WOMEN UNITE !

STRENGTHENING WOMEN-LED SOCIAL COHESION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

IN POST-ELECTION SIERRA LEONE

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EVALUATION
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Acknowledgments

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

BAN   Budget Advocacy Network

CBO   Community Based Organization

CSO   Civil Society Organization

FGD   Focus Group Discussion

IGR   Institute for Governance Reform

KII   Key Informant Interview

NGO   Non-Governmental Organisation

Search   Search for Common Grounds

TOT   Training of Trainers

WCSG Women Community Solidarity Groups

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Search for Common Ground (Search) in partnership with the 50/50 Group, the Institute for Governance Reform (IGR), and Budget Advocacy Network (BAN) implemented a 12-month Women Unite! Strengthening Women-led Social Cohesion and Accountability in Post-Election Sierra Leone Project which was funded by Irish Aid.

The project sought to promote social cohesion and accountability within the post-election environment, with women's empowerment and participation streamlined throughout five districts in Sierra Leone: Kenema, Port Loko, Kambia, Tonkolili and Kono districts.

With the aim of strengthening women-led social cohesion and accountability in post-election environment, the project hinges on three specific objectives which targeted change from the structural, community to individual levels. The project objectives are:

1.   To build social cohesion at the community level through women-led approaches

2.   To strengthen women's role in promoting local-level accountability

3.   To increase citizens' access to information and awareness raising around social cohesion and governance processes.

To successfully implement the project activities, Search and partners engaged key stakeholders including civil society organizations (CSOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), communities and community leaders, government stakeholders and local authorities, and media institutions.

The objective of the end-of-project evaluation is to assess the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of project activities in achieving the stated change objectives. It further covers measuring what has changed as a result of the project and provides lessons learned that will inform future initiatives for women-led approaches in promoting social cohesion and public sector accountability. The core research questions in the evaluation are (a) Did the program build social cohesion at the community level through women-led approaches? (b) Did the program strengthen women's role in promoting local-level accountability? (c) Did the program increase citizens' access to information and awareness raising around social cohesion and governance processes?

The evaluation exercise targeted project implementation partners, key stakeholders, and beneficiaries in Port Loko, Kenema, Kono, Tonkolili and Kambia.

The evaluation adopted a mixed method research design in order to capture the subjective experiences, atti-

tudes and perspectives of key stakeholders/project beneficiaries through a qualitative lens and measure key project results quantitatively. Data collection included desk review, key informant interviews (KII), focus group discussions (FGDs) and surveys. The evaluation team interviewed 3 project implementing staff, 8 female CSO leaders, 8 local leaders, and 10 women community solidarity group leaders; additionally, they surveyed 264 project beneficiaries across the five districts of implementation.

In line with the evaluation criteria which centered on assessing the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, what has changed and learning and replicability; the key findings are summarized as thus:

Relevance

The evaluation found the programme to be relevant in attaining the key objectives and expected results of the projects. The evaluation design shows alignment of activities to addressing the needs of women in Sierra Leone. The strategy utilized including the establishment of WSCGs added to the relevance of the project. Throughout the five districts of implementation, 92% of participants interviewed overwhelmingly agreed that the program activities were relevant to their needs and therefore recommended the continuation of those activities which they believed promoted the objectives of the project. Participants agreed that they enjoyed the activities in which they participated and revealed that those activities have helped them in either fostering social cohesion, local level accountability and/or awareness in their communities. The alignment of activities to the objectives yielded a positive outcome. For instance, in fostering local level accountability, participants agreed that their participation in multi-stakeholder gender sensitive budget forum, capacity building for women-led CSOs on governance and accountability, and the action-oriented town hall meetings broadened their knowledge and skills in the concept of local level accountability. The concept of local level accountability was well interpreted by locally termed word in the Temne language "Konani" – the ability to report transparently on issues of communal interests. This term was widely used to describe local level accountability in Port Loko, Kambia, Tonkolili and Kono district while the term "Kona" was used in Kenema district.

Effectiveness

The evaluation captures the effectiveness of the project around the three core themes (1) to build social cohesion at the community level through women-led approaches (2) to strengthen women's role in promoting local-level accountability and (3) to increase citizens' access to information and awareness raising around social cohesion and governance processes. Overall, results from the KII and survey reveal a strong agreement on how the project has facilitated an increase in social cohesion, local level accountability and awareness of the governance processes in communities. 85% of the participants surveyed mentioned the reduction of post-election conflict as a significant outcome of the project. Participants further revealed that women participation in

the development and implementation of the community peace plan ushered an avenue for conflicting parties to resolve their disputes and work amicably on building social cohesion in their community, as evidenced by the following statement from a WCSG leader in Port Loko, "The Women Unite! Project provides a comprehensive approach to tackling post-election tension through the integration of multiple activities geared toward social cohesion and peace in the community." Participants demonstrated understanding of local level accountability which they loosely defined as "transparent reporting" on governance issues by politicians.

To strengthen transparent reporting on key issues, participants emphasized that the program has enabled them to ask their political heads/representatives to report to them in a timely manner. Transparent reporting from local leaders encapsulate notifying the people about pre, during and post decision making actions. As a result of the program, participants confirmed that local level accountability has increased as captured in some of these responses:

- Now there is transparency in whatever they are doing as compared to previous times. Local-level accountability means "Transparency".

- Women were not bold enough before asking for clarity on issues concerning them. During and after the project, women start to speak for themselves.

- Local level accountability has been very successful because of the project, we now know how all sectors within our community is running and we usually spot-check with the town council.

Efficiency

Through triangulating interviews with participants and project implementing staff, the evaluation revealed that the project was efficiently managed in line with financial best practices and value for money. The efficient implementation of 29 activities within 12 months in which the cumulative target was met in 98% of the activities demonstrated a high level of efficiency. Search and local partners created structures and processes that enabled the efficient use of resources in attaining the project objectives. Interviews with organizations within the consortium shows a clear picture of having the requisite knowledge and skills to implement a project aimed at addressing the needs of women in Sierra Leone.

However, the consortium approach to project implementation upscaled project delivery. Interviews with Search (Lead implementing partner) and Irish AID (funders) demonstrated a tenacious framework of financial accountability and efficient utilization of resources in the project.

Search expertise in utilizing media as a tool to disseminate messages of peace, social cohesion and women empowerment was pivotal in the project. Organizations within the consortium played specific significant roles

which filtered into the overarching framework of the project. Participants revealed alignment of organizations role to attaining project objectives. For instance, Search use of media to engage participants and awareness raising on governance issues; BAN's role on Multi-Stakeholder Gender-Sensitive Budget and Service Delivery Forums; 50/50's role in the Training of Trainers and formation of WCSGs, and IGR's role in women's participation in the governance process were complementary to achieving the project outcomes. The findings revealed that the consortium approach to project delivery yielded positive outcome.

What has Changed?

While the effectiveness described the outcomes of the program, what has changed to highlight are the most striking personal and community-based changes resulting from the program. With no baseline data prior to the implementation of the project, capturing what has changed as a result of the intervention was largely subjective. The KIIs and survey highlighted a significant increase in social cohesion, local level accountability and women's participation in the governance processes in their community. The most striking changes that emanated from the evaluation are:

1. *Womens' involvement in Local Governance processes have increased.*

Anecdotal findings from the KII shows that there is an increase in women participation in governance processes as a result of the project. While there was limited quantifiable evidence to reflect the number of women participants in governance processes; respondents define participation as having some interest in understanding how the governance structure work and engaging in decision making processes in their communities. Most respondents accredited the increase of their participation to their engagement in the activities of the project. A women leader noted that "Through the action-oriented town hall meetings and policy dialogue events, I have now understood that women have rights to participate in the decision-making process and we are seeing large turnout of women groups in governance related activities"

2. *Women are positive influencers in their communities.*

Through the activities of the WSCGs, participants depict follow women who wielded leadership qualities as having a positive influence in their communities. Participants commented that women leaders led in organizing and coordinating social cohesion events with limited or no oversight from men who had been provided leadership guidance prior to the project. Women leaders that were trained and equipped with leadership skills from the Women Unite project are highly regarded as peace ambassadors and positive influencers especially to girl mentees in their communities.

3.   Better community relations among conflicting factions

The project limits the post electoral violence and enhance a better interpersonal relationship among conflicting political factions. 85 % of the participants surveyed mentioned the reduction of post-election conflict as a significant relevance of the project. It further reveals that women participation in the development and implementation of the community peace plans ushered an avenue for conflicting parties to resolve their disputes and work amicably on building social cohesion in their community. A participant in Kenema mentioned that "there was serious conflict between me and a lady which went up to court level but because of this program we are now sisters. We have settled our differences by learning through the program that there should be peaceful co-existence in order to achieve a better community."

4.   Shifting dynamics in terms of women's abilities to speak up on communal issues.

The findings shows that women have been capacitated to speak up on issues of communal interest and can now advocate for their rights. Common responses were …women are now included in decision making processes, women can now contest for leadership position, women can contribute to household decision making, which was predominantly men's role, women can speak in public gathering even when men are present… . A local leader noted that "women were at the back seat because they were afraid or shy to speak for fear of being stigmatized. Also, most of them were not aware of their rights. But now, because of this project, they are present in most of the community meetings even though they don't speak up all the time, they try to fully participate in decision making in the community and that's an improvement." Indeed, stakeholders recognized that this project gave them the tools to contribute to this changing power dynamic.

With the intervention of the Irish Aid Project- "Women Unite!", the activities laid solid foundations for peace and reconciliation and forgiveness between and amongst one-time political rivals. The evaluation noted that 95% of women interviewed confirmed that the Women Unite program has changed the way women previously perceived political rivalries as evidenced in the below scenarios:

In Tonkolili District, Mile 91 town, peace was brokered between a former candidate of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) and All Peoples Congress (APC) Supporter.The allegation was that the latter used her political connections and affiliations within the APC party in Mile 91 to stifle activities of her SLPP opponent. This led to confrontations during and after the last elections. This animosity led to a breakdown in communication which eventually affected the setting up of the WCSGs as all three of them are members. This did not augur well with the other members of the WCSGs who requested a reconciliation process. Eventually their differences were resolved and this open communication between the conflicting women.

An APC Councillor from Tonko Limba in Kambia District complained about incidences of elections vio-

lence against women in her community. She complained of harassment from men belonging to secret societies and that male secret societies came out in broad daylight to scare women to enter their houses and prevented them from moving around.

The problem was exacerbated with the clapping of "pot covers" behind female candidates who were awarded symbols. This led to animosity and breakdown in communication among the people of Tonko Limba. With the establishment of the WCSGs, she hopes to leverage her influence to bridge peace and bring all women on board to promote peace in their community.

Learning and Replicability

The evaluation captures key learning from the project and what can be replicated. The utilization of key concepts delivered through project activities was a vital learning. Concepts of transparency, social cohesion and accountability have been internalized and effectively utilized by most participants and stakeholders interviewed. Moreover, their description of social cohesion rests on the ability of the people to work together for communal purposes. The WCSGs practicalized this concept by building a framework for peace through the cross-district peace exchanges and other related activities in the project.

The positive impact of the consortium approach – bringing international and local organizations with varied but complementary expertise to deliver the activities in the project cannot be underemphasized. This allows for synergy among organizations and shared expertise complemented each other's activities in the implementation of the project.

The involvement of local authorities in the implementation of the project yielded a positive outcome. They revealed that they are able to take ownership of the project. The model of participatory action intervention through which the local authorities were incorporated throughout the project implementation have enabled local authorities to continue creating avenues for women to lead in building social cohesion and foster peace among communities.

The evaluation depicts that owing to the effective design, structure and implementation of the project, there is an avenue for replicability. Several KII and survey respondents indicated that the model through which the WCSGs work in cascading training on women empowerment to other women in their communities is worthy of emulation. That the WCSGs have been empowered with the knowledge and tools to replicate the intervention was a theme that resonates with most respondents interviewed.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the evaluation, the following are recommended:

Opportunities to Improve the Program:

Ensure there are opportunities for women to apply the skills they learned in the training. This can include supporting community-level interventions such as women led advocacy, community peace building initiatives through which women will take leading roles in cascading training to other women; and ensure there is a facilitator to reflect on how skills and knowledge from the training were applied in those projects.

Opportunities to Make a Sustainable Impact:

Ensure women and girls have access to educational resources so they can develop the skills necessary to advance into leadership roles. Participants interviewed highlighted illiteracy as a major deterrent to women in attaining a leadership position in their communities. They recommended adult education/capacity building for illiterate women who are already willing and able to develop themselves educationally to participate in governance.

Include interventions that support economic opportunities for women and girls. While the intention of the program is to empower women, there were no direct interventions promoting economic opportunities for women. If women are unable to be financially independent from men, it will reduce their influence in governance decisions.

Create sustainability plans for the WCSGs as part of the exit strategy. The organizations should have a strategy for funding and maintaining empowerment initiatives after the close the program. There is a clear risk to relying on volunteers to maintain program activities, especially in high poverty communities where community members' focus on meeting basic needs rather than gender parity in governance.

Opportunities to Influence Macro Level Policy:

Influence policy on the local level to increase gender parity in local leadership. Encourage local governance councils to mandate 50% representation of women in local leadership.

Share success stories with key Ministries in the Sierra Leone Government and make recommendations on how national policy can influence local governance.

Opportunities to Improve Evaluation Design

Improve evaluation methodology on the frontend of implementation. Optimally, there would have been baseline data collected, so that quantitative indicators could have been tracked over time. Further, a quasi-experimental design could have been implemented wherein similar communities without the intervention could be used as a source of comparison to the communities receiving the intervention.

BACKGROUND

Project Overview

Women Unite! Strengthening Women-led Social Cohesion and Accountability in Post-Election Sierra Leone Project` was a 12-month project funded by Irish Aid and implemented by Search for Common Ground (Search), in partnership with the 50/50 Group, the Institute for Governance Reform (IGR), and the Budget Advocacy Network (BAN).

The project sought to promote social cohesion and accountability within the post-election environment, with women's empowerment and participation streamlined throughout five districts in Sierra Leone: Kenema, Port Loko, Kambia, Tonkolili and Kono districts.

The project hinges on the following theory of change: IF women CSOs, groups, and leaders are equipped with the skills and capacity to promote peace, meaningfully participate in public life, and strengthen local-level accountability alongside their peers and other stakeholders, THEN they can effectively contribute to democratic peace consolidation that is holistic, inclusive, and sustainable.

The project objectives are to (1) build social cohesion at the community level through women-led approaches, (2) strengthen women's role in promoting local-level accountability, and, (3) increase citizens' access to information and awareness raising around social cohesion and governance processes.

The expected results as against the objectives of the project are:

1. Women CSOs, groups, and leaders have increased capacity to carry out social cohesion and peace initiatives; foster stronger networks and shared learning among and between each other to achieve their collective goals within their communities.

2. Women CSOs, groups, and leaders are equipped with the skills and capacity to strengthen local-level accountability.

3. Citizens have increased access to peaceful narratives that strengthen social cohesion and promote peace.

To achieve these results, Search and partners implemented a wide range of activities across the five districts. Table 1 provides a brief description of the activities.

See Annex 1 for a complete breakdown of activities and outputs over the 12 months of project implementation.

Table 1

Activity	Description
Training of Trainers	Search and 50/50 provide a two-day tailored capacity building training to women leaders of CSOs. A training manual was developed for this training.
Establishment of Women Community Solidarity Groups (WCSG)	Influential women in both formal and informal groupings were identified by Search, 50/50 Group and women led CSOs to form WSCGs in the target districts and chiefdoms
Step-down training for WCSGs	50/50 led step down trainings to WCSGs
Girl Mentorship Programmes	Girls were mentored by WSCG members and women CSOs. They met twice a month as well as participated in organizing the solidarity and peace events
Community peace plans	Women led CSOs and WCSGs in each district designed their community peace plans.
Action-oriented Town Hall Meetings	With support from Search and 50/50, trained women (CSOs and WSCGs) organized and facilitated 2 town hall meetings per district for a total of 10 town hall meetings.
Participatory Theatre Performance	Search created community-level participatory theatre troupes. These groups provided theatrical performances to reflect key conflicting themes and allows the audience to participate. It entails 2 performances per district (10 performances total).
Multi-stakeholder Gender-sensitive Budget and Service Delivery Forums	BAN provides forums on the importance of gender considerations within budget planning and how various stakeholders can work together to ensure budgets remain gender sensitive.

Activity	Description
Media Campaign *We Tumara Bambai*	We Tumara Bambai: An informative media campaign. Search identified and conducted a two-day training of journalists of the five radio stations. Each station produced 24 editions of the campaign.
Media Campaign *Atunda Ayenda Radio Drama*	Atunda Ayenda: Search collaborated with the women led CSOs, the WCSGs, and project partners to design and produce radio programme content consistent with the accountability and social cohesion issues raised at the local level as well as showcase the positive outcomes of the peace and solidarity events.

Assessment of Project Expected Result and Activities

The overall aim of the project is to strengthen the role of women in promoting social cohesion, local-level accountability, and inclusive decision-making processes in five districts of Sierra Leone. This overall aim is supported by 3 broad objectives, 8 Expected Results (ER) and 29 activities designed to achieve the project's goal from conceptualization to realization. Here is a summary of the expected results and activities.

ER1.1 Women CSOs, groups, and leaders have increased capacity to carry out social cohesion and peace initiatives within their communities. The project aimed at capacity building for women in carrying out social cohesion and peace initiatives in their communities. Participants interviewed overwhelmingly agreed that this key result was achieved. They demonstrated an increase in their capacity to carry out social cohesion and peace initiatives through their participation in activities like the cross-district peace exchanges, and development and implementation of their community peace plan. They also accredited the success of upscaling their capacity to the work of the WCSGs. The theatrical performances and media programs on social cohesion and peace initiatives were useful in developing women's capacity to drive peaceful initiatives in their communities, they noted.

ER1.2 Women CSOs, groups and leaders foster stronger networks and shared learning among and between each other to achieve their collective goals. The evaluation reveals that through the implementation of project activities, women CSOs, groups and leaders were able to foster stronger networks and shared learning between each other. The basis for the attaining of this result was set by the establishment of the WCSGs and women empowerment sessions through the TOTs and step-down trainings. The FGDs revealed that the project has

enabled conflicting parties to cast their differences aside and foster communal bonding through building so-
cial cohesion which they termed "togetherness." The success of the cross-district peace exchange and women's
participation in peace and solidarity events contributed to the attainment of this result.

ER1.3 Participatory and culturally relevant events and initiatives foster peace and cohesion within commu-
nities. The output chart shows an overwhelming participation in culturally relevant events that were geared
toward fostering peace and cohesion in different communities where the intervention was initiated. Also, the
survey results capture a 95% agreement to statements around how their participation in culturally relevant
events like the cross-district peace exchange, solidarity initiatives and implementing the peace plan contribute
to fostering peace and social cohesion. An excerpt from an interview with a WSCG leader reveals "Enhanc-
ing an avenue for women participation in the theatrical performances and cross district peace exchanges en-
ables us to lead in fostering peace in our communities. I have had many foes as a result of the tensions in the
national elections, but through my participation in the project, I now work hand in glove with them to foster
peace in our community."

ER2.1 Women CSOs, groups, and leaders are equipped with the skills and capacity to strengthen local-level
accountability. This result was aimed at ensuring women understand and participate in local level account-
ability drives in their community. The evaluation shows that women who were less interested in holding their
representatives accountable or participating in local level accountability are now vehemently leading the quest
for accountability in their communities. Participants demonstrated understanding of accountability through
their interpretation of the concept as "Konani" – the ability to transparently report on issues of communal
interest. The survey reveals a strong agreement by respondents to a feeling of empowerment to ask questions
and speak up on accountability issues in their communities.

ER2.2 Community members, local authorities, and elected officials have increased platforms for engagement.
The project activities including Action Oriented Townhall Meetings, public policy dialogue, and Multi-stake-
holder Gender-sensitive Budget and Service Delivery Forums created the right platforms for increasing en-
gagement between and amongst women and local authorities. The evaluation findings reveal that these plat-
forms were effectively utilized, and participants demonstrated acquiring the requisite knowledge and skills
to "speak up" on issues of communal interest. A local leader commented that the "Women unite project has
created a platform for women to contribute in communal decision making, they can speak up on matters of
interest to us all…"

ER2.3 Elected leaders become more responsive to citizens' concerns (especially those of women) in local gover-
nance and development processes. The findings show that the expected project result which aimed at ensuring
that elected leaders are more responsive to citizen's concerns (especially those of women) was achieved. Par-
ticipants revealed that prior to the inception of the Women Unite project in their communities, there was no

systematic method of creating avenue for engagement between elected representatives and their electorates. The project activities – town hall meetings and policy dialogue fostered the right platform and means of dialogue and avenues to hold elected leaders into account. This upscaled their responsiveness as women continue to contribute vocally on governance issues in their communities. "If they don't listen to us, we know what to do – we will not elect them again and we will support follow women in their quest for elected positions" noted a WSCG leader in Portloko District.

Scope of the Evaluation

The evaluation covered the entire project implementation period from September 2018 to August 2019. The evaluation assessed the attainment of key result areas, activities implemented to capture project outputs; roles of consortium partners and perception of participants and stakeholders. The project's relevance to the needs of women in the five districts of project implementation and what has changed as a result of the project were also evaluated.

Evaluation Objectives and Research Questions

The objectives of the evaluation are:

   a) To evaluate to what extent the project has been able to achieve desired objectives and expected outcomes

   b) To ascertain the appropriateness/effectiveness of project design and implementation model

   c) To identify key lessons and potential practices for learning.

   d) Evaluate the transformation of attitudes and behaviours of the target groups.

Evaluation Questions

The evaluation was guided by the following questions:

No	Evaluation Criteria	Mandatory Evaluation Questions
1	Relevance	1. To what extent the project is relevant to the identified needs of the target beneficiaries and the context central to women's participation in decision making in SL? 2. How do the project beneficiaries/participants perceive the relevance of the project vis-a-vis their needs? How relevant is the project against the national objectives of peace, accountability and social cohesion? What is its relevance to the development priorities of the corresponding districts? 3. How does the project match with the Irish Government Aid priorities in SL? How does the project match with the SL government's policies and programs on accountability
2	Effectiveness	4. To what extent were the intended project goal, outcomes and outputs achieved and how? To what extent did the project reach the targeted beneficiaries at the project goal and outcome levels? How many beneficiaries have been reached? How did the project structure, strategies and tools support effective delivery? 5. To what extent the project has contributed in building (women leaders', women CSO's and Groups)' capacity to carry out social cohesion and peacebuilding activities and skills to strengthen local level (at institutional and individual leaders level) accountability? 6. How has it promoted networking and knowledge sharing among women CSOs, groups and leaders? 7. To what extent the project has provided platform for collective engagement of community authorities and elected officials? 8. How has the project contributed to enhance the responsiveness of elected leaders towards their constituents? 9. To what extent the project was able to provide positive narratives for social cohesion and peace among target groups? 10. To what extent the project was able to enhance citizen understanding of local governance, and development process? 11. How did the policy dialogue influenced local level policy making? 12. Did the project contribute in increased participation of women in Chieftaincy election? If yes, how?

3	Efficiency	13. How far the results achieved justify the cost incurred - were the resources effectively utilized? How did it perform from the perspective of planning vs execution?
		14. Was there any coordination/networking with other organizations like NMJD's Peace Ambassador or similar initiatives? Did project activities overlap and duplicate other similar interventions (funded nationally and/or by other donors)?
		15. Could a different approach have produced better results? If yes, why?
		16. How cost-efficient was the project structure (consortium approach) to deliver the results of the project at scale?
	What has changed?	17. What are some of the striking changes (either personal or community based) as a result of the project?
		18. How has the project contributed to institutionalised democratic, holistic and sustainable peace in target areas in SL?
		19. How has this project contributed in promoting social cohesion in target communities?
		20. How has this project contributed in strengthening the role of women and local governance and accountability of leaders?
		21. How has this project contributed in increasing citizens' access to information and awareness around social cohesion and governance processes in SL?
	Learning and Replicability	22. What are some of the key lessons learned as a result of this project that can be shared and replicated?
		23. What worked well and what could have been done better?
		24. How can we improve the radio program production and timely broadcast?
		25. What are the recommendations for similar future interventions?
		26. What are the long-term plans for supporting local CSOs (IGR, 50/50 and BAN) to address their need for continuous engagement before and after elections for peace and social cohesion to be maintained?

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A mixed method research design was utilized in this evaluation. The aim was to quantify project outputs and indicators and to understand the experience of program participants by obtaining information from staff, participants, and stakeholders. This approach was considered appropriate since it captured the subjective experiences, attitudes and perspectives of key stakeholders/project beneficiaries through a qualitative lens and measured key project results quantitatively. The research design aimed at utilizing the appropriate tools to provide an opportunity for programme stakeholders to describe their experiences as part of the Women Unite! Project; identify successes and challenges in programme implementation; and, determine if programme outcomes, outputs, and indicators were met during the project cycle.

The evaluation utilized the following data sources:

•   Desk review and analysis of Search's Women Unite!'s project documents and existing monitoring and evaluation data

•   Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with key stakeholders (project staff, local authorities, and leaders of women led CSOs)

•   Surveys with a sample of beneficiaries (WCSGs, girls mentees, and women who participated in the project activities)

•   Focus group discussions with beneficiary

Sampling Procedure

The project was implemented in five districts (Kambia, Kono, Tonkolili, Port Loko and Kenema) in Sierra Leone. The target beneficiaries included but was not limited to 400 WCSGs members, 10 CSOs groups, 90 girls' participants, 36 girls' mentors, 400 community members trained in cross-district peace exchange and about 2 million listeners of peace campaign messages aired on radio. All five districts, with a minimum of two chiefdoms in each district, were selected for the evaluation. This constituted a 100% representativeness of the project implementation area. The selection criteria were purposive on the grounds that project activities were implemented in those districts, and accessibility given weather conditions at the time of data collection. Search shared a list of CSOs in the districts who were instrumental in the recruitment of participants in the evaluation. WCSG leaders were informed about the evaluation and they cascaded the information to other participants in the projects. The criterion for selection of participants hinged on participation in at least one of the activities in the Women Unite! Project.

Table 1 : Districts and Chiefdoms Selected

| Districts	Chiefdoms Selected
Port Loko	1. Lokomasama 2. Maforki
Tonkolili	1. Rochen Kamandao 2. Mile 91 3. Kholifa Rowali 4. Tane
Kono	1. Gbense 2. Tankoro
Kenema	1. Small Bo 2. Nongowa 3. Malegohun
Kambia	1. Magbema 2. Tonko Limba

The sample (see Table 3) draws from five populations:

1) **Project staff.** A purposive sample of five project staff from Search, IGR, BAN, 50/50 Group and Irish Aid were selected for interview. Three of the five project staff, one each from Search, Irish Aid and IGR participated in interviews. These individuals were selected based on their subject matter expertise in the implementation of the program as well as availability for interviews.

2) **Women-led CSO leaders**. Out of 10 female CSO leaders who participated in the project, 8 were interviewed. Search provided the evaluators with a list of female CSO leaders and evaluators reached out to 9 of the directly by phone and through Search's local partner in the designated district. After these outreach efforts, 8 agreed to participate and they represented all of the five districts.

3) **WCSG leaders**. Out of 18 WCSG leaders who participated in the project, 10 were interviewed. Search provided the evaluators with a list of WCSG leaders and evaluators reached out to 10 of the 18 by phone and through CBOs in the designated district. After these outreach efforts, 8 agreed to participate and they represented all the five districts.

4) **Local authorities**. Eight local authorities representing five districts were interviewed. Local authorities were recruited to participate by being identified by CBOs and then the evaluators followed up with phone calls to set appointment for their participation.

5) **Survey of Program participants.** 264 respondents participated in the survey and a cumulative total of 48 participated in 8 focus group discussions. The inclusion criterion was participation in at least one of the project activities. District level CSOs were instrumental in helping the evaluation team to recruit participants for the evaluation.

Table 3 : Data Collection Chart	
Days of Data Collection	6 Days
Enumerators	8
Districts Represented	5
Project Staff Interviewed	3
Female CSO Leaders Interviewd	8
FGDs Conducted	8
WCSGs Leaders Interviewed	10
Local Authorities Interviewed	8
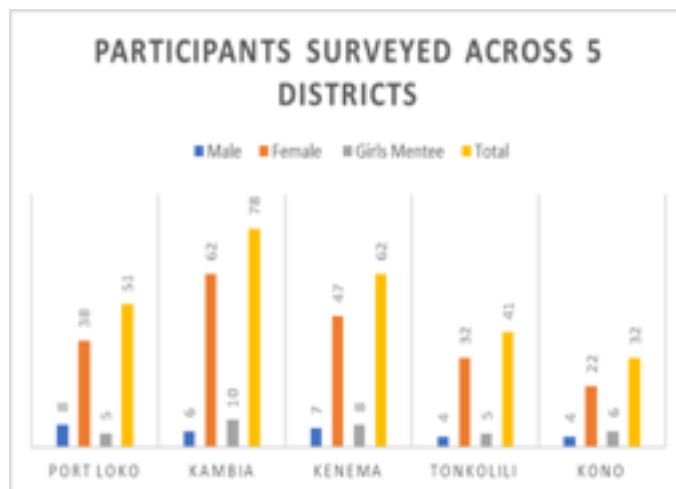
Data Collection Instruments

1. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

A total of 29 KIIs were conducted with donor partner, program staff, WCSGs and female CSO leaders, and local authorities. These stakeholders answered to a comprehensive list of semi structured questions tailored to cover the three project objectives and five evaluation criteria.

2. Survey

A total of 264 surveys were administered to project participants across the five districts of implementation. The survey questionnaire contained likert scale options and open-ended questions to seek justifications to answers ranging from strongly agree to disagree. The survey was paper based, and enumerators endeavored to capture participants responses with utmost accuracy to enhance an effective data analysis.

3. Focus Group Discussion (FGDs)

A total of 8 FGDs with 64 participants were conducted in five districts. The initial target was 10 FGDs with two per chiefdom in the five districts of project implementation. The demographics cut across all samples in the evaluation – women, men and girls mentees. Participants were randomly selected for participation in the FGDs. This enhances an avenue to bring together local authorities, women leaders, CSO leaders and other women to triangulate their responses per question.

4. Training of Enumerators and Pre-testing of tools

8 enumerators participated in the data collection exercise supervised by the lead consultant. 6 of the 8 enumerators had obtained a minimum of Bachelor's degree and had participated in data collection in previous research related activities. Enumerators were trained by the lead consultant using the evaluation inception report and tailor-made data collection tools. The tools were tested and revised to accommodate an understanding of its utilization in a non- English setting. Key concepts were domesticated to reflect a cultural setting in which it will be utilized. Ethical considerations and Search's best practices on data collection were adhered to.

5. Data collection and Analysis

Traditional data collection method – the use of papers to document responses was utilized in this evaluation. Enumerators read out and filled survey questions for participants who are unable to read and write, while those who can read and write completed their survey themselves. Responses from the semi structured interview guide and FGDs where written down in a template designed by the lead consultant.

Enumerators transcribed responses verbatim and submitted to lead consultant who utilized NVivo to extract qualitative themes and Microsoft excel to work on quantitative analysis. An analysis matrix which included the evaluation criteria and core evaluation questions was developed. Data was streamlined through the analysis matrix to capture anecdotal and quantitative findings.

6. Limitations

Even though the evaluation was conducted in all the districts in which the project was implemented, not all the chiefdoms in those districts were captured in the process. This was due to difficulties with transportation to some communities due to long distances, especially during the rainy season, leading to geographical bias.

Field coordination was a challenge as partner CSOs and CBOs in the districts were the forerunners in granting enumerators access to participants. Some participants misperceived the evaluation exercise as a form of project activity in which transportation allowance and other forms of tangible handouts will be provided. Since participation is voluntary and upon realizing that money/tangible handouts would not be provided for their participation, some individuals refused to participate on the grounds that they were not available or could not self-fund transportation to meet enumerators.

Also, selection bias must be considered. Many participants were difficult to meet as they were engaged in work on their farms or were living in sparsely populated areas that were far from the chiefdom centers. This impacted the attainment of target sample of participants for survey; the target was 385 (77 per district) and the actual was 264 with varying numbers of participants per district.

In terms of trustworthiness of the data, the major limitation is that many behaviors were reported rather than

observed and participant responses were subject to the enumerators' documentation of data and interpretation, as they translated the local language to English. Efforts were made to mitigate these limitations, such as using semi structured interview protocols, encouraging respondents to provide examples, and triangulating data from multiple sources. As a safeguard, co-evaluators reviewed the enumerators' work each day to ensure quality and trustworthiness of the data collected.

Sensitivity to gender roles was a key consideration in the evaluation process. Thus, the research team was composed of three females and five males and all of the male enumerators were trained in gender sensitive interviewing to minimize bias that may come from the lack of gender balance.

Lastly, because there was no baseline data for the intervention, measuring what has changed is largely subjective on participants' perception of change as a result of the intervention.

KEY EVALUATION FINDINGS

Overview of Program Implementation

The Women Unite! project aimed at strengthening the role of women in promoting social cohesion, local-level accountability, and inclusive decision-making processes in five districts of Sierra Leone. Through triangulation from the KIIs of project staff, stakeholders and responses from beneficiaries, it was found that the project activities were effectively implemented and relevant to the attainment of the program objectives. Structurally, the program was implemented in a way in which each objective is supported by corresponding activities as follows:

Table 4: Program Activities by Objectives	
Objectives	**Corresponding Activities**
Social Cohesion	1. Training of Trainers (TOT) 2. WCSG 3. Step down Training 4. Community Peace Plan 5. Action Oriented Town Hall Meetings 6. Girl Mentorship programme 7. Mentorship programme 8. District Peace exchanges 9. Set up of WCSGs 10. Participatory Theatre

	12.	Atunda Ayenda campaign
	13.	Policy Dialogues
Local Level Accountability	1.	Training of Trainers
	2.	Multi stakeholder Gender Sensitive Budget forum,
	3.	Capacity building for women led CSOs on Governance & Accountability
	4.	Action oriented town hall meetings
Awareness Raising	1.	Media campaigns/Radio programs/ theatrical performances
	2.	Community Peace plan
	3.	Participatory Theatre
	4.	Community Peace Plan

Assessment of Output Chart

The project was designed and implemented with the aim of reaching the stipulated output targets per activity. Out of 29 activities implemented and monitored; the cumulative target was achieved in 20 activities including the training of trainers, girl's mentorship and cross district peace exchange. There was a variance between cumulative targets and actual outputs in one activity – # who listened to the peace campaign and/or Atunda Ayenda which was aired on radio during the project period. For this activity the cumulative target was aimed at reaching 2 million listeners whereas the actual output stands at 1.8 million listeners.

However, 8 activities exceeded the cumulative targets among which are: number of community members who participated in the solidarity and peace initiatives, number of participants engaged in the town halls, and number of participants in peace campaigns.

See Annex for complete breakdown of the output chart

RELEVANCE OF THE PROJECT TO THE NEEDS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN SIERRA LEONE

Key evaluation questions included in KIIs, FGDs, and surveys assessed the relevance of the activities and objectives of the project to the needs of women and girls in Sierra Leone and alignment between donor priorities and stakeholders' (local leaders, and project staff) perceptions of relevance.

Participants' perception on relevance of the project

Project participants overwhelmingly agreed that the project activities were relevant to their needs and therefore recommended the continuation of those activities which they believed promoted the objectives of the project. Chart 1 shows the results of participants responses to the survey question:

How relevant are the activities of the Women Unite! project to addressing the needs of women in Sierra Leone?

Further, in open-ended survey responses and FGDs, participants discussed the relevance of the activities and objectives of the project as follows.

Participants described the post-election conflicts in their communities and the need for an intervention. In fact, 85% of the participants surveyed attribute a reduction of post-election conflict to the program activities. Responses further revealed that women participation in the development and implementation of the community peace plans ushered an avenue for conflicting parties to resolve their disputes and work amicably on building social cohesion in their community. A participant in Kenema mentioned that "*there was serious conflict between me and a lady which went up to court level but because of this program we are now sisters. We have settled our differences by learning through the program that there should be peaceful co-existence in order to achieve a better community.*"

Chart 1

Perceptions of Stakeholders

KIIs with project staff, leaders of CSOs, and local authorities lifted qualitative themes associated with relevance. Local authorities and CSO leaders in the designated districts acknowledged the predominance of post-election tension prior to the inception of the Women Unite! project. CSO leaders maintained that at the end of the election, members of rival political parties could not interact with each other, thereby creating an avenue for chaos and disunity in the community. The tension/conflict intensified as there was no systematic approach to dealing with conflict, and so through the community peace plans and cross district peace exchanges rivaled parties where able to mend their differences and work together peacefully.

A WSCG leader in Kono noted that "*the Women Unite! project provides a comprehensive approach to tackling post election tension through the integration of multiple activities geared toward social cohesion and peace in the community*." This was reinforced by a local leader in Port Loko who said that "*This project is relevant because it has improved social cohesion and unity amongst women in the community. There were lots of disputes before; however, after implementation there has been a reduction on the post-election tension that had existed between political parties and their members.*"

Another theme that emerged was that prior to Women Unite! Women were largely left out of decision-making. Women have been capacitated to speak up on issues of communal interest and can now advocate for their rights. In discussing how the program has impacted them, participants reflected on the need for an intervention to promote women's voices in decision-making. Example responses were: "*women are now included in decision making processes,*" "*women can now contest for leadership position,*" "*women can contribute to household decision making, which was predominantly men's role,*" and "*women [now] can speak in public gathering even when men are present.*"

A local authority interviewed noted "*All I have to say is, thanks to God for this project. Formerly, women were not considered in decision making. It had always been us (men). They were at the back seat because they were afraid or shy to speak for fear of being stigmatized. Also, most of them were not aware of their rights. But now, because of this project, they are present in most of the community meetings even though they don't speak up all the time, they try to fully participate in decision making in the community and that's an improvement.*" Indeed, stakeholders recognized that this project gave them the tools to contribute to this changing power dynamic.

Another theme was that the project activities were relevant means of capacitating women to participate in governance, specifically by giving women the opportunities to take on leadership positions in their community. Local leaders and female CSO leaders acknowledged an overwhelming support from fellow women in their quest for leadership positions in their communities. The support is attributed to the knowledge and skills gained from their participation in the project activities.

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROJECT

This section organises analysis of the effectiveness around the three core objectives of the program: (1) to build social cohesion at the community level through women-led approaches (2) to strengthen women's role in promoting local-level accountability and (3) to increase citizens' access to information and awareness raising around social cohesion and governance processes. When available, reported perceptions of effectiveness are supported with specific examples of changes that resulted from the program.

Objective 1: Build Social Cohesion at the Community-Level Through Women-Led Approaches

Participant Survey Results and Anecdotal Findings

Overall, survey participants felt strongly that program activities improved social cohesion. For the purpose of this evaluation, social cohesion was defined as "the glue that binds society together, essential for achieving peace, democracy and equitable development.(IRishAid Proposal document). "

Chart 2 presents results from survey questions related to Objective 1.

CHART 2: Survey response related to Social Cohesion
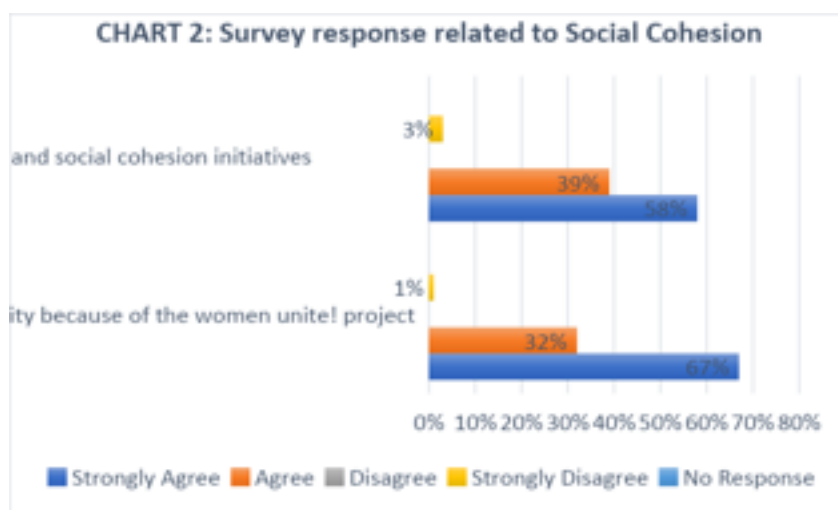
In justifying the level of agreement to how social cohesion has advanced peace and unity in their communities, WCSG members surveyed noted that social cohesion was achieved by way of talking to women about peace, conducting or participating in workshops and sensitization on peace building, working with local leaders on settling disputes, and promoting peace through regular meetings with community members. However, these respondents appealed strongly that they would continue to be involved in social cohesion and peace in their community by utilizing the knowledge and skills gained in the Women Unite! Program.

To support the quantitative survey results, anecdotal evidence from open-ended survey questions, notes from FGDs, and KIIs show that social cohesion means "togetherness." Efforts were made to document participants understanding of social cohesion through how they define the term and how they have been operationalizing the concept. They were asked what social cohesion meant to them. An overwhelming response to this question revolves around the ability to work together for a better community. 93% of respondents were able to define the term in their own way in consonance with key words: peace, unity and working together.

From the responses gathered, it is certain that the project staff did a good job in cascading the concept of social cohesion to the participants. Aside from defining the concept, participants gave anecdotal evidence of how they have been using the concept in fostering peace, local level accountability and awareness in their communities. Participants further agreed that the project objective of improving social cohesion was achieved. A local leader in Port Loko noted that "*social cohesion means peace. This objective was successful as it reduces post-election tension which was very high in this district. People in the different chiefdoms had little or no interaction, however, through this project, there has been much improvements and everybody is now involved in promoting peace, unity, and harmony. Women are now working together, and we have each other back. Also, the cross-district exchange has enlightened us that we are all one*".

Objective 2: Strenghten women's role in promoting local-level accountability

Participant Survey Results and Anecdotal Findings

Overall, survey participants felt strongly that program activities improved local-level accountability. For the purpose of this evaluation, local-level accountability was defined as "people's ability to hold leaders accountable for their actions and inactions in their community".

Chart 3 presents results from survey questions related to Objective 2.
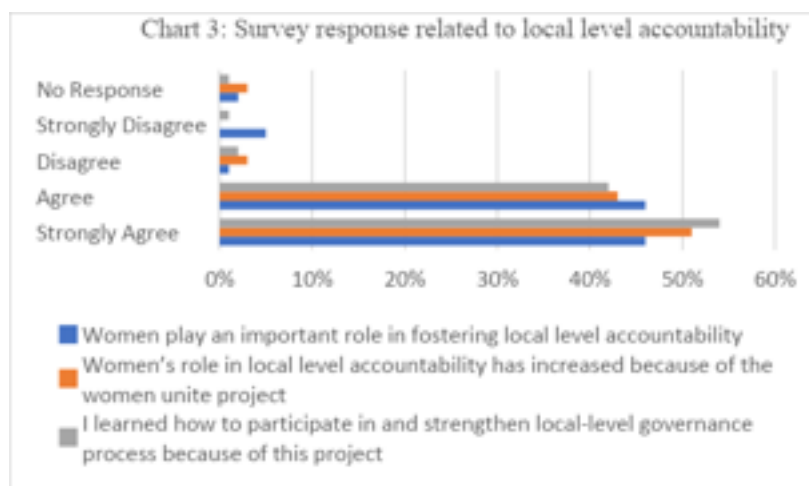
Respondents were asked about their understanding of local level accountability and how do they practicalize it. The overarching theme was in two folds "accountability meaning transparent reporting by politicians/local leaders in a timely manner" and accountability which focuses on participants' responsibility of delivering the resources and services at their disposition to their community and family rather than on the duty of politicians.

In Port Loko and Kambia districts, accountability was further explained using a term "Konani" from the local dialect which means to report transparently. To strengthen transparent reporting on key issues, participants emphasized that the program has enabled them to ask their political heads/representatives to report to them in a timely manner. Transparent reporting from local leaders encapsulated notifying the people about pre, during and post decision making actions. As a result of the program, participants confirmed that local level accountability has increased as captured in some of these responses:

• *'Now there is transparency in whatever they are doing as compared to previous times. Local-level accountability means "Transparency"*

• *Women were not bold enough before asking for clarity on issues concerning them. During and after the project, women start to speak for themselves.*

• *Local level accountability has been very successful because of the project, we now know how all sectors within our community is running and we usually spot-check with the town council.*

• *Local level accountability is defined as holding officials accountable for position or resources entrusted to them.*

• *Now councillors and village elders can give report about any activity they undertake including taxes they collected. accountability is defined as giving account of all money given to you for the purpose to the people"*

The role of the WCSGs in the local level accountability and women leadership drive cannot be underemphasized. The study revealed a positive contribution of the WCSGs to upscaling local-level accountability and women in governance in all the districts where the project was implemented. Participants acknowledged the roles of the WSCGs in pushing forward for women's rights through community sensitization, inclusive decision making and capacitating women for leadership positions.

For instance, in Small Bo, Kenema District, the WCSG leader, who is the wife of the traditional ruler has been working effectively with her team to implement most of what they learned from the project activities. The evaluation team witnessed, firsthand, an activity conducted by women to enhance their collective decision-making devoid of men leading them. A town hall meeting was summoned by the women to replace their deceased woman chief. In attendance were sub chiefs (male and female) from the other chiefdoms, who listened attentively to the women leaders, as they facilitated the process of electing a new chief.

Objective 3: Increase Citizens' Access to Information and Awareness Raising Around Social Coheson and Governance Processes

Overall, survey participants felt strongly that program activities improved access to information and raised awareness of social cohesion and governance processes.

Chart 4 presents results from survey questions related to Objective 3.

Chart 4: Survey responses related to awareness raising around social cohesion and governance processes
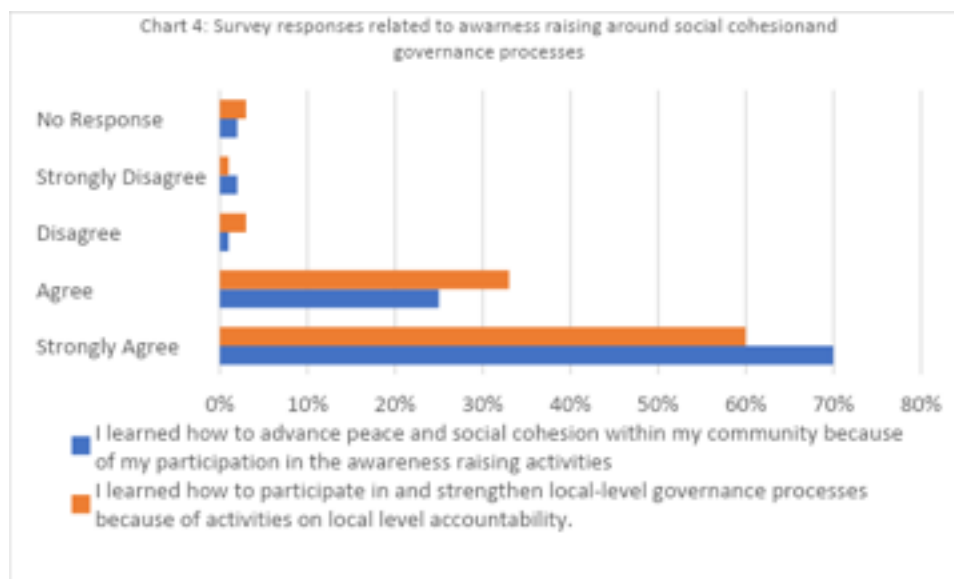
Drawing from open-ended survey questions, notes from FGDs, and KIIs, this section presents qualitative themes that emerged related to access to information and awareness-raising as well as examples of how program activities led to increased access to information.

What did you learn from peaceful narratives on the media engagement activities?

Response to this question across all the districts indicated that the participants gained knowledge and understanding about peace and social cohesion, and awareness of their rights and duties. These are largely credited to the radio programs Atunda Ayenda, We Tumara Bambai and theatrical performances.

Women's role in promoting peace has increased.

A vital component of the Women Unite! Program is to capacitate women with the knowledge and skills in promoting peace in their communities. The activities of the WCSGs in all the districts were credited for the increasing roles of women in promoting peace. The WCSG-led activities in dispute resolution, cross district peace exchange and cascading the training their members received from the training sessions to other members in their communities were pivotal in promoting peace. Women were seen as the forerunners in peace initiatives as a result of their participation in the program. Participants overwhelmingly agreed that women's role have increased in promoting peace.

EFFICIENCY OF THE PROJECT

How far the results achieved justified the cost incurred - were the resources effectively utilized? How did it perform from the perspective of planning vs execution? The viability of the consortium approach and could a different approach yields a better result were the key efficiency questions.

The evaluation findings show an effective utilization of resources, endorses the viability of the consortium approach in implementing such a project and depicted that the design, structure and alignment of activities in the project upscaled efficiency. Through triangulating interviews with participants and project implementing staff, the evaluation revealed that the project was efficiently managed in line with financial best practices and value for money. The efficient implementation of 29 activities within 12 months in which the cumulative target was met in 98% of the activities demonstrated a high level of efficiency.

Search and local partners created structures and processes that enabled the efficient use of resources in attaining the project objectives. At implementation level, Search had a project officer who worked with local organizations to ensure the project is delivered in line with financial best practice. At the top cadre of management, Search managed the utilization of resources and ensure consortium partners and CSO's understand the guiding principles of "doing more with less" throughout the project cycle. Interviews with organizations within the consortium shows a clear picture of having the requisite knowledge and skills to implement a project aimed at addressing the needs of women in Sierra Leone.

However, the consortium approach to project implementation upscaled project delivery. Interviews with Search (Lead implementing partner) and Irish AID (funders) demonstrated a tenacious framework of financial accountability and efficient utilization of resources in the project.

Search expertise in utilizing media as a tool to disseminate messages of peace, social cohesion and women empowerment was pivotal in the project. Organizations within the consortium played specific significant roles which filtered into the overarching framework of the project. Participants revealed alignment of organizations role to attaining project objectives. For instance, Search use of media to engage participants and awareness raising on governance issues; BAN's role on Multi-Stakeholder Gender-Sensitive Budget and Service Delivery Forums; 50/50's role in the Training of Trainers and formation of WCSGs, and IGR's role in women's participation in the governance process were complementary to achieving the project outcomes. The findings revealed that the consortium approach to project delivery yielded positive outcomes.

WHAT HAS CHANGED

While the effectiveness section described the outcomes of the program, this section will highlight the most striking personal and community-based changes resulting from the program. *See Annex for Case studies on what has changed as a result of the project.

Women involvement in Local Governance processes have increased

For the participants, there have been some changes resulting from the various activities they were engaged in. Based on the program, 32% agreed and 67% strongly agreed that they learned techniques to advance social cohesion and peace in their community as well as the level of awareness to understand how they can be more involved in the governance and accountability process of their various communities.

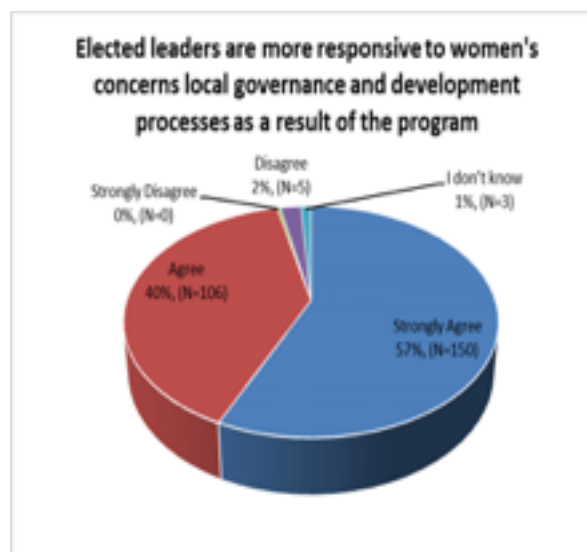*Women are positive influencers in their communities*

A major example of what has changed is that 34.2% participants explicitly discussed replicating the Women Unite! Program through various activities they organise or co-ordinate at their local communities such as sensitization on peacebuilding.

Better community relations because of the Women Unite! Project

There are a better community relations between conflicting political factions and responsiveness of political leaders to the needs of their people. This is as a result of the exposure participants gained through the Women Unite! Program with 49% of the participants strongly agree and 48% agreed across the entire districts.

Participants and stakeholders maintained that the dynamic of political disconnect in which elected officials were less responsive to women concerns about local governance and development processes is changing as a result of the project.

From their participation in the Town Hall and Public Policy dialogues, 85% of participants interviewed acknowledged that they can now ask questions and demand answers from their elected officials. They further revealed that elected officials are responding to their concerns about governance processes.

Elected leaders are more responsive to women's concerns local governance and development processes as a result of the program

Strongly Disagree 0%, (N=0)
Disagree 2%, (N=5)
I don't know 1%, (N=3)
Agree 40%, (N=106)
Strongly Agree 57%, (N=150)

Shifting dynamics in terms of leadership as a result of the program

A local leader in Kono revealed that as a result of the program, women and girls are now rallying and sup porting one another in attaining and maintaining local leadership. Few women were contesting for elected positions prior to the inception of the program, but now they are seeing more women contending with men for elected positions in our community, he concluded.

LEARNING AND REPLICABILITY

Some of the key lessons learned from this project that can be shared and replicated are:

Applicability of design and content: The project was well designed to meet its objectives and expected results. The alignment of activities to objectives proves to be efficient. Participants and stakeholders acknowledged the appropriateness of the training content to the overarching framework of the project. The project de- sign ensures avenues for complementary expertise among partners in the consortium. The formation of the WSCGs as a key vehicle to carry out Women Unite! initiatives reinforces a participatory model and predicts sustainability in the long term.

The impact of consortium approach to project delivery: While one agency may have the resources and expertise to roll out a project aimed at addressing the needs of women in Sierra Leone, the findings from the evaluation strongly support the need for a consortium approach to achieving positive outcomes in projects like the Wom- en Unite! The sharing of expertise among partners in the consortium, and the effective delivery of activities under their purview like Search's media related activities, CBO's identification and recruitment of WCSGs members, BAN's training on gender sensitive budget, contributed to the success of the project.

Utilization of key concepts on social cohesion and local level accountability: Concepts of transparency, social cohesion and accountability have been internalized and effectively utilized by most participants and stakeholders interviewed. Moreover, their description of social cohesion rests on the ability of the people to work together for communal purposes. The WCSGs practicalized this concept by building frameworks for peace through the cross-district peace exchanges and other related activities in the project.

CONCLUSIONS

The project's success can be largely attributed to the strategy utilized in bringing partners together with shared expertise in a consortium. The strategy of bonding international and local organizations to implement a project with several activities pays off. While Search took the lead in managing the Consortium, the role of BAN, 50/50, IGR and CBOs filters into the overarching framework for the successful implementation of the project. There is strong evidence from participants and stakeholders that the consortium approach should be upheld and replicated in future programming.

Also, the project's theory of change states IF women CSOs, groups, and leaders are equipped with the skills and capacity to promote peace, meaningfully participate in public life, and strengthen local-level accountability alongside their peers and other stakeholders, THEN they can effectively contribute to democratic peace consolidation that is holistic, inclusive, and sustainable seemed active throughout the project implementation cycle. Participants and stakeholders interviewed validated the assumption that if women are equipped with the skills and capacity to promote peace and strengthen local level accountability, then they can effectively contribute to democratic peace consolidation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the evaluation, the following are recommended:

Opportunities to Improve the Program

Ensure there are opportunities for women to apply the skills they learned in the training. This can include supporting community-level interventions such as women led advocacy, community peace building initiatives through which women will take leading roles in cascading training to other women; and ensure there is a facilitator to reflect on how skills and knowledge from the training were applied in those projects.

Opportunities to Make a Sustainable Impact

Ensure women and girls have access to educational resources so they can develop the skills necessary to advance into leadership roles. Participants interviewed highlighted illiteracy as a major deterrent to women in attaining a leadership position in their communities. They recommended adult education/capacity building for illiterate women who are already willing and able to develop themselves educationally to participate in governance.

Include interventions that support economic opportunities for women and girls. While the intention of the program is to empower women, there were no direct interventions promoting economic opportunities for women. If women are unable to be financially independent from men, it will reduce their influence in governance decisions.

Create sustainability plans for the WCSGs as part of the exit strategy. The organizations should have a strategy for funding and maintaining empowerment initiatives after the close the program. There is a clear risk to relying on volunteers to maintain program activities, especially in high poverty communities where community members focus on meeting basic needs rather than gender parity in governance.

Opportunities to Influence Macro Level Policy

Influence policy on the local level to increase gender parity in local leadership. Encourage local governance councils to mandate 50% representation of women in local leadership.

Share success stories with key Ministries in the Sierra Leone Government and make recommendations on how national policy can influence local governance.

Opportunities to improve Evaluation Design

Improve evaluation methodology on the frontend of implementation. Optimally, there would have been baseline data collected, so that quantitative indicators could have been tracked over time. Further, a quasi-experimental design could have been implemented wherein similar communities without the intervention could be used as a source of comparison to the communities receiving the intervention.

ANNEXE 1: OUTPUT CHART

A = Target Achieved

E = Target Exceeded

NA =Target Not Achieved

Output	Cumulative Ouputs			
	Target	Actual	Variance	Status
# of CSOs identified for core training	10	10	0	A
# of women influencers and leaders trained (Training of Trainers (ToT) for Women-led CSOs)	30	30	0	A
# of WCSGs formed	15	18	3	E
# of participants in WCSGs	400	400	0	A
# of girls' mentorship programmes formed	18	18	0	A
# of girl participants	90	90	0	A
# of mentors	36	36	0	A
# of cross-district peace exchanges	5	5	0	A
# of participants in cross-district peace exchanges	150	200	50	E
# of Community Peace Plans (CPPs) created	18	18	0	A
# of step-down trainings provided	5	5	0	A
# of community members trained in step-down meetings	400	400	0	A
# of community solidarity and peace initiatives	18	18	0	A
# community members who participated in the solidarity and peace initiatives	1800	1911	111	E
# participatory theatre performances	10	10	0	A
# audience members for theatre performances	700	1308	608	E
# of capacity building trainings on governance and accountability to women	5	5	0	A
# participants trained in capacity building trainings	500	500	0	A
# of action-oriented town hall meetings	10	10	0	A
# of participants engaged in the town halls	900	1000	100	E
# of public policy dialogues	5	5	0	A
# of participants in each policy dialogue	500	600	100	E
# of multi-stakeholder gender-sensitive budget forums	5	5	0	A
# of participants in each budget forum	400	416	16	E
# listened to the peace campaign and/or Atunda Ayenda during the project period.	2.000.000	1.800.000	-200.000	N/A
# of peace campaigns	24	24	0	A
# of participants in peace campaigns	1.200.000	1.500.000	300.000	E
# of scriptwriting workshops	1	1	0	A
# of governance-themed episodes of Atunda Ayenda	70	70	0	A

ANNEXE 2: KII INTERVIEW GUIDE

Key Informant Interview Guide:

PROGRAM STAFF OF IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS INTERVIEW GUIDE
Pre-Interview Guidance: The purpose of this interview is to understand the role of the project and management staff in the project and their perceptions of the project. The exact questions will depend on the individual's role with the programme. It will be critical to take effective notes. Try to copy down what is said as exact as possible.
The Interviewer: Introduce yourself and the reason you are there: Hello, my name is ……….. I am working as an evaluator/enumerator to support an independent end of project evaluation of the Search for Common Ground Women Unite! project. The purpose of the evaluation is to find out how well the project has achieved its objectives and what lessons can be learned. I will be conducting interviews and discussions with various people who have been involved in the project. The findings from these discussions and other sources will be written up into a report to be used by Search, its partners and the donor. Although I will be asking your name, the information will be confidential, and your name will not be linked to anything you say in the final report. I understand you are probably very busy, and I hope this will not take much more than 30 minutes. I really appreciate your willingness to answer my questions but please be assured that this is voluntary so if there is anything you don't want to answer or if you need or want to stop this interview at any time, just let me know.   **NB: Document Name, Organization and Designation of the key informant in the note pad.**

Interview Questions:

1.   How would you describe your role with the Women Unite! project?

2.   Let's review the main activities of the program. If you are not familiar with an activity, we can skip it. I want to learn whether you think these activities were successfully implemented and/or contribute to achieving the objectives of the program.

[Use Activity sheet – have interviewee speak to activities they are familiar with]

3.   When someone talks about social cohesion, what do you understand by this?

4.   The program's objective was to build social cohesion at the community level. Was this successful? In what way?

5.   Another objective was to promote local-level accountability. Was this successful? In what way? How do you define local-level accountability?

6.   The last objective was to increase citizens' access to information and awareness raising around social cohesion and governance processes. Was this successful? In what way?

To what extent do you think the program's goals continue to be relevant to the needs of women and girls in SL?

How relevant is the project to your agency's priorities in SL?

If you had a reduced budget and were to implement this program again, how would you make the program more efficient? [potential follow-up…what part of the program would you eliminate?

If you could rewrite the proposal for this program after having implemented it, what would you change in the proposal?

If this program is to be replicated

FEMALE CSO LEADERS INTERVIEW GUIDE

1.   You played an integral role in the implementation of this project, now that the project has ended can you comment on the following activities you participated in and or led.

[Use activity sheet to document responses]

2.   When someone talks about social cohesion, what do you understand by this?

3.   The program's objective was to build social cohesion at the community level. Was this successful? In what way?

4.   Another objective was to promote local-level accountability. Was this successful? In what way? How do you define local-level accountability?

5.   The last objective was to increase citizens' access to information and awareness raising around social cohesion and governance processes. Was this successful? In what way?

6.   To what extent do you think the program's goals continue to be relevant to the needs of women and girls in SL?

7.   Describe your relationship with the organizations implementing this program. Could they have been more effective?

8.   If another NGO is replicating this project in another district, what are some of the key recommendations that you will give to that NGO? What would you change?

9.   Do you have any other feedback?

WOMEN FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

Pre-Focus Group Guidance:

The purpose of this focus group is to allow the project beneficiaries (women) to talk in depth about their experiences as a participant in this project and to measure their levels of empowerment as a result of their participation in the project. For the FGD, please assemble 6-8 women who participated in the project. Contacts with WSCGs leaders will help in coordinating the FGD. We are looking for as complete as possible qualitative data from this. Two enumerators should facilitate the focus group – one should take detailed notes. Please take as full notes as possible, as near to verbatim as can be achieved

NOTE: Concepts like social cohesion, peace initiatives and accountability **MUST** be explained clearly and simply in local language

Ground rules in conducting the FGD

•   Ensure one person speaks at a time.

•   Participants have the right to express their views either by respectfully agreeing or disagreeing with each other.

•   Ensure participants understand that there is no right or wrong answer

•   Start by asking if everyone has participated in activities related to the project. If yes, proceed to the questions. (If a participant says NO, kindly remove her from the group)

1.   Which activity (s) did you participate in? Please describe the activity (s) that you participated in.

2.   What do you think of the relevance of this project?

3.   Do you believe you have increased capacity to carry out social cohesion and peace initiatives in your community as a result of your participation in this project?

      -       Describe what social cohesion means to you.

      -       Describe what specific capacity increased?

      -       How have you been able to carry out those initiatives?

4.   Describe how the following have changed in your community as a result of the project?

      -       Women's role in local decision-making.

      -       Are leaders more likely to listen to women?

      -       Women's role in promoting peace.

      -       Women's role in fostering local-level accountability.

5.   How effective were the WSCGs related activities to the program implementation? (comment where applicable)

      -       Girls' Mentorship Programme

      -       Cross-District

      -       Community Peace Plan

      -       Step-down Trainings to Women's Community Solidarity Groups

ANNEXE 4: CASE STUDY 1

SUCCESS STORY OF MARIATU FULLAH (A WCSG MEMBER AT ROCHEN KAMAND-AO/ TONKOLILI DISTRICT)

My name is Mariatu Fullah. I joined the Women Unite! Project implemented by Search for Common Ground and partners. I am one of the members of the Women Community Solidarity Group. My story about this project is that, I was in this village where women were not valued, women's rights were suppressed, but now through the help of this project, I have acquired those rights. Now my voice is being heard; I do advice my fellow women and the men as well. Men are now involving us in local governance process, they often do invite us for meetings, and sometimes we also invite them over for meetings vice versa. In those meetings, we have equal rights with these men in terms of decision making.

 I thank God, because this project has helped us to be considered as useful people in this community. Prior to this project, women were not considered in matters relating to local governance, and decision making. I am very delighted for having such project in my community. I want Search to continue to help us more; by empowering us.

Currently, we do travel at least once weekly six to seven miles to spread these awareness messages to other communities. We are now being recognized anywhere we visit as Members of the WSCG. People have been delighted to receive us, the Chiefs now do welcome us warmly, even the youths have been grateful for our kind contributions made in propagating peace within their communities. So, for that I am happy, women are the caretakers of the home, they assist their husbands in up keeping the home; women also ensure that the children acquire the basic education and without these helps the home cannot function properly.

My relationship with my fellow women in this community has improved as a result of my participation in this project. I do bring my fellow women together, we help in building and promoting peace within our community and beyond. There is oneness among women and men in Rochen Kamandao, we do spend time together. The men have realized that if they continue to embrace us, it will be a win-win situation for us all, because if there is no peace development cannot materialize; but with unity, development and progress are assured. Now I am at liberty to talk anywhere as a woman, and don't be afraid of men's criticism as the case was before. Women have become aware that if there can be male councillors, there can be female councillors as well. We have also learned that women can also become Paramount Chiefs, Members of Parliaments respectively. We are also looking forward to electing a female President someday. There is no limitation for women! I believe if we are at peace with the men, there will be development

ANNEXE 5: CASE STUDY 2

My name is Jamie Kai Kai, I joined the Women Unite! Project implemented by Search for Common Ground and partners. I am one of the mentees. This project has helped me a lot. At first, I never had the confidence to talk to elderly people. I was too shy to speak in public or to people I am not quite familiar with. I was definitely not an outspoken type either.

However, through this program, I had the privilege of learning those skills. It has also impacted my school greatly, both the student populace and the teaching staff. Talking about peacebuilding, this project has

helped me to learn how to resolve conflict between opposing parties. For instance, there was a case in my school between a colleague pupil and my teacher. Although it was not easy at first. Like I said earlier, I never knew how to approach issues of such nature; neither do I know how to approach people without getting them on their nerves. But with the help of the Women Unite! Girls' mentorship program, I acquired those skills.

I am happy for this project, it has raised awareness in me, and taught me conflict resolution, and how to become bold, confident to vie for the position of even the School Prefect which I won. This project also enabled me to become one of the Kenema Youth Ambassadors.

I would like or recommend Search to increase the number of mentees, so that we can acquire more trainings to assist more girls who are not part of the training. Doing this job alone can be very difficult. Next, I will want Search to financially assist us for preparation of food for session. I also want Search to help us with ID card for easy identification.

I will advise that this project is replicated in other communities because it has helped us a lot.