



# How to implement a community based support model

A practical guide based on an approach developed in Sierra Leone

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## Contributors:

MAPCO, Sierra Leone

Sue Coe, Independent Consultant, UK

Adrian Marshall, Programme Manager, APT Action on Poverty UK

## Preface

APT Action on Poverty is a UK based charity working to reduce the poverty of the most poor and vulnerable people in Africa and Asia by helping them get skills and knowledge to have a sustainable livelihood. We aim to provide opportunities for vulnerable people to improve their quality of life and address the root causes of their poverty.

Our target groups include people living with HIV/AIDS, disabled people and vulnerable women and youths, as well as people facing harsh environmental conditions, or rebuilding their lives following conflict or natural disasters.

This “how to” guide is intended as a practical handbook for organisations working with vulnerable people and/or on livelihoods development on how to set up and implement a community-based support model.

**“MAPCO is the first NGO that has succeeded here in this community. All others that have come since the war – and there have been many – have failed. MAPCO have trained us how to manage after they leave, not just left us goods and gone”**

*Loans development officer and CBO executive committee member*

## Contacts

Adrian Marshall,  
Programme Manager  
**APT Action on Poverty**  
Nicholas House, Heath Park, Main Road,  
Crowthorne, WR10 3NE, United Kingdom  
**e** [adrian.marshall@aptuk.org.uk](mailto:adrian.marshall@aptuk.org.uk)  
**e** [info@aptuk.org.uk](mailto:info@aptuk.org.uk)  
**w** [www.aptuk.org.uk](http://www.aptuk.org.uk)

Francis Lavalley  
Chief Executive  
**MAPCO**  
19 Francis Lavalley Street  
Off Bo/Taiama Highway  
Kebbie Town, Bo  
Sierra Leone  
**e** [francisrhl44@gmail.com](mailto:francisrhl44@gmail.com)

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## Acronyms

<b>APT</b>	Action on Poverty – UK NGO
<b>CBO</b>	Community Based Organisation
<b>MAPCO</b>	Movement for Assistance and Promotion of Rural Communities
<b>MOU</b>	Memorandum of Understanding
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>PWD</b>	Person With Disability
<b>SMEs</b>	Small Micro Enterprises

## Introduction

This document outlines a successful approach to create, support and exit from viable, self-reliant community-based organisations (CBOs) in disadvantaged communities. Whilst this approach has been tried and tested in a post conflict context in Sierra Leone, it is still proving effective many years after the conflict and therefore could be applicable to other situations where there are vulnerable communities and local government and civil society structures are weak.

CBOs, when operating well, can be key channels for economic and social support in poverty-affected communities. As well as facilitating vital economic development, they can be a mechanism for increased harmony and reduced conflict amongst community members – even those who have a history of deep conflict.

This model has been developed over the last 10 years with MAPCO, a leading local Non-Government Organisation (NGO) in Sierra Leone, first formed in rural communities in 1986.

Since 1992 MAPCO has been in partnership with the UK based international NGO APT Action on Poverty. Projects mainly funded through Comic Relief have been implemented in the South, East and North of the country.

Each section of this guide includes some “do’s” and “don’ts”. There are also key lessons shared throughout the document based on MAPCO’s extensive experience from implementing the approach.



## Step One – IDENTIFICATION OF VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES – POVERTY ASSESSMENT

### Review of available statistics and local knowledge

Identification of potential communities is started by using a combination of available statistics and knowledge of different parts of the country – the people, culture and ethnic norms – to identify districts with high poverty vulnerability for more in-depth assessment. From this a short-list of districts is made to approach for potential CBO support work to be undertaken. .

### Recruitment and training of good quality field staff

Staff are trained on undertaking poverty assessment surveys and report compilation before starting the assessment work.

Having good people to undertake needs assessments and deliver CBO support work is essential. Staff are recruited based on relevant qualifications, field experience and knowledge of the geographical areas under consideration. Personal qualities are also very important – especially clear communication skills and abilities to engage well with authorities, individuals and community groups.

### Poverty assessment survey visit

A set of activities have been developed to comprehensively understand the needs and capacities in communities that are approached. These help to make decisions on where support should be focused. Activities are:-:

#### **Introductory letter to the Paramount Chief and meeting the community leaders**

The assessment starts by writing to the Chief of the identified area requesting a meeting with the leaders (chiefs, elders, local councilors) so MAPCO staff can explain what they could offer to their area through the CBO support model. Between five and ten people usually attend this meeting.

#### **General community meeting**

If community leaders are interested in proceeding, MAPCO requests they organise a general community meeting for staff to explain the CBO support model and start the poverty assessment survey.

Leaders are asked to mobilise as many people as possible to attend – especially those who are vulnerable (including widows, people with disabilities and youth). Attendance at general community meetings has ranged from 60 people to 350 people.

After a general introduction to MAPCO's work and the purpose of CBOs, people who attend the

meeting are sub-divided by age groups (children - under 18s, youth – 18 to 35 years, above 35 years) and then each group is sub-divided by gender for focused discussions.

A survey questionnaire is used as the basis of the poverty assessment. The survey covers many areas including employment, income level, ownership of assets, access to health and educational facilities, food security, housing and sanitation. Each group completes the questionnaire from their own perspective.

### **Further interviews and discussions**

After the general meeting, staff spend up to four more days in the community conducting interviews and focus group discussions, especially with vulnerable people – for example widows, youth and people with disabilities. This enables the situation of poverty and vulnerability in the community in to be understood in greater depth.

## **Data compilation and analysis**

All data collected on the community visit is compiled into an assessment matrix MAPCO has developed over the past decade. This is a detailed document that provides a comprehensive picture of need, assesses the community's suitability and where detailed planning and intervention would be required.

Once poverty assessment surveys have been conducted in a wide number of communities, data generated from the process is used to decide which communities to follow up for implementation of the CBO support model.

## **Dos and Don'ts**

### **Do**

Ensure community leaders and Government authorities are engaged and supportive before launching a full survey – their ongoing support is critical to success of the CBO model.

Be clear to specify who you would like to be part of the consultations – especially vulnerable people in the community. They may not be naturally included by leaders without you specifying them.

### **Don't**

Rush the field staff selection process – good staff are vital to the delicate process of successful CBO formation. Make sure you choose appropriate people.

## Step Two – NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND PARTICIPATORY PROGRAMME PLANNING

Having identified vulnerable communities to work with the next step is to conduct in-depth needs assessments to establish priorities for assistance. Plans are then made with communities to implement activities focused on these concerns/needs.

The detailed needs assessment and participatory planning process in a community lasts between three and five days. MAPCO staff facilitate the process. Sometimes specialists are hired from partner service provider organisations when the poverty assessment survey has shown focus is needed on particular thematic areas like education, skills training, livelihoods, human rights, health and/or sanitation.

### Detailed Needs Assessment

Detailed needs assessments start with community sensitisation on the purpose of the assessment and the tools MAPCO uses. Emphasis is placed on the importance of participatory planning and community involvement. The guidelines used are distributed outlining the information needed and proposed research methodologies. These include:

**Targeted focus group discussions** – with different sectors of the population regarding their needs, the challenges they face, available services, gaps and good practices. The groups are organized by age and gender and include:

- Women, men, youth, boys, girls, people with disabilities.
- Community leaders, religious leaders and community workers.

**Semi structured discussions** – conducted with a small number of people in an informal and conversational way by using open ended questions.

**Questionnaires** – pre-prepared questions distributed among interviewees.

**Structured interviews** – more formal discussions with service providers and duty bearers regarding the types and quality of services they provide for the community e.g. local councils, government agencies, NGOs and local authorities.

The information collected is collated and analysed to provide a comprehensive picture for discussion with community members and to start the planning process.

## Participatory planning process

The participatory planning process brings together community and project staff into dialogue through a planning forum. All sit together to do community resource mapping. The needs assessment process helps identify the most vulnerable people and groups within the community where focus is required.

The community is asked to identify available resources it can utilise for the benefit of all. The vision and mission of the CBO to be formed emerges from the planning process. Needs are prioritized and ways to mobilise resources to meet them are established.

### Dos and Don'ts

#### Do

Ensure participation is genuine and not "token" – the range of techniques/stakeholder groups involved should help make sure people across the community feel equally engaged in the process.

Use a range of techniques to gain information – it helps establish genuine issues and needs. It is easy for people to feel they should tell you what you want to hear, instead of what the truth of their situation is.

#### Don't

Just rely on inputs from community leaders. Getting authentic views from everyone involved – including and especially vulnerable people – will give a full picture to help form a successful plan

### Key lesson – involvement of vulnerable people

*Vulnerable people can be difficult to locate in communities, especially those experiencing discrimination. Once found, they may not know how to participate or what to say as they are not used to being consulted. Invest time and resources to enable and empower their involvement.*

*Consult/engage with organisations representing vulnerable people to support the process. Women are key to success - activities that women and girl youths have participated in have had particularly high success levels.*

## Step Three – CAPACITY BUILDING OF CBOs AND IMPLEMENTATION OF SUPPORT ACTIVITIES

Experience demonstrates that establishing an effective CBO is at the heart of bringing effective, long-lasting economic and social change to vulnerable communities who have been affected by conflict.

A Community Development Worker is placed in or close to the community for regular and ongoing support during the CBO capacity building phase.

### CBO Formation

Depending on the capacity within the community, a CBO may be created by restructuring an existing organization, merging existing CBOs or establishing a completely new one.

Membership criteria for a CBO depends on the exact circumstances and needs in the community area. Often it includes targeting membership from identified vulnerable groups – including for example young people who didn't attend or finish school, families of vulnerable children, people with disabilities and/or young mothers (under 18 years of age). All membership should be voluntary.

Once membership criteria have been established, a launch meeting for the CBO is publicised in the community using a variety of methods – for example public announcements on a megaphone and notices on community boards. At the launch meeting the CBO membership criteria is explained as well as the various leadership roles (including chairman, secretary, treasurer) that need to be elected from the membership.

Once the CBO has been identified/established, the role of MAPCO as a development partner is clearly spelt out. A Memorandum of Understanding is drafted and signed between MAPCO and the CBO and then also between MAPCO and the community leaders. Criteria are set for membership of the CBO Management Committee. MAPCO ensures that procedures have been followed satisfactorily.

MAPCO then works in a facilitative role to support membership registration. Experience has demonstrated membership fees are an important part of bringing commitment and cohesion to the CBO. The CBO decides its own fee level at the launch meeting and through subsequent discussions.

The next meeting of the CBO is to compile a constitution and by-laws for the CBO to operate within. MAPCO facilitates and guides the process. The CBO is also asked to agree on a name to give themselves, which is used in all correspondence going forward. Once a constitution and name are established, the CBO can then register with their District Council – an important activity to gain local recognition and credibility.

## **CBO Management Committee Elections**

One of the most important parts of the initial CBO formation process is the election of the CBO Management Committee. Roles that need to be elected include a Chairperson, Treasurer, Secretary and Loans Officer. CBO Management Committees are generally between 10 and 15 people, depending on the number of members in the CBO (which can range from 50 – 200).

It can be the first time many people in communities have been through such a process. MAPCO clearly explains the qualities all the different Management Committee 'members to ensure the CBO is run effectively and efficiently. Emphasis is also given to the importance of having Management Committee members from groups of vulnerable people the CBO is particularly seeking to support - including youth, widows and people with disabilities. MAPCO then facilitates a democratic election process amongst CBO members.

### **Key lessons**

*Consistent, transparent payments of monthly membership fees – even in areas of high poverty – substantially enhance ownership by CBO members of the work of their group. It has proved an important factor for successful CBOs. Allowing members to miss monthly payments should be the exception, not the rule, if the CBO wants to maximize chances of continuing once external support ends.*

## **CBO Capacity Building Process**

Capacity building is a fundamental feature of MAPCO's CBO support model. There are four components to capacity building:

- Building human and organizational resources
- Economic support
- Building confidence for self-reliance
- Physical rehabilitation

## Building Human and Organisational Resources

### **CBO Management Committee training**

Once the CBO Management Committee has been elected two to three days are spent training them in governance, leadership and management. Topics covered are:

- Basic skills in the art of leadership
- Roles and responsibility of a leader
- The basic concept of leadership
- Skills in decision making
- Participatory decision making
- Good governance
- Conflict management
- Transparency and accountability
- Record keeping
- Revolving loan management

After training has been completed MAPCO's communication channel with the community transfers from the local authorities to the CBO, primarily the CBO Management Committee.

### **Key lesson**

*The quality of CBO membership committees is a primary factor accounting for success or failure of a CBO.*

*Strong, sensitive support to inform communities on electing appropriate representatives– including those from vulnerable groups – helps successful election processes. Comprehensive leadership training of elected committee members helps successful committee operation. Offering conflict-resolution support when issues arise in CBOs also makes a big difference to whether a CBO succeeds or fails in the long term.*

*Take into account the planting and rainy seasons when implementing activities with community members. Be flexible in your timetable planning. Training should be delivered at times which don't prevent community members earning their living. It may also be hard to reach the communities at certain times of year (such as heavy rains) due to road conditions.*

## Adult literacy training

Literacy levels are always very low in the project delivery communities. Most people have either dropped out of school as a result of the civil war or never had the opportunity to go to school due to poverty.

The economic support element of the model cannot be fully implemented unless people can write their names (a requirement for most loan and credit providers) and have enough literacy and

numeracy skills to record and monitor business transactions. Furthermore, people who are illiterate often have issues of poor self esteem and enhanced vulnerabilities to being abused – especially women. Literacy brings empowerment as well as skills to run businesses.

Training of trainers is conducted where possible with educated people in communities (usually school teachers) to prepare them to undertake literacy classes. The number of people who use thumbprints on documents will be reduced. Most will be able to sign their names, read bye laws and understand project related documents.

## Saffie: Literacy brings widow empowerment and a better income

Saffie is a widow with eight children. Before she joined the CBO things were very tough for her family. She didn't have enough money to send her children to school or provide enough food for them.

She learnt about the formation of a new CBO from a megaphone announcement. She went to a meeting and heard about the people they wanted to join the CBO. She fitted their criteria so applied to become a member.

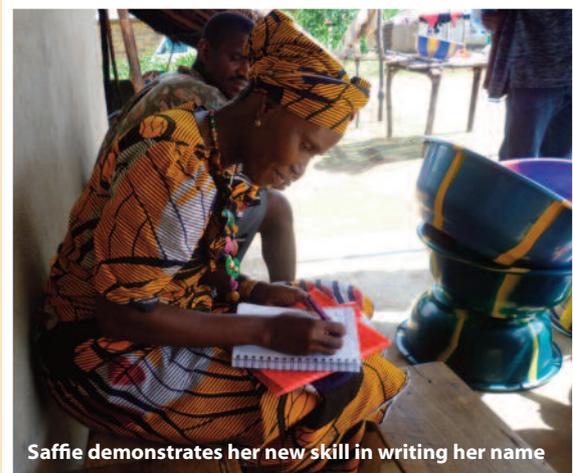
Saffie has received several loans and the improved the income from her business. This has helped her to feed her family properly and support all her children to go to school.

The training Saffie received has been just as important. As well as learning post-harvesting skills, the human rights training informed and empowered her to raise her children to be strong citizens of the future.

The achievement Saffie is most proud of is her new ability to read, write and count. Before she was illiterate, now she can confidently write her name.

This means she can get credit for her business from a bank that requires signatures. She can also keep better track of her income and profit.

*Saffie says "Before the CBO, the people who gave business loans came for their money before you made any profit. Now I have an interest rate that allows me to make profit through the CBO loan scheme and I make money to help my family. All the children live happily in the family now. They like going to school."*



## Key lessons

*Adult literacy training is important in the CBO model to ensure the inclusion of vulnerable people, who have been denied education opportunities. Basic reading, writing and numeracy skills are an important part of successful small business management. Literacy skills also empower and build self-confidence.*

*Adult literacy for women brings both increased knowledge to help run businesses more profitably but also increased self-esteem and empowerment within family structures.*

### **Training for Duty Bearers in communities**

A key part of the long term success of the CBO is the ongoing support of the authorities and other duty-bearers in the communities where they operate. Dialogue between the CBO and their local duty-bearers is encouraged as well as ongoing direct contact.

Training is offered to local authorities, police, councilors and other duty bearers on the work of the CBO, their structures and issues relevant to how they can support the CBO to effectively operate in communities. They have an important role in resolving disputes that may arise (most often these are over non-repayment of loans).

Duty bearers tend to quickly recognise, acknowledge and support the positive difference an effective CBO brings to their area. CBOs that work well bring both improved economic status and reduced social conflict to a community.

## Economic Support

### **Skills training for CBO members**

MAPCO offers three courses to CBO members to support economic development:

#### **Business management training:**

This three day course introduces comprehensive and straightforward methods to enable CBO members to manage small businesses. It includes training on building marketing linkages, part of which is doing practical market surveys in wider markets. Once a CBO member has successfully completed this course, they are eligible to apply for a loan from the CBO revolving loan fund.

#### **Post-harvest management:**

Many people – especially in rural areas – are farmers. Supporting and promoting farm and off-farm income generating activities/interventions is important to improve the economic and nutritional status of the people that depend on farming. Training in modern farming methods to improve crop yields, reduce crop losses and maximise incomes from surplus produce is also important. On completion of this course CBO members receive agricultural seeds and tools and are linked to local agricultural extension workers

**Value added services:**

This two day course gives a range of practical ideas and techniques to help CBO members improve their competitiveness. After successfully completing the course, attendees are supported to improve their market linkages.

## Youth apprenticeships

A recent successful innovation by MAPCO has been the introduction of youth apprenticeships with local artisans in CBO community areas.

One of the legacies of the decade-long civil war has been a generation of uneducated and unemployed young people, with few prospects of finding a way to earn a living. This has led to huge economic deprivation and social turmoil as many young people are bored and feel hopeless to move forward with their lives.

Vocational training for young people can be an alternative where they have been denied the opportunity to have a formal education. It can also help them develop social skills to assist them in living productive and independent lives.

Recently, youth apprenticeships with local artisans for two years have been introduced into the CBO support model. These apprenticeships are “on-the-job” and local to where young people live. They are offered across a significant range of businesses – including roofing, tailoring, soap-making, small-scale food production, car mechanics and weaving. A modest stipend is offered to the artisans for having trainees and to cover the costs involved.



## Revolving loan fund

A core part of the services of each CBO is establishing an effective revolving loan fund scheme. This scheme is often a key incentive to attract CBO membership in communities. Transparency and strong accountability are important components to successful CBO revolving loans fund schemes.

A loans committee is established as a sub-committee of the CBO Management Committee. All loan committee members are trained on their roles, responsibilities, disbursement criteria, setting interest rates and loan duration periods.

As the fund is a revolving one, CBOs are encouraged to set short loan periods, especially in initial disbursement phases. These are typically four months. Initial loans are not large amounts, but successful repayments of loans can qualify CBO members for larger loans in the future.

MAPCO provides the initial capital for CBO revolving loans funds in instalments, referred to as “cycles”. The CBO Management committee receives the money on behalf of the CBO in the presence of other CBO members, district council representatives and chiefdom authorities.

Revolving loan funds are used exclusively to support micro and small enterprises undertaken by members of the CBO either as individuals or as a group. All members who apply for loans need to have first successfully completed at least one of MAPCO’s economic support training courses.

Qualification for the receipt of the second cycle of money by the CBO greatly depends on the correct and judicious use of the first loan monies, determined by evidence that the loan has been used for the purposes intended and repayment record. The interest rate is usually 10% for a three month loan. The process is initially closely monitored by MAPCO staff (the Community Development Worker based in the community) and the monitoring and evaluation team.

The amount given to each CBO is determined by a number of factors including:

- The size of the CBO membership;
- The number of viable income generating activities undertaken by CBO members;
- The ability of the CBO to handle large sums of money.

When the management committee receives the money, it distributes this equally among the members with priority given to those that have good track records on loan repayment.

When every member who qualifies has received a loan and the money has completely revolved, the entire process begins again – with a larger fund to disburse due to the interest payments on the loans.

Community ownership of the revolving loan funds greatly enhances the effectiveness of the scheme. Unlike micro-credit, communities tend to consider revolving loan funds as “their” property and so are protective over its proper use. Loan fund repayment rates to CBOs are 90% overall – with a good number of CBOs delivering 100% repayment rates, especially in rural areas.

Loan recovery in some areas has not been easy. There is a small minority of people who have deliberately defaulted on their loans. This is often linked to the effectiveness and social cohesion of

the overall group, and how effectively local authorities have been engaged to support the CBO in approaching loan defaulters for their payments. Local authority support has made substantial difference in these cases - some defaulters have even been summoned to local courts and compelled to pay back what they owe. In the post-conflict context the CBOs operate in, handling such matters is delicate work.

## Fatu: From begging to business

Fatu is a woman with a disability. Her husband died when her four children were very young (five years and under) and she was forced to move from her home into Yele town in Tonkolili District to find a living and support her children. She found her only option was begging.

When she was out begging one day, she heard about the CBO from a megaphone announcement that said there would be an information meeting. She went to the meeting and heard how the new CBO would be set up. She applied to register, finding the process easier than she expected.

The first loan she applied for was to buy a table and assorted goods to sell. She also received training in business management skills. She was successful and used her profits to start trading in palm oil which gave her more income.

After reliable electricity came to Yele she got a second loan towards a freezer. For the past year she has been selling ice, icicles and water from her home – something especially profitable in the long dry season in Sierra Leone.

Fatu has used her profit to improve her family's nutrition and pay for school fees and uniforms. Her son recently died and she has taken on responsibility for her grandchild.

*Fatu said: "Being a member of the CBO has changed my life. Before, I depended on other people but now I can help others."*



Fatu with the freezer she bought with a CBO loan

## Key lesson

*Linking CBO member access to provision of inputs and loans to successful completion of business training helps those inputs/funds be used more successfully.*

*Undertaking loan disbursement at the same time as undertaking training on project activities encourages greater participation.*

## CBO input loans

As well operating revolving loan funds, some CBOs have successfully developed input loans schemes. A CBO was provided with by 20 bushels of seed rice to which they added 18 bushels of their own to be able to loan to CBO members for planting. After harvesting the rice, the CBO member farmers return more seed rice than they borrowed as a form of interest in-kind, aiming to build up the seed rice available for distribution the next year. In 2012 the CBO was able to give out 58 bushels and 72 bushels in 2013. The CBO expected to get back around 90 bushels later in the year after harvesting. Thus the CBO has successfully built up their seed reserves from 18 to 90 bushels (with the assistance of a donation of 20 bushels from the project. This could be replicated for other staple inputs in other contexts.

## Supporting CBOs to make market linkages

Post-training business counselling and supporting CBO members to establish market linkages are part of the support model strategy to boost production and market opportunities for CBOs. Forging market linkages begins by studying the constraints local producers face in accessing and competing with wider markets. This includes making a comprehensive study of the “push” and “pull” factors.

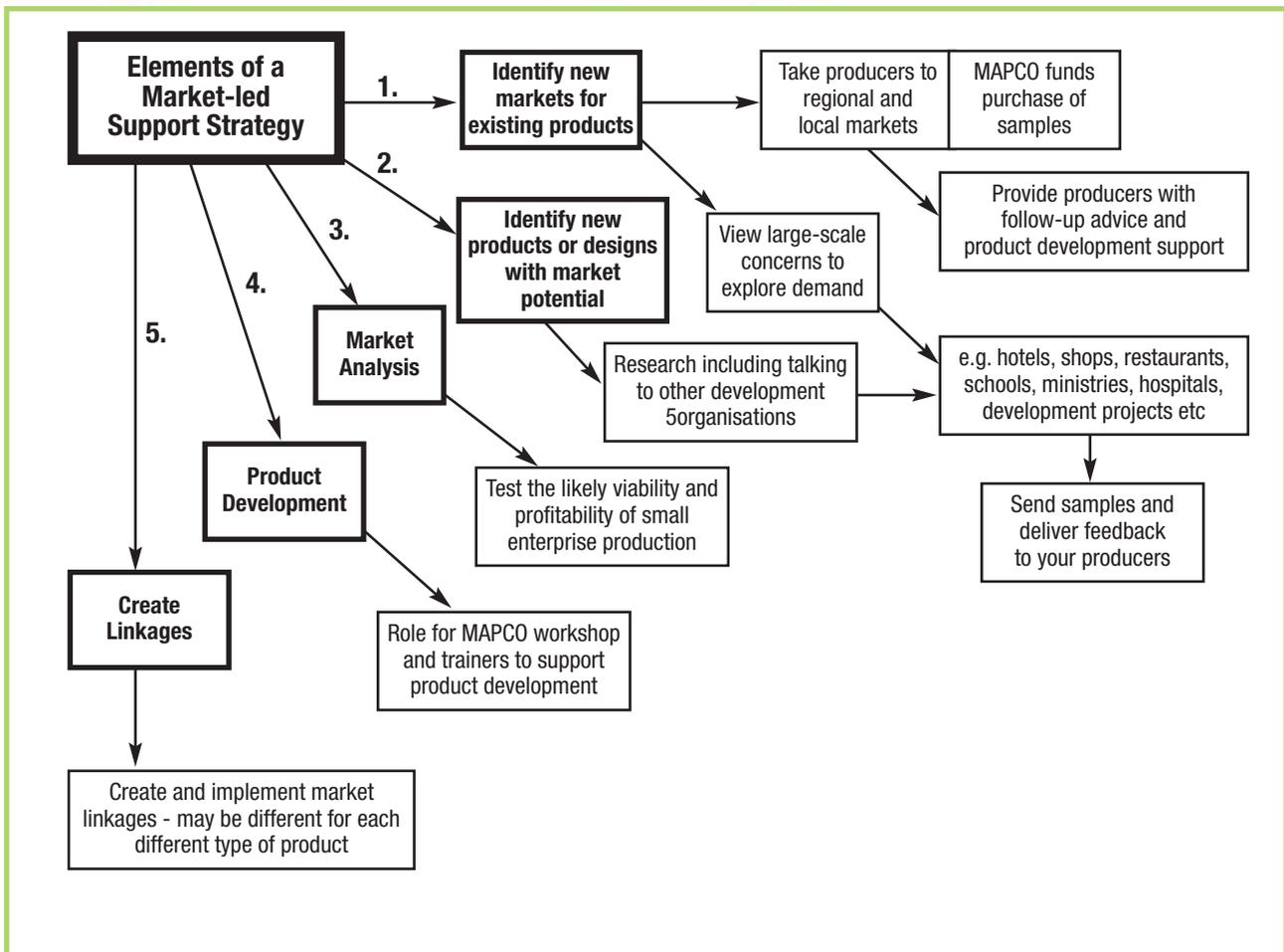
### **PULL – in wider markets**

What is currently:  
Undersupplied  
In demand  
Expensive  
Unreliably supplied  
Of poor quality.

### **PUSH – from local areas**

What is currently:  
Produced in the rural areas for sale  
Available for value adding and if the technology to add value is available  
Produced with confidence and skill by rural producers and if quantities can be increased easily  
Untapped in terms of rural skills and knowledge  
Under advertised but likely to be in demand

Enabling CBO members to take sample products to other markets has helped them to compare their goods with those imported to their local area from elsewhere. MAPCO has also taken samples from the big sales markets that were in demand but not produced at local level to provide ideas for local production.



## Creation of CBO enterprises

Generating funds for CBO running costs is important to enable CBOs to continue operating after project interventions have finished. CBOs are encouraged to consider collective, profitable enterprises that their members can support.

Popular initial CBO enterprises are community rice, cassava or groundnut farms. These lead to increased incomes but also improved food security in communities. Subsequent enterprises often include basic food processing services such as rice milling.

Neighbouring communities also benefit from collective CBO enterprises and training courses. Services offered by CBO enterprises – for example rice milling – are important services for members of neighbouring communities to access. CBO members also tend to enthusiastically offer their knowledge and experiences gained with people in similar businesses in surrounding areas.

## Building Confidence for Self-Reliance

### Rights awareness training

There are huge social poverty and conflict issues in many communities in Sierra Leone. Rights abuses are common, especially amongst women, youth, children and people with disabilities. Family and community disharmony is typically very high in communities before MAPCO starts working with them.

An important element of the training to CBO members is on human rights awareness. Training is designed to help CBO members – especially those marginalised and disadvantaged – to realise their economic and social rights as well as empower them to articulate, negotiate for and demand their rights, seeking redress if this is appropriate.

### Human rights issues covered during training are:

- **Civil and political rights** – includes right to life, freedom of expression, religion, association, freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention, freedom of assembly and movement.
- **Social, economic and cultural rights** – includes rights to education, housing, health, food, shelter and employment.
- **Solidarity rights** – these are rights for all, claimable by people as groups or communities. They include rights to a clean environment, peace, development and self-determination.
- **Gender awareness and women's rights** – gender-based violence and abuse of women's rights is a huge problem in many communities. Training covers subjects including laws focused on gender issues - domestic violence, inheritance, customary marriage and divorce.
- **Political and current issues** impact the rights, roles and responsibilities of both the people and their leaders. For example, the decentralisation process and disability awareness
- **HIV and AIDs sensitisation.** HIV and AIDs is a topic still carrying huge stigma through Sierra Leone. Official reported prevalence rates are very low. Sensitisation training includes distribution of male and female condoms, and linking CBOs with the national AIDS secretariat.

### Key lesson

*Delivering human-rights awareness training alongside business and agricultural development work helps facilitate good use of increased incomes in families.*

*Community drama and comedy is a good way to promote important messages. It also helps bring communities who previously were in conflict with each other together for a common cause.*

*Increased family income tends to be channeled to getting children into school - which brings many benefits to families as children are occupied, learning and gaining knowledge which will help their adult lives.*

## Nasu: Reunited family live peacefully together



Nasu stands proudly by her house with its improved roof, paid for from business profits

Nasu lives in Segbwema in Kenema district. She was widowed in 2004 - her husband died just after the civil war ended. She had 12 children but only seven children survived beyond infancy – two girls and five boys. Her eldest child is now 20 years old, her youngest is 10.

Before the CBO started, Nasu's situation was very bad. The roof of her house leaked badly and led to illness in her family. No one helped her with feeding her children or school fees. She sent her children away to live as she could not afford to feed or look after them.

When the CBO started she decided to stand for a position on the executive committee – and was elected to be Chairperson.

Nasu attended business management training and human rights training courses run by MAPCO for the CBO. She also received a loan to establish a hot food business. The training helped her to sell well – she knows how to encourage and engage with customers, which has increased her sales.

Nasu's situation has improved a lot since joining the CBO. Her children have all returned home. She has paid for a zinc roof on her house so the family don't get soaked in the rain. She can afford for her children to have medical treatment when they get sick. She is paying for school and exam fees, and has also improved her business to make more profit.

*Nasu says: "Hardship was my lot. My children were scattered. I used to have to take loans just to feed the them. Now I thank God my children are back with me. I can pay their school fees. I'm now at peace after the improvement in my life."*

**Building awareness of Duty Bearers of rights they should enforce**

Training on human rights awareness is not limited to CBO partners but also includes rights-holders such as local councilors, paramount chiefs, and police etc. who have responsibilities for realizing the rights of CBO members. It is very important to engage duty bearers in the process.

**Strengthening links with local institutions**

CBO members are linked to duty bearers and human rights institutions in the community to enhance benefits beyond the training course activities. For example the court clerk, police, family support units are invited to meet CBO members and plan how they can assist them to have their rights upheld and enforced. Reduction of conflict in communities reduces workloads for duty bearers, so mainly they see direct benefits in investing in this.

**Physical Rehabilitation**

Sometimes during the needs assessment (step two) it is evident community infrastructure needs rehabilitation in order for key economic and social development activities to succeed. This is mainly in communities that experienced heavy destruction of physical infrastructure during the civil war.

Structures that may be rehabilitated include:

- **Training centres** – to provide a conducive environment for local skills training in trades such as black and tin-smithing, soap making, weaving, needlework, clothing and textiles, building/construction skills and food processing.
- **Community meeting places** – an important community structure for CBO use, community meetings and other social gatherings which helps enhance social cohesion.
- **Crop drying floors** – for drying crops such as rice, maize and groundnut after harvesting.
- **Stores** – storage facilities for crops after harvesting to prevent wastage and losses. Also to keep tools, equipment and other valuables belonging to the CBO.
- **Toilets** – modern ventilated improved pit latrines for proper hygiene and sanitation for the CBO and the community.
- **Wells** – to provide clean and safe drinking water for the community.

**Dos and Don'ts**

**Do**

Ensure local duty-bearers are engaged and trained. Support from them will help ensure long-term success of the CBO.

Ensure rigorous and fair economic management of CBOs. Many members are initially motivated to join groups for their economic benefits. Ensuring they run well financially maintains group momentum and prevents a dependency culture developing.

**Don't**

Only train a narrow range of CBO members – as many should benefit as possible. Ensure vulnerable group members are included in training

## Step Four – CBO EXIT STRATEGY

**“MAPCO is the first NGO that has succeeded here in this community. All others that have come since the war – and there have been many – have failed. MAPCO have trained us how to manage after they leave, not just left us goods and gone”**

*Loans development officer and CBO executive committee member*

The aim is to work directly with communities on CBO support work for a period of three to five years, depending on the specific situation.

The CBO exit phase must be managed well to enhance the likelihood of long-term sustainability beyond MAPCO’s direct support. Engaging a wide base of community stakeholders in the process – as well as CBO members – is important for successful transition.

It is common for CBOs to be initially reluctant to accept or plan for the period beyond MAPCO’s inputs. “Getting into a community is often easier than getting out” is a well-used phrase in development. The risks of positive changes disappearing once external support ceases are high.

Many NGOs have implemented service-delivery models that largely provided high-cost physical inputs to communities in Sierra Leone – the contrast in implementing this model, especially where communities have previously associated NGO work with the service-delivery model, can make working towards exiting from direct support to CBOs even more challenging.

Experience has shown that a careful exit strategy can empower CBOs to be independent and confident. It can even compensate for a poor entry strategy – where a dependency culture on an NGO has been unintentionally established. An emphasis on technical training alongside training on management, finance, leadership, marketing, etc. brings with it community ownership of activities.

The exit strategy seeks to effectively exit from direct CBO support without momentum being lost by the CBO for their own sustained development.

### **CBO confidence and linkage with service providers**

The most important part is having built the capacity and confidence during the capacity-building phase – many CBOs have grown to a point where they are capable of managing their affairs and have confidence to approach other service providers for support.

Part of the process of the CBO exit strategy is building good links with other service providers like the Ministry of Social Welfare and District Councils in Sierra Leone to enable further support after MAPCO phases out.

Sometimes CBOs have taken the initiative to approach service providers on their own. These linkages are mainly developed by paying official visits together with CBO members or inviting them to a

forum. The most easy and effective means has been by MAPCO bringing all parties together.

### **MAPCO sustainability matrix**

MAPCO use an organisational assessment matrix to assess the progress of CBOs towards independence. It is reviewed annually with the CBO Management Committee. The matrix criteria are wide-ranging, considering whether the CBO:

- has the ability to attract support from other agencies for its activities;
- is generating its own income/revenue through enterprise activities and provides employment for its members;
- operates its own bank account(s) satisfactorily;
- runs savings and revolving loan funds effectively;
- has a democratically elected management structure, handling their own affairs, reporting and accountable to members;
- actively encourages the participation of the most poor and vulnerable people including women and people with disabilities, youth and those with HIV/AIDS as members, in decision making and to participate in management structures;
- can provide advocacy and human rights services for the community;
- can link the community with service providers and duty bearers;
- has systems in place to ensure good governance and transparency;
- demonstrates enterprise and entrepreneurship in its activities;
- has the ability to establish market linkage opportunities for members and non-members.

Once, through the use of participatory impact monitoring tools, MAPCO is confident the CBO is fulfilling the above criteria the process of exiting begins.

### **New MoU with CBO including ongoing informal contact with MAPCO**

Part of the exit strategy is to maintain contact with the CBO but progressively in ways that give the CBO full control of its own affairs. Initially this is through providing mentoring and problem solving support, involving CBOs in some capacity building activities.

To formally exit, MAPCO draws up a new Memorandum of Understanding with the CBO. This includes nominating a CBO Management Committee member to maintain long-term informal links with MAPCO so communication is not completely cut. Sometimes there are opportunities to undertake forums for CBO learning and sharing and establishing linkages with previous CBO partners. To further strengthen MAPCO's relationship with CBOs, an active CBO member now sits on MAPCO's board to represent the interests of CBOs.

## **Key lesson**

*Avoiding the creation of a dependency culture between the CBO and local implementing NGO is a difficult thing to avoid, especially in high-poverty, post-conflict context. However, through open communications with all stakeholders in a community, plus high quality training and support to the CBO, it is possible to foster a culture of self-reliance.*

## Dos and Don'ts

### Do

Start discussions as early as possible on the CBO exit process – ideally as part of steps one and two. Setting out clear expectations on the length of time external support is available will help CBOs focus on long-term sustainability.

Use annual review processes with the CBO to discuss how they are progressing towards independence from external support – these discussions can be positive and constructive.

Create a clear Memorandum of Understanding with the CBO listing arrangements for links beyond external funding.

### Don't

Encourage a dependency culture of the CBO on your support. Although in the short-term some immediate welfare needs will be fulfilled, in the long-term it will not help communities prepare for life beyond the length of external funding available to them.



## POSITIVE IMPACT OF THE CBO MODEL

The CBO model has positively impacted on thousands of vulnerable people in hundreds of post-conflict communities across Sierra Leone. The combination of improved agricultural productivity and increased incomes, alongside improved knowledge of human-rights has proved powerful in substantially improving the situation of vulnerable people in conflict-affected communities.

### **Before**

The typical situation before the CBO model is introduced is that families are not eating more than once per day, children are at home and not attending school, and house infrastructure can be poor – e.g. a leaking roof leading to health problems in the rainy season. There is low respect for women in households. With everyone spending most time together, with little activity and high poverty, conflict between women and men, parents and children can be high. When there has been high conflict in communities because of war, then violence in communities, even in post-conflict situations, can be common.

### **After**

Families – especially female-headed households – have increased incomes to provide more/better quality food, improve shelter and send children to school. Women gain greater respect in their households by contributing economic resources – which turn gives them greater decision-making power and choice over the use of household resources. With economic power they are less vulnerable to abuse and domestic violence.

### **Empowerment and rights awareness**

Increased incomes alone will not bring conflict reduction and improved status. An important part of the CBO model is working to empower vulnerable individuals – especially women, youth, people with disabilities and children – to know their rights and have the confidence to ensure they are fulfilled.

Human rights awareness training delivers information on laws and rights including violence, property and inheritance (new widows losing their land to their husband's family is common as they are unaware of their legal right. Often communities – and even some duty-bearers – are unaware of the full scope of the rights they should be upholding and enforcing. Training duty-bearers in addition to CBO members helps increase the fulfillment of rights in communities.

Increased incomes and better rights awareness - along with the empowerment that adult literacy classes brings to those who have previously been denied education opportunities – have enabled previously vulnerable members of communities to have higher self-esteem, confidence and assert their rights within families and communities.

### **Impact on youth**

The impact of the CBO model has been very marked on youth in communities. Many youths in post-war Sierra Leone had no livelihoods and no focus. Drug-taking and disenfranchisement was high. CBOs have sought to include youths through skills training - including the recent innovation of in-community apprenticeships with local artisans – and CBO membership and management. This has yielded strong positive impact. With youths gaining useful employment, feeling pride in their work

and participating in CBOs, they have demonstrated abilities to support and enhance the communities they live in.

Communities are brought together through the formation and effective functioning of the CBOs. CBO committees are encouraged to work harmoniously and productively, using conflict-sensitive approaches to gain agreements on matters where they are disagreements. The involvement of community leaders – both Government and others such as religious leaders – helps encourage and enhance community harmony.

Evaluations consistently have found the following main impacts of the CBO model:  
Reduction of conflict and gender-based violence in communities and families –50-60% decreases are typical;

- Better nutrition in families – eating more than once per day;
- More children going to school – which in turn leads to more harmony in households;
- Reduced youth disenfranchisement and reduced youth drug use ;
- Reduced incidence of pregnancy and girl mothers;
- Reduced numbers of reports of rape ;
- Better community cohesion and greater community harmony.



## INCLUSION OF VULNERABLE PEOPLE IN THE CBO MODEL

The CBO model offers many opportunities to seek and include vulnerable members of post-conflict communities in economic and social development work.

Gender inequality is high in Sierra Leone. The CBO model has helped women strengthen their income levels and reduce human rights abuses they face. In the past three years (2010-2013) 92% of young females and 75% of female-headed families have increased their incomes by 80% or more – a remarkable achievement.

Youth disenfranchisement is a major issue in Sierra Leone and a root cause of the conflict. The intentional inclusion of young people on CBO communities, as part of activities and through the recent innovation of in-community youth apprenticeships have made substantial impact on disenfranchisement levels within post-war communities.

People with disabilities in particular experience social exclusion. The clear agenda to include people with disabilities in CBOs helps empower and raise the status of people with disabilities in the communities where they live. People with disabilities benefit from improved economic status and social empowerment the CBO model brings.

At every part of the model encouragement is given to include disadvantaged people in communities – emphasizing the importance of their participation in the CBO is especially important at survey and needs assessment stages.

Inequalities within communities can increase if vulnerable people are not included in development work. Engaging with Government and community leaders is an important success factor for including vulnerable people in communities – they struggle to make significant progress unless community leadership shows commitment to supporting the CBO's work.

Empowerment work with highly vulnerable people in communities – especially those suffering from extreme social discrimination – enables them to participate effectively. Partnership with groups representing vulnerable people can help identify and support these activities.



## Key lesson - access is not inclusion

*Many NGOs that want to include highly vulnerable people believe "access" and "inclusion" are the same processes, when they are not. It is often mistakenly believed that "inclusion" means identifying and inviting vulnerable people to join project activities, when this is actually giving "access" to project work.*

*NGO staff need to have a clear understanding of "vulnerability" and how to reach the "most vulnerable people" as part of their training to deliver the CBO model.*

*Due to the cumulative impact of extreme deprivation and stigma faced by most vulnerable people they often do not understand or know how to participate in activities when they are given access to them. Specific empowerment work to enable them to take advantage of opportunities is needed.*

## Abu: Young widower sends his children back to school



Abu at his successful shop in Yele town

Abu is 38. Before he joined Royale CBO in Yele, Tonkolili District his situation was very difficult. His wife died, leaving him five children aged from two to ten years to support. He was working as a gold digging labourer and running a small business that was not succeeding.

After he joined the CBO he received a loan for 500,000 Sierra Leones (£80) and attended training on how to improve his business - selling goods in Yele town. As a result, his profits increased.

Abu has used his income to feed his children properly – something difficult to do before he joined the CBO – and pay for school fees. He also reinvests in his business as and when he can.

*Abu says "The difference the CBO has made to me and my family is massive. Four out of my five children are in school. My family can live happily and things are not so difficult as before."*

## Conclusion

The CBO model has brought demonstrable positive change to communities in post-conflict Sierra Leone. Each of the four steps – identification of vulnerable communities; detailed needs and participatory planning; capacity-building of CBO and implementation of support activities; exit of external support to the CBO – are important and necessary to achieve long-lasting change to vulnerable people living in rural, semi-urban and urban communities.

Even in highly delicate social situations that communities emerging from war live in, the CBO model has shown big improvements are possible in a relatively short period of time. It is a simple and sustainable tool to use for poverty alleviation following a crisis