

# Islamic Solidarity Fund for Development Poverty Reduction Series

Sierra Leone Community Driven Development project



## REBUILDING WAR-TORN COMMUNITIES IN **SIERRA LEONE**



ISFD POVERTY REDUCTION SERIES: NO. 3 (MAY 2016)



Head teacher's accommodation is now of sufficient quality to attract teachers to these rural areas (Moyamba Junction).





# Introduction

Sierra Leone's people have faced many hardships in recent times. A decade-long civil war took hold in the 1990s and early 2000s, and the country is still suffering from the knock-on effects. More recently, the Ebola epidemic hit many regions hard. These all put a brake on the country's economic development, keeping much of the population trapped in poverty.

To help poor communities to rise above these challenges, the Sierra Leone Community Driven Development (SLCDD) project was launched in 2010. This ambitious programme of work aimed to reduce poverty among war-affected communities, and to build their capacity to take collective action to improve their lives. The Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) and its Islamic Solidarity Fund for Development (ISFD) were two of the funders behind this project.

Overall, the SLCDD project was a resounding success. Across the country, the beneficiaries – the people who gained access to new infrastructure, or benefitted from group support and micro-credit – are singing its praises for the changes it has made to their lives.



According to pupils at Moyamba District Education Committee primary school, the new school is “comfortable” – the church where they used to teach was “uncomfortable, crowded ... with no seats or benches.” The new school also has “fixed black-boards, toilets and a well, and seven teachers” (they used to have only two teachers).

## Poor education means poor people

Despite some political and economic progress, Sierra Leone's recovery from its civil war (1991–2002) has been fragile. This has limited national progress in many key sectors: the 2009 Human Development Index ranked Sierra Leone 185th out of 188 countries.<sup>1</sup>

A leading example is its education sector. Fewer than half of Sierra Leoneans benefit from good schooling: enrolment in education institutions (primary, secondary and tertiary) is just 45 per cent. This problem has persisted for many years and affects all age groups: only a quarter of the adult population are literate.

Many factors contribute to this. In 2008, three-quarters of the country's households were more than 30 minutes away from the nearest primary school, which resulted in 30 per cent of children in this age group not attending school. There is also a direct link between poverty and education: the poorest people have the lowest access to primary education, and the majority of school dropouts are from disadvantaged households.

Cover photo: A self-help affinity group in Kawella.

# The Sierra Leone Community Driven Development project

The SLCDD project aimed to reduce poverty – and address the causes of poverty – among war-affected communities by building their capacity for collective action. Its overall aim was to help Sierra Leoneans by contributing to the country’s stability, peace and sustainable growth.

Specifically, the objectives were to:

- ♦ improve the socio-economic conditions of the communities involved through developing basic social infrastructure, health education and preventive care, youth and enterprise development, adult education and life skills
- ♦ support capacity-building in the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA), the implementing agency, through facilitation and skills training
- ♦ strengthen links among communities, local and chiefdom councils, the private sector and NaCSA.

The project, which ran from August 2010 to March 2014, was designed, created and co-funded by an ISFD loan of US\$8.43 million, an IsDB loan (US\$8.653 million), an IsDB technical assistance grant (US\$457,000) and the Government of Sierra Leone (US\$223,000).

The project’s intervention targeted national development priorities as identified in the third ‘Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper 2013–2018: The Agenda for Prosperity’.



Hon. Patrick L.M. Karbo.

The project was also consistent with the IsDB’s client-centric focus, encapsulated in its ‘1440H Vision’ and its ‘Special Program for the Development of Africa’.

**“This was the first time Sierra Leone had done anything like this”**

– Hon. Patrick L.M. Karbo, Chairman of the NaCSA Parliamentary Oversight Committee

# A range of beneficiaries

Overall, the project targeted 12 of the country's 14 districts (see map), aiming to reach about 300,000 people in 50,000 households across 900 villages. These were divided into 135 clusters of 4–5 villages each, and a community management committee was created and trained for each cluster. The SLCDD also recruited 53 community-based facilitators to support project implementation in the clusters.

The ISFD loan supported three specific components.

## 1. Community-driven programme

This comprised 215 projects to build a range of vital infrastructure, each selected by the community (see infographic, page 9).

## 2. Non-formal education and agriculture support

This entailed training 'farmer-trainers' in appropriate agronomic practices for them to share with other farmers. Under this component, 135 farmer-based

organizations were provided with training via a modular 'training of trainers' model.

## 3. Youth and micro-, small and medium-sized enterprise development

This component focused on forming self-help groups and providing them with micro-credit. In total, 32 micro-enterprise groups and 118 self-help affinity groups were established – and 95 per cent of the members were women. These groups were trained and serviced with micro-grants; the micro-enterprise groups also received loans from a revolving fund established at the Union Trust Bank.

Another part of this component was the installation of solar panels. These were introduced in 24 communities, while 4 existing facilities were rehabilitated. The project also trained 22 maintenance committees in basic maintenance of solar-power infrastructure.

## Districts involved in the SLCDD project







Stallholder Afsatu sells shoes and T-shirts in the rehabilitated section of Rokupr market. "Before, I used different areas – my house, the old market," she says. "Now it is better, there is shelter from the rain and sun – no need to rush for shelter when the rain starts."



# Built by – and chosen by – communities

A central approach of the community-driven programme was that each community set its own priorities in terms of the infrastructure it needed, and then established a community management committee (composed of 10 members) to manage the building of this.

In Rokupr, the community decided to replace its market: a 30-year-old building that was broken and hazardous, leaving users and their wares exposed to the sun and rain. Through the project, they constructed a brand new building adjacent to the old one, as well as a water well and toilet.

According to Mr Mohamed M. Kamara, the chairman of the community management committee, this brought many benefits. During construction, money was injected into the local economy through payment to skilled labourers and the local procurement of building

materials. And now the market is complete, traders are in better health, thanks to the improved shelter; their produce is also displayed in a more hygienic environment.

Traders have also managed to expand their businesses. Trade has increased, and they can afford to invest in more produce, because the improved protection from sun and rain gives their wares a longer shelf life.

However, even when completed, many still had to operate outside of the market's shelter. The community management committee asked for additional help from NaCSA to expand further. Through the SLCDD project, more funds were provided to rehabilitate the old market building next door. This has provided even more sheltered space for traders – although there is still not enough space on the busiest market days!



Aminata Kamara has been selling local cereals, pulses and seeds for 15 years; she used to sell from the old market. Now, she is “feeling good, not under the sun – I can sell all day. I am looking after my children’s secondary school education and looking to increase my trade.”

# A deadly interlude: The Ebola epidemic 2014–2015

The West African Ebola epidemic hit Sierra Leone in May 2014, shortly after the micro-enterprise groups had received their first loans. Restrictions for Ebola ‘hot spots’ began in late July 2014, and several communities involved in the SLCDD project were quarantined for between 8 and 18 months.

For most, this meant a ban on public gatherings and people leaving or entering the village or town – rules that led to a loss of income. Traders could not obtain supplies, and the lack of income meant that some businesses have been unable to reopen, even after the epidemic ended.

Some areas also experienced food shortages. Villagers were banned from going to their fields and consequently their crops failed. Others experienced problems buying food, as scarcity drove up prices. The quarantine regulations also had direct impacts on some of the education programmes established under the SLCDD project. Some parents were reluctant to send children to school, some schools shut, and others were used as emergency camps during the crisis.

The travel restrictions also placed a great strain on NaCSA's ability to provide ongoing support. Despite this, they did everything possible to help out during the epidemic. This included food distribution to affected communities, awareness and prevention help, and assistance to the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs in training trainers in psychological counselling for those affected.

Fortunately, the crisis did not ruin all the new enterprises that had been set up. While the Union Trust Bank withdrew its field staff during the crisis, this did not seriously affect loan repayments: the recovery rate in 2014 reached 64 per cent despite the crisis. And the micro-enterprise

groups in Kambia District repaid 100 per cent of their loans, providing NaCSA with example of successful loan management in the face of adversity.



A Veronica bucket as distributed by NaCSA to aid Ebola prevention. The bucket reminds community members of the importance of washing their hands in clean water as a hygienic practice.



# The role of micro-enterprise groups

The Rokupr market project saw the creation of micro-enterprise groups, formed out of existing self-help groups (e.g. community saving and lending groups). These were trained in skills such as group dynamics and good practice for micro-enterprises.

These groups were linked to the Union Trust Bank for access to microfinance loans. One beneficiary was

Mr Ali A. Kamara, a rice trader and storeholder at Rokupr community market who has been trading here since 1987. He received his loan of 8 million leones (approximately US\$1,990) in July 2014, which he invested in the business. Before this, his annual turnover was about 20 million leones (US\$4,977); today, he boasts a turnover of 40 million leones (US\$9,955). He has used the profits to further expand his business and pay for his children's education.

## Agricultural training and literacy – a partial success

The second component funded by ISFD – non-formal education and agriculture support – was designed to provide farming communities with training in improved farming practices, and to equip the poorest rural people with literacy skills. However, difficulties with sourcing the in-country expertise needed to deliver these courses left little opportunity to deliver them within the time frame of the project.

As a result, the literacy programme was dropped and the farmer-training sub-component was re-thought and centralized. Representatives from 135 farming communities were brought together to be trained as trainers for their own communities and neighbours, facilitated by the National Farmers Federation.



Mr Ali A. Kamara.



## Exceeding project targets – and more

Under the community-driven programme component, the SLCDD project established 135 village clusters, as planned. Meanwhile, 215 sub-projects were completed – more than the expected 190.

All along, the intention was to give communities the power to set their own priorities, based on their own judgement of their needs – decisions made collectively in community meetings. This influenced the overall mix of projects. For example, there was greater demand for primary and junior secondary schools, health posts and clinics, courthouses and roads than originally predicted. Conversely, there was less demand for hand-pump wells.

Some communities also requested infrastructure not originally planned by the project, such as playground perimeter fences and school libraries. The project's flexibility in meeting these requests was a factor in its success.



Alie Badara Mansaray.

The youth and micro-, small and medium-sized enterprise component was also successful, especially in terms of women's empowerment. In total, 150 mutual-support groups were established, and 95 per cent of approximately 3,000 members were women, who formed the majority of loan beneficiaries.

The micro-enterprise groups that secured loans were those that had been set up prior to the project. Meanwhile, many of the self-help affinity groups were established in direct response to the SLCDD project's offer to provide 'matching funding' to supplement each group's own internal saving and lending schemes. Overall, these have seen 2,100 entrepreneurs and poor women receive financial assistance in the form of loans and capacity-building support in how to use these loans.

Most of these groups have continued to function beyond the end of the project. The micro-enterprise groups in particular have the ongoing benefit of access to the revolving fund at Union Trust Bank. This is a potentially unending source of credit, as the repayment of existing loans fuels it – thus, the benefits of the SLCDD will be felt long after its official completion.



"Before [the self-help affinity group and internal lending], we were sorry – now we praise God!" – Self-help affinity groups in Kawella.

**"The project objectives were significantly addressed and successfully implemented. The impact is felt in the field, especially in terms of infrastructure and enterprise development"**

– Alie Badara Mansaray, NaCSA commissioner



# Success built on many foundations

Anyone who visits the SLCDD projects will identify NaCSA's role of as a major factor in the project's success. It has an excellent track record of delivering social assistance in Sierra Leone, combining professionalism with a heart for the people it serves – as demonstrated during the Ebola crisis (see page 6).

Mr Alie Fornah, the NaCSA board chairman during much of the SLCDD project, highlighted other success factors.

- ♦ **Community participation.** The project used participatory methods to mobilize communities, and men, women and youth were involved before, during and after the project cycle.
- ♦ **A sense of ownership.** Because of their involvement, the communities took ownership of their projects, for example cleaning and maintaining the new infrastructure.
- ♦ **Sustainability.** The SLCDD project had systems in place for continuing the work after the official project end date. These include the revolving fund for micro-enterprise groups and the self-supporting internal loans in the self-help affinity groups.
- ♦ **Flexibility.** Giving the communities complete freedom in their choices of infrastructure created 'space' for both NaCSA and the communities to pursue their aims.
- ♦ **Learning from others.** The project coordinators learnt from the success of other projects. For example, key NaCSA personnel travelled to India to see first-hand how self-help affinity groups operate.

And what of the beneficiaries themselves? The communities identified capacity-building as a key factor. NaCSA realized early on that, after basic training, many community management committees did not have the skills needed to manage the sub-projects as expected. They stepped in to provide further training in infrastructure project management, mentoring and backstopping. This

included support in tendering and contracting processes for infrastructure construction, and NaCSA engineers made site visits throughout the construction phase.

Financial training was also significant. For example, the 'Real Lady's' micro-enterprise group in Mammah Beach cited 'Financial training' as one of the benefits of the loan process, while the four micro-enterprise groups in Kenema noted 'Improvement of business skills' and 'Good financial management' as important.

## The community-driven programme by numbers...

### Beneficiaries:

**300,000** people in **50,000** households across **900** villages in **12** (of 14) Districts

### Outputs:

	<b>90</b> hand-pump wells
	<b>40</b> maternal and community health posts and community clinics
	<b>36</b> primary schools
	<b>19</b> junior secondary schools
	<b>6</b> markets
	<b>7</b> community centres
	<b>4</b> court houses
	<b>3</b> roads rehabilitated
	<b>3</b> playground perimeter fences
	<b>2</b> multipurpose complexes
	<b>2</b> school libraries
	<b>2</b> crop-drying floors
	<b>1</b> rehabilitated water reservoir and its distribution networks

<sup>1</sup> This was the last ranking before the SLCDD project began. The 2015 report ranked Sierra Leone 181st out of 188 countries (see [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2015\\_human\\_development\\_report.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2015_human_development_report.pdf)).



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