019 Training Manual for Capacity Building for Elected and Aspiring Women Leaders in Sierra Leone

2020 Village Savings and Loans Association Training Manual – Improved access to sustainably managed micro-finance and WaSH systems project

2020 Gender Transformative Approaches for food security, improved nutrition, and sustainable agriculture, a compendium of 15 good practices by FAO, IFAD, and WFP

2021 Men for Women (M4W) Training Manual: Engaging Men as Allies to Support Gender Equality

APPENDIX 1: SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Respondent's Response (Tick The Appropriate Response)

A: I am willing to participate:

B: I am not willing to participate:

Sex: M F

Acceptance Of Female Leadership

1. **Do you believe husband and wife should make decision together?**

a. Yes
b. No

2. **Women's opinion is valuable and should always be considered when household decisions are made.**

a. Strongly agree
b. Disagree
c. Neutral Agree
d. Strongly agree

3. **Do other individuals in your community seek your opinion about important matters?**

a. Yes
b. No

Psychological Well-being And Self- Esteem:

4. **How strongly do you agree with the following statement?**

- I feel helpless
- I am driven and motivated to work hard
- I expect good things to happen to me in the future
- I feel I can provide for my family and meet my family's need
- I have no confidence in myself
- I feel like my life has importance

a. Strongly agree
b. Disagree
c. Neutral Agree
d. Strongly agree

Confidence In A Woman As Leader?

6. **In your point of view, should female meet the political leaders or representatives of their communities for solving the community problem?**

a. Yes
b. No

7. **Should female take part in political campaigns/public assemblies?**

a. Yes
b. No

Participation: How ready are you to put yourself forward and compete for an elected position.

8. **Did you register to vote in the last presidential elections?**

a. Yes
b. No

9. **What is the primary reason you didn't register**

a. Forgot to register
b. Didn't know how to register
c. Didn't want to register
d. Prevented from registering
e. Other

- - - -

13. **What problems are faced to females in getting into politics?**

a. Female participation is against religious rules
b. Due to less or no resources females cannot participate in politics
c. Due to sexual harassment, female participation is not possible
d. Political parties do not give opportunities to common people or women

14. **In your opinion what decisions/steps should be taken to improve females' participation in politics**

a. Political parties should provide more strengthen their women's wing
b. Control or minimise harassment within political parties
c. Females should be included in decision making process
d. Political education and awareness should focus directly to women

15. **Do you participate in or are you a member of any social, political or religious organisation/group in your community?**

a. Yes
b. No

16. **Which of these organisations do you belong to/participate in?**

a. Religious group
b. Political party
c. Village development committee
d. Other village development committee (education, sanitation, WASH ect)
e. VSLA group
f. Cooperatives
g. Farmer Association
h. Other

17. **What is you level of participation in the group activities?**

a. Very active
b. Somewhat active
c. Not active

18. **Do you have leadership role in the group?**

a. Yes
b. No.
c. I don't think they are worthwhile
d. I don't feel welcome /included
e. Other.

19. **In the last 12 months, did you attend any community meetings?**

a. Yes
b. No

(If Yes) Did you speak at any of these meetings?

a. Yes
b. No

Governance: The impact of women in decision in the community

20. **Do you know your local representatives?**

a. Yes
b. No

21. **How interested are you in political affairs?**

a. Very interested
b. Somewhat interested
c. Not very interested
d. Not at all interested
e. Don't know

22. **If I disagree with something the village chief is doing or saying, I keep quiet.**

a. Always true
b. Generally true
c. Sometimes true
d. Rarely true
e. Never true

23. **Do you feel like people like yourself can generally change things in your community if they want to?**

a. Yes, very easily
b. Yes, fairly easily
c. Yes, but with a little difficulty
d. Yes, but with a great deal of difficulty
e. No, not at all

Thank you for your time and very useful information gathered during this interview.

APPENDIX 2: KEY INFORMATION INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

1. In your experience, what skills sets are required for successful women's participation in decision making, politics and governance and politics?
2. What do you estimate is the financial cost of women's participation in politics?
3. What other resources are needed and how can they be mobilized to enhance effective political engagement and participation?
4. What political engagement strategies are need to secure support from the leadership of political parties to increase the success of women candidates?
5. What are the lessons learned from your experience working with women?

6t. What could be recommended for the improvement of women empowerment programme strategies and activities in future interventions?

APPENDIX 3: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONNAIRE

A. Women under-representation in public life

1. Mention 3 factors which in your opinion contribute to the under-representation of women in key areas of public life.
2. What are the key barriers to the appointment of women to positions of influence?
3. What is that keeps women from committing themselves to politics or public life commitments?

B. Getting into governance

1. What motivated you to become a [ward committee member, councillor, MP etc)
2. What were the key elements that helped you reach that position?
3. Were there any things that put you off initially when considering getting involved?
4. What obstacles have you had to overcome? (structures, practice, attitudes)

C. Being in governance

1. How does it feel to be a woman in your particular field? Do you face particular problems that are related to be a woman?
2. What are the key elements that support you and sustain you in your public role?

APPENDIX 1: WOMEN'S STORIES

HON. EMILIA LOLLOH TONGI, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT



Hon. Emilia Lolloh Tongi,
Member of Parliament

Honorable Emelia Lolloh Tongi is an independent female Member of Parliament who contested and won the 2018 parliamentary election for constituency 001, Kissy Tongi chiefdom, Kailahun District. For most of her life, Honorable Lolloh lived and studied in France, where she graduated with a Diploma in Office Administration. Upon completion of her studies, she came home for a brief period to work as an Executive Bilingual Secretary under the Sheka Stevens' leadership. While in France, Hon. Lolloh worked as a banker and created her own private company. She, however, maintained strong ties to Sierra Leone but more so to her hometown of Kissi Tongi. Every year she said, she will visit to see her aging parents. Being the eldest daughter, she felt the responsibility to look after her aging parents. This responsibility she said she found from the African tradition, which expects children to provide care for their elderly parents. Because of that, she frequented her visits until they passed away.

Hon. Lolloh said it was during these visits; she would travel across communities to see other family members and friends. She recalls for each time she visited; she'll be confronted with long stories of human sufferings, which in her mind could be avoided if community representatives were doing their job.

What Motivated You?

Driven by the stories she heard from the communities she visited, she also noticed how remote and underdeveloped the area was. She said she was especially struck by the plight of women whom she felt were giving too much, but getting nothing in return. She heard stories of women who were being raped without any access to justice; some were forced into marriages and girls, not in schools. There were numerous other stories related to service delivery. For 57 years, she said, there was no access to a health facility for the people of Ward 2. She explained the story -that struck a chord with her heart- about a young pregnant woman who was in labor and trekking a 5-mile distance with her 4-year-old daughter to access the only health center in Ward 1. During the walk, she said, the woman had a breech delivery on the road. The baby arrived with the feet, and there was no way she could bear the child safely. Noting she could not go any further, the woman sends her 4-year-old to get medical health. By the time medical help could arrive, the woman was found holding her fetus leg as she was trying to pull the baby by herself. She died during that delivery. As a woman and a Mother, Lolloh

cries, "I could not understand how a pregnant woman could be allowed to die in labor on the roadside." In an instance, Lolo said she decided that this must stop. She wrote letters to the district council, the MP at the time, and other stakeholders to intervene. Unfortunately, there were no positive responses. She then realized as an ordinary citizen; she has minimal powers to influence decisions. So, she began to nurture the idea of getting into politics.

What Was It Like Getting Into Politics?

Hon. Lolloh said it was not easy because, as an accomplished professional, she felt politics might not fit her personality. However, she was motivated to help the people of Kissi Tongi, so she disregarded all other emotional feelings she had at the time. When she returned to France that year, she shipped a container load of goods that included books, computers, and necessary medical supplies and solar lights. Since she had been away from home for a long time, she thought that would be a perfect way to reconnect with people in the constituency, and it worked. She became a household name in the constituency.

As an active member of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), Lolloh banked on the network she had established with the party leadership from when she was in the diaspora to when she returned home. Based on that, she thought obtaining the party symbol would be easy. However, Lolo said she quickly learned her assumption was wrong and that having a symbol would be the most challenging part of her entire political journey as; some members of the party began to reference her status as a nonmember of the female secret society while the incumbent was throwing money at party delegates at will. She immediately became aware that there could be more challenges, so she started to weight her options by evaluating her chances. More importantly, the cost of a party symbol that year was very high due to what was referred to as 'see foresee.'

As much as she was financially prepared with 35 000 euros, which she brought cash from her savings in France, she did not want to gamble and lose the symbol; neither was she prepared to contest under any other party who was also charging money for their political symbol. Added to that, she knew the majority of the political parties' conditions favor men more than women, and she did not want to be a part of playing the high-stakes game.

In a Damascus moment, Lolloh decided to take part in the election as an independent candidate. Traditionally, Kailahun district is an SLPP stronghold, but she banked on her community people's support to go against the norm. Lolloh said, most of her political strategies were driven by SEND-SL, who provided her the insight she needed to succeed. Being a first-time candidate, she recalls critical times in the election when SEND will give her support, which she later discovered increased her chance of winning. She combines SEND help with the training (leadership, advocacy, and mentorship) she received. She said, together, the strategies boosted her confidence to engage stakeholders and traditional leaders. Lolloh also recognized the SEND economic empowerment approach is helping to improve the lives of women in her community as they are now able to save through the VSLA and access credit. Lolo is proud to be the first independent female candidate to win an election in the country.

Being In Governance

Since winning the elections, Lolo has built a health facility that serviced eight communities. She noticed the majority of the people in her communities are cash crop farmers who do business carrying large sums of money on themselves. With her banking experience, she understands the risk associated with having large sums of money as such, she established a community bank and approached one of the big banks, ECOBANK, to manage the facility. Talks are still ongoing with the bank, but Lolo believes if the structure is there, the bank will have a little excuse but to provide staff and extend their service to her constituency. Including education scholarships to pupils and university students, honorable also succeeded in taking cold-room facilities to the women in constituency 1,2,3, Liberia, and Guinea. This facility is scheduled to open this September. Her most proud moment is when she completed the International market that serves businesspeople from across the three countries, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea. She said this market was destroyed because of the civil war. The absence of the market impacted the lives of businesspeople in her community and so having it restored makes her incredibly proud. In addition to these, honorable has also built an office for her constituency with the resources she received from parliament to rent one. She believes the building is a better option because even after she leaves, the building will be part of the constituency asset other MPs can use. She said most of the developments she provides for her community are made out of her pocket, which she estimates cost her around Le 750,000,000. Her hard work and result oriented approach has not gone unnoticed among her colleagues in parliament. Lolloh is a member of 4 parliamentary committees, which include; the Public Account Committee, Foreign Affairs, etc. She intends to stand for a second term because her constituency people want her to. Additionally, the SLPP leadership is also canvassing her to stand with the symbol. She has already been promised that this time she will not have to go through the difficulty she experienced in the 2018 elections.

THERESA KEMOKAI, CONTESTED MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT 2018 ELECTIONS



Theresa Kemokai,
Contested Member of Parliament 2018

Madam Theresa Kemokai is a nurse who contested the 2018 local council elections for constituency 016, ward 47 in Kenema District. Theresa is married with four adult children. She lives in the Kenema district, which is 19 miles away from her hometown Talia. The 2018 election was her first attempt to stand for an elected position.

What Motivated You?

Theresa said in 2016; her community people approached her and request for her to stand the 2018 elections. Motivated by their request and that of her party, the SLPP endorsement, she got involved in the race in 2018. Without much preparation financially and negotiation with her partner, she relied on the support of the community and the family to go through the process.

What Was It Like Going Into Politics?

Driven by the community support she had received, Theresa said she was excited about the opportunity and wasted no time to get involved in the campaign. She resigned from her nursing job to focus on the campaign but soon realized her husband was against her standing for an elected position. Although she is a nurse, Theresa had on the money of her own and, her husband was the primary breadwinner of the family. The result of her declaration made her husband drift away from the family. In no time, they were separated. Theresa said her life changed when her husband left home as he was working abroad on an international mission and making good money. Since she got involved in politics, she said she noticed the husband's attitude changed, and he was visiting the country without her knowledge. She later learned the husband was with another woman with whom he was making plans to settle. The husband made no secret of his disapproval for her to get into politics. He told every one of their friends and family who tries to resolve their marital problems. It got to a point where the husband stopped supporting the family.

Theresa said she made several attempts to fix the marriage, but all her efforts went unnoticed. T her husband was infuriated, had nothing to do with her or the children. However, she felt her husband's behavior tested her resolved, so she continued her political campaign to get the SLPP symbol. Determined not to lose the only other thing that matters to her, she loaned Le 30,000,000 to support her campaign. As a first-time politician, Theresa said she simply banked on the community support she had and, on the party's, verbal promise to get the symbol. She later realized the 2018 elections were different, and the party operations that dictate how to get a symbol changed dramatically. She required at least 60,000,000.00 of which she would need to cover unofficial costs like delegates

buying and community engagements to obtain the party symbol. She knew having the party symbol in an SLPP stronghold like Kenema will see her, but her finances were not enough for her to get the symbol. On the day of the primaries, Theresa received four votes out of 12, and she lost the elections. Shocked by the result, she was very discouraged because she had pinned her hopes on the delegates' verbal promise and her community support.

Both when she lost and during her campaign, Theresa said she received tremendous support from SEND-SL, who were able to courage her and provide her transport support and material support during her campaign. She said if she had gone independent, she would have stood a better chance to win because all the communities were in support of her. Because of her bitter experience, Theresa said she had put politics behind her to concentrate on her children. She is currently studying community development, which she hopes will better position her for good jobs and prosperous life. When asked about her marriage and future, Theresa said she is still legally married, but she prefers to channel her energy to develop her career. She is also engaged in rice farming in the communities, which makes her proud to be able to help the communities who once put their trust in her.

AMIE MOMOH, ASPIRING LOCAL COUNCILOR



Amie Momoh
Aspiring Local Councilor

Amie Momoh is a young teacher who aspires to get into politics. She contested the 2012 and 2018 local council elections under the All People's Party symbol and lost. Born in Pendembu, she has lived all her life in her hometown with her husband and three children. Until recently, Amie's educational background stopped at the Senior Secondary School level, but she recently sat her Teaching Certificate course, which she expects to pass. On both occasions, Amie contested the local council election in constituency 014, Upper Bambara Chiefdom, Kailahun District.

What Motivated You?

Being a resident of the constituency and a teacher, Amie said she witnessed the challenges girls and women are going through in the hands of men in the area. Specifically, regularly she said, promising young girls were removed from school to get married to older men and, most women in abusive relationships felt helpless. Amie became motivated by this, and she believed becoming a councilor will help her improve the lives of women. As a well-known gender equality focal person and the Village Savings and loans and microcredit lead manager, she said members have enormous respect for her. Still, she needed to have political authority, which would help her activism to succeed. With so much illiteracy among women, Amie lamented, a large sector of the constituency women lack knowledge about women's rights issues as such, they do not know how to respond when men violate these rights. She believes joining politics will help her achieve her vision, which she said is to improve the lives and living conditions of women in the constituency.

What Is It Like Getting Into Politics?

Amie said since she declared her intentions to contest the local council elections in 2012, life has not been easy for her and her family. Originally a member of the SLPP, she competed for the SLPP symbol in the 2012 elections and lost because she believed the party did not have confidence that she could win. She did not have the finances required to canvass the delegates. So, in 2018, Amie switches to the APC, where she was given a symbol. In retrospect, Amie said she was given the APC symbol only because her constituency was an SLPP stronghold, and there were no bold candidates to contest for the APC in the area. In both elections, she was shocked at the support she received from the

community but more so the 2018 elections. She said the community-made her feels she had their fullest support until the day of the elections when the results were announced, and the opposition candidate won a landslide. She said, for the first time, she became fully aware of the regional and tribal biases of Sierra Leone politics. When the results were announced, her house was attacked by youths from the winning party. She and her family ran to the police, but there were little the police could do, and so she ran for her life to safety in Kenema, where she now lives.

Although she has not relented on her vision, after her ordeal, and based on how she is observing the political tension between the two dominant parties APC and SLPP in the country, she is currently undecided in her hope to contest the 2022 local council elections. Amie is, therefore, working hard to develop her career in teaching. Some members of the community, including the Kailahun Women in governance network, are encouraging her to try again. Still, she is adamant that she wants to observe the political climate before making a declaration. In addition to that, she is also contemplating new strategies that will see her contest for the SLPP symbol with which she feels she will stand a better chance being that constituency 014 is an SLPP stronghold. That said, she is also frightened of how that will turn out, bearing in mind that she was once a member who defected to the opposition.

Another option she is weighing is to contest as an independent candidate. Amie believes SEND-SL and the KWIGN will be crucial in supporting her if she decides to compete for the third time. From her past experiences working with SEND, Campaign for Good Governance, and other NGOs promoting good governance, Amie said with the right support and guidance through the process, her luck will shine one day, and she will win. She is, however, not forcing the situation as she wishes to see her children grow. She said she spent Le 5,000,000 in the last elections.

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