

Final Evaluation Report

For the Project

Enhancing CSOs' capacities for more inclusive governance and development processes in Kenema District

Implemented By



with

CARD, Moloma Women's Development Association & Partners
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Tsitsi Muvunzi | Gender, Research and Development Specialist

T: +23279831512 | C:+232 34268916|

E: muvunzitsitsi@gmail.com

S: tsitsi.muvunzi1

CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	iii
LIST OF FIGURES	iii
ACRONYMS.....	iv
PROJECT SYNTHESIS.....	v
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	vi
1. CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT	1
1.1. Project Details.....	1
1.2. Outcomes and Activities	2
1.3. Project Activities.....	4
1.4. Evaluation Overview	4
1.4.1. Evaluation Objectives	5
1.4.2. Evaluation Questions.....	5
1.4.3. Evaluation Criteria.....	5
1.4.4. Scope of the Evaluation.....	7
2. CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY.....	7
2.1. Research Design.....	7
2.2. Methods for Data Collection.....	7
2.2.1. Desk Review.....	8
2.2.2. Semi-Structured Open Ended Key Informant Interviews (KIs)	8
2.2.3. Focus Group Discussions	9
2.2.4. Mini Survey	9
2.3. Data Analysis.....	9
2.3.1. Quantitative Data Analysis	10
2.3.2. Qualitative Data Analysis.....	10
3. CHAPTER THREE: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS.....	10
3.1. Demographic information of respondents.....	10
3.2. Progress in Outcome Achievement	13
3.3. Evaluation Criteria	20
3.3.1. Relevance	20
3.3.3. Efficiency.....	31
3.3.4. Inclusiveness	31
3.3.5. Impact.....	33

3.3.6. Accountability.....	37
3.3.7. Sustainability.....	38
4. CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	39
4.1. Conclusions	39
4.2. Recommendations and Lessons	41
4.2.1. Programming Design.....	41
4.2.2. Partnership and Synergy.....	42
4.2.3. Monitoring and Evaluation and Knowledge Management.....	42
4.2.4. Scaling Up.....	42
Response from CARD and APT on the Evaluation Recommendations.....	43

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Project Indicators.....	4
Table 2: Evaluation Criteria	7
Table 3: Respondents/ Participants per data collection tool	8
Table 4: Outcome Achievement Analysis Table	19
Table 5: Participation of community people in decision making platforms.....	27

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Respondents disaggregated by sex	10
Figure 2: Respondents disaggregated by age	11
Figure 3: PWD respondents disaggregated by gender	11
Figure 4: Respondents disaggregated by project groups	12
Figure 5: Perceptions of Respondents on whether CSOs are inclusive in working with women	23
Figure 6: Participation in events organised by CSOs and CBOs that promoted participatory decision making	23
Figure 7: Whether skills acquired during trainings were put into practice.....	24
Figure 8: Project CSOs and CBOs ability to advocate for women's issues	24
Figure 9: Ability of trainees to put into practice skills from trainings by CSOs & CBOs	26
Figure 10: Respondents' participation in decision making platforms.....	26
Figure 11: Women's participation in development processes at Chiefdom level.....	27
Figure 12: Perceptions of community members on whether the project influenced duty bearers to be committed to include vulnerable people in decision making processes	28
Figure 13: Perceptions of respondents on whether duty bearers pay attention to the demands for inclusive decision making and accountability by CSOs and CBOs	29
Figure 14: Participation in apprenticeship trainings	30
Figure 15: Ability to earn income through trade of apprenticeship training.....	30

ACRONYMS

APT	Action on Poverty
CARD	Community Action for Rural Development
ISLAG	Islamic Action Group
MUWODA	Moloma Women's Development Association
CCTD	Coalition for Community Transformation and Development
REFLECT	Regenerated Freirian Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques
EMAP	Engaging Men in Accountable Practice – SGBV methodology
PWD	Persons with Disability
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
CBOs	Community Based Organisations
EU	European Union
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
FAL	Functional Adult Literacy
GBV	Gender Based Violence
SGBV	Sexual Gender Based Violence
VSLs	Village, Savings and Lending Schemes
CAGs	Community Action Groups

Disclaimer

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PROJECT SYNTHESIS

Title of the project	Enhancing CSOs' capacities for more inclusive governance and development processes in Kenema District
Country	Sierra Leone
Region/ District/ Communities	Kenema
Project Duration	36 months (September 2018 to August 2021)
Overall Goal	Enhance Civil Society Organizations capacities for more inclusive governance and development processes in Kenema District
Project Budget	£745,543
Main Donors	European Union, Marr-Munning, Turing Foundation
Overall Objectives	Objective 1: Enhanced capacity of 45 Civil Society Organizations in Kenema District to represent women and support local communities
	Objective 2: Increased gender equality and empowerment of women with increased inclusion in local development processes and decision making in Kenema District
Specific Objectives	Specific Objective 1: 5 Leading NGOs and 40 CBOs will have greater organizational capacity to deliver quality services to poor and vulnerable people especially women.
	Specific Objective 2: 5 NGOs and 40 CBOs will have proven strengthened capacity to deliver development assistance through functional literacy training, livelihoods development and gender rights awareness.
	Specific Objective 3: Increased participation of targeted women in decision making relating to policy and practice of local development processes in 40 communities

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Between September 2018 and August 2021 APT Action on Poverty and its partners Community Action for Rural Development (CARD) and Moloma Women's Development Association (MUWODA) implemented a three-year European Union supported project titled "*Enhancing CSOs' capacities for more inclusive governance and development processes in Kenema District*". The project worked with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) strengthening their capacities to support youth, women and PWD's for effective participation in governance, economic and social activities within their communities. It additionally, contributed to enabling rural women in Kenema District to have access to rural community-based services for their empowerment and participation in policy making and development processes. It impacted especially vulnerable women and girls (girl mothers, women with disabilities and impoverished and disempowered women) in 40 communities in 9 chiefdoms, including directly delivering and providing ongoing access to literacy, business skills, and apprenticeship training to improve economic empowerment.

The overall objectives of the final evaluation were to;

- i. Evaluate the impact of the project on NGOs, CBOs, (individual beneficiaries including women and PWDs), their households, and wider communities including chiefdom authorities.
- ii. Assess the success of the project in meeting its outcomes, expected results and (indicators including any unintended outcomes – positive or negative).
 - a. Identify key contributing factors which have enhanced and/or hindered these prospects.
 - b. Assess the project's overall performance in terms of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, economy (including value for money) impact and sustainability.
 - c. Identify key learning points and make recommendations for future operations of similar projects.

Methodology

The evaluation collected both quantitative and qualitative data through a mini survey, face to face administration of key informant interviews and focus group discussions. Data was collected in all of the targeted chiefdoms from a total of 205 survey respondents, 114 FGD participants and several Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). In addition to reviewing a broad range of relevant documents, the research team interfaced with a range of key stakeholders whose portfolio involved direct and indirect interaction with the project.

Findings

Overall, comparison of the indicator values at baseline and at end line show significant achievement of outcomes.

Relevance

- Project activities were relevant in developing NGOs' staff capacity in project writing, management, disability and inclusion, financial and project management as well as monitoring and evaluation skills among other skills.
- The capacity development activities for NGOs were relevant in building a vibrant civil society and an engaging citizenry able to challenge and influence decision makers to prioritise women's issues. However, COVID-19 affected the physical connection between APT, implementing partners and beneficiaries. As a result of COVID-19 associated travelling restrictions, APT was not able to visit the project locations as often as had been initially planned.
- Meetings conducted at the onset of the project including inception meetings with partners and stakeholders ensured that the project targeted the most deprived communities and targeted beneficiaries in need.
- Project stakeholders appreciated the relevance of the project in enhancing women's participation and changing patriarchal perceptions and attitudes. Duty bearers including representatives of the Ministry of Gender and Children Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Youth, and the Sierra Leone Police acknowledged that the improved interest of women and PWDs in policy making.

- Apprenticeship was also found relevant in addressing livelihood challenges and ensuring women participate in the economy through tailoring, weaving, embroidery and hairdressing among other trades. Improved women and PWD involvement in income generating activities is attributed to project activities by most stakeholders.
- The evaluation team noted especially high familiarity and ownership of the project among beneficiary groups such as REFLECT, EMAP, VSLAs, FAL circles, Oversight Groups and CBOs. Project NGOs and CBOs noted that the project was unique in as far as it worked with community structures, building their skills and ensuring these skills translate into real change in terms of empowerment and inclusive decision making.
- Generally, the project was not only relevant to the development priorities of the Kenema District but also to the key priorities of Sierra Leone's Medium Term National Development Plan (MTNDP, 2019 to 2023). This is especially so for cluster five of the MTNDP, namely "empowering women, children and persons with disability" and cluster seven, which is "addressing vulnerabilities and building resilience".

Effectiveness

- The project approach was found to be highly effective in meeting the intended outcomes. Staff of implementing partners (CARD, MUWODA, ISLAG, CCTD and Brighter Futures) informed the evaluation team that the project owes its effectiveness to the clarity of roles spelt out from the onset of the project.
- APT empowered project NGOs by providing skills in gender mainstreaming, inclusivity; as well as building capacity in managerial, organisational, and technical skills. These skills were translated into improved inclusivity and improved organisational management. CBOs reached confirmed that they improved their organisational management skills and were influenced to officially register with the District Council and / or Ministries of Agriculture and Forestry; Ministry of Social Welfare; Ministry of Gender and Children Affairs.
- Outreach activities were seen by community members as informative and providing them with influenced changed norms and attitudes for women's empowerment. Project CSOs and CBOs were seen to be advocating for women's issues in the community.
- The project was effective in enhancing the participation of women in decision making processes at chiefdom, community and village levels. It was noted that as a result of project implementation, women, youth and PWDs took part in platforms for decision making in their communities. Such platforms included Ward Development Committees, Village Development Committees, Oversight Committees and other community related platforms
- There was evidence of enhanced involvement in decision making by community members, acquired from participation in project activities. Increased engagement of women and PWDs by duty bearers and community stakeholders led to increased participation in development processes and influenced duty bearers to be committed to include vulnerable women in development processes and interventions.
- It was determined that duty bearers were empowered to address community issues and enhance participatory decision making. The empowerment of duty bearers and support provided to them to engage women and PWDs were therefore found effective in ensuring that they take on board the desires and aspirations of women and PWDs.
- The REFLECT methodology was found to be effective in promoting adult literacy and especially in making sure that members of the literacy cycles make use of the knowledge gained.
- The approach used by the project was confirmed effective in creating a multiplier impact as other community members learnt to associate themselves with people of a particular trade to adopt the trade practices, even outside the project.

Efficiency

- Project inception meetings held at the onset of the project were vital in directing the project to address real needs and target deserving beneficiaries and this avoided wastages.
- Technical skills and mentorship provided under this project enabled the project to save resources instead of hiring separate consultants and experts. Project NGOs were able to acquire skills in resource mobilisation, grant management, quality programme implementation and monitoring and evaluation practically under this project; through their interaction with APT.

- Additionally, working with locally based CSOs and CBOs ensured that activities were organised and implemented locally. This was found to be cost effective rather than acquiring external experts to conduct trainings, organise meetings and create awareness raising; which would have demanded a lot of resources in covering their flight tickets, accommodation and feeding costs.
- Project beneficiaries were purposefully selected and this contributed to project effectiveness. Apprenticeship facilitators were selected from people engaged in certain trades in a participatory manner involving community stakeholders. This ensured commitment and continuity. Project CBOs on the other hand were selected based on a mapping exercise with a criteria that looked at the most disadvantaged, but had been engaging in governance and women empowerment projects.

Inclusiveness

- The project was found to be inclusive in terms of reaching out to different categories of beneficiaries. Each group of beneficiaries included vulnerable women, PWDs including women PWDs and child mothers.
- Within the implementing consortium, decision making was inclusive and mostly involved all the consortium partners. However, MUWODA felt that its relationship with CARD was not equal as CARD ended up playing much of the coordinating role and making decisions on behalf of MUWODA.
- The project was found to be inclusive in terms of challenging patriarchy, gender stereotypes and norms that perpetuate inequalities.
- The evaluation established that knowledge of disability issues improved. Before project implementation, communities were side-lining PWDs with little understanding of their needs. PWDs expressed appreciation over the project's ability to influence perceptions, norms, and attitudes.
- The project was inclusive because, while empowering the women; it also targeted men for awareness raising on the rights of women and positive masculinity. This ensured that men do not resist the empowerment activities for women.

Impact

- Impact was noted among project NGOs and CBOs. Policy documents produced during project implementation were seen in the offices of project NGOs, who testified that their understanding of enhancing accountability and instituting control systems were built through capacity development activities implemented under the project. NGOs also noted their ability to train CBOs, conduct timely activity implementation and reporting as signs of project impact.
- The project empowered CBOs to formally register their organisations and put in place appropriate systems to ensure effective project implementation. Project CBOs indicated that, as a result of project implementation, they were able to frame their mandate, objectives and key result areas. In addition, they no longer just implement and attend activities; but plan, budget, implement and report.
- The project was impactful in terms of positioning women to take part in leadership structures at household and community level by shifting patriarchal norms and challenges.
- The impact of FAL activities was witnessed as FAL members testified that prior to project implementation they were totally illiterate but were now able to write and do simple calculations to manage their businesses.
- The comprehensive apprenticeship and business management trainings were influential in grooming young women including child mothers into business management and income generation. Income levels among the women increased leading to enhanced status and recognition at household and community level.
- Though acknowledging the overall positive impact of the project, it is vital to note that the apprenticeship programme and women's business ventures were affected by COVID-19. During the COVID-19 period women's income generating activities recorded a drop in profits as a result of increased prices of goods and services.
- The evaluation team found evidence to conclude that through the capacity building sessions, community groups strengthened their skills and knowledge on existing local governance structures and how they work to develop communities.
- The trainings empowered not only CSOs and CBOs but women, youth and PWDs; through various platforms to champion community outreach sessions and media sensitization.

Accountability

- Findings of the evaluation exercise revealed that the project's accountability processes were active in ensuring community feedback and regular communication with the consortium. Project beneficiaries view the project as highly participatory and engaging.
- Consortium partners reported mutual accountability among members and noted that systems and processes for ensuring accountability were set up from the onset of the project.
- The project revealed collaboration between the consortium and the different players involved in project implementation i.e. both beneficiaries and stakeholders. Each of the project NGOs had Project Officers stationed in the project sites providing a clear feedback and complaints mechanism.
- The impact of the project was also seen with women and youth including those with disabilities being active in demanding transparency and accountability in public service provision. As a result of the platforms set for community members to interact with chieftdom and community level authorities, community members were confident to seek clarity and ask questions to authorities regarding public service provision.

Sustainability

- The evaluation team noted significant capacity of CBOs and CSOs in the management of their organisations including in instituting control systems and processes for quality project implementation and reporting. Capacity development programmes targeting project NGOs and CBOs promoted a culture of organisational development that is likely to thrive beyond project implementation.
- The project positively impacted on patriarchy, shifting norms and attitudes towards respect for women and PWDs' rights at community and household levels. These changes that permeate society and have influenced the composition of key chieftdom and village structures for inclusive and participatory decision making are likely to be endured after project implementation.
- The project created structures that gave status to community people such as FALs, VSLA, Action Groups, apprenticeship groups, and REFLECT platforms. The evaluation team cannot say with certainty that it ascertained continuation of activities at the same pace as under the project; but established that beneficiaries would want to continue to be associated with the groups established by the project.
- VSLAs were found to be self-sustaining given the fact that members mastered the art of running the schemes, run bank accounts providing credit to each other and a system of continually saving.
- The project generated a lot of community interest in young mothers, women, and PWDs' participation in economic activities. Participants are concerned that the involvement of other people who did not benefit from this project would require investment in initial capital and seed money which is complicated without a funded programme.
- Similarly, the literacy activities require investment in academic materials like stationery that the project provided for. The same applies to the apprenticeship programme because training materials and equipment are also required. However, it is hoped that VSLAs will continue to be sustained and support some of these activities.

Recommendations and Lessons

Given the above mentioned findings and conclusions, the following recommendations were made.

Programming Design

- The project was found to be designed based on defined needs of communities ensuring the active participation of beneficiaries and stakeholders from the onset of the project. Given the success of this project in influencing positive masculinity, promoting women empowerment and addressing poverty issues, it is recommended that similar approaches to programme implementation be replicated in future designs.
- Capacity development of NGO and CBO structures facilitated a trickle down approach and empowered grassroots organisations to be active and vibrant in the promotion of social accountability, inclusive development planning and economic development. This approach is unique and commendable for its ability to ensure gains are sustained beyond project implementation. It is therefore recommended that future programming consider this approach.

- It was also noted that activities were clearly defined among consortium partners promoting mutual accountability and transparency. This is a positive principle that should be considered in designing projects in future.
- Incorporating economic empowerment activities into projects targeted at enhancing inclusive decision making was found to be a favourable approach.
- However, despite the positive aspects in project design noted above; it was indicated that the project was packed with too many activities distributed among several beneficiaries. Concentrating on a particular set of beneficiaries over time can be an alternative best option that the evaluation team would like to recommend.
- Some NGO staff indicated that project resources were overstretched because the project sought to impact on the lives of many people. Logistics was a challenge particularly in terms of transportation given the fact that the consortium acquired only one vehicle under the project.

Partnership and Synergy

- The project owes its success to a strong consortium that integrated capacity development into programme implementation, thus promoting transparency, accountability, effectiveness and efficiency. Project implementers improved the management of their organisations while also strengthening implementation, accountability and reporting. This is something commendable and worth emulating in partnership strengthening.
- However, there was no evidence of a sustainability plan that would ensure continued tracking of the benefits gained that have potential of continuity. Indeed, there were evidences of project sustainability among key gains as cited above. If this is clearly articulated in a sustainability plan that ensures shared responsibilities among consortium partners and stakeholders, it would ensure that such gains are tracked and that consortium partners will not lose track of these gains.
- The project did well in promoting in-house capacity building support and this can be a lesson in other settings.

Monitoring and Evaluation and Knowledge Management

- Knowledge management is self-empowering and institutions such as APT have comparative advantage in building the capacity of NGOs and CBOs to effectively put in place mechanisms for organisational development including departmental growth.
- Development of standard reporting mechanisms and structures for project implementation and reporting with key specific indicators is key to promoting project success. The study revealed that investing in Designing, Monitoring and Evaluation is key to knowledge management.
- Some of the project stakeholders expressed uncertainty over project continuity. FAL members for instance, indicated that they were still attending FAL sessions and wanted them to continue. Project closure workshops are a good way to end a project and gain community feedback. These sessions are also key in facilitating participatory appraisals and action planning for sustainability.
- There seemed to be limited experience sharing and internal learnings among project beneficiaries. This could have been enhanced through exchange visits and community of practice sessions. There could be much to learn among beneficiaries that could enrich the experience of each partner. Thus, knowledge and experience should have a place in future project through an approach that demonstrates value for money and better knowledge management.

Scaling Up

- Expanding this intervention in other communities and districts would be worthwhile given the progress made. Replicating it in other parts of the country should be considered to give a stronger voice to women's issues, citizens' participation and inclusive decision making at household and community level.

1. CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

1.1. Project Details

Between September 2018 and August 2021 APT Sierra Leone and its partners Community Action for Rural Development (CARD) and Moloma Women's Development Association (MUWODA) implemented a three-year European Union supported project titled "*Enhancing CSOs' capacities for more inclusive governance and development processes in Kenema District*". The project worked with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) strengthening their capacities to support youth, women and PWD's for effective participation in governance, economic and social activities within their communities. It additionally contributed to enabling rural women in Kenema District to have access to rural community-based services for their empowerment and participation in policy making and development processes. It impacted especially vulnerable women and girls (girl mothers, women with disabilities and impoverished and disempowered women) in 40 communities in 9 chiefdoms, including directly delivering and providing ongoing access to literacy, business skills, and apprenticeship training to improve economic empowerment. It also empowered duty bearers to be inclusive in governance processes including development planning and policy making. The project therefore promoted inclusion of women and Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in development activities and improving the inclusion of women's views and perspectives in decision making processes.

The project baseline report states that at the onset of the project there were high levels of illiteracy and poverty among project beneficiaries. Additionally, there was limited knowledge of gender equality and inclusion was rated low especially among CSOs, CBOs and men and women across the project areas. Additionally, the project baseline report concluded that participation of women in decision making processes at household and community level was very low. Skills in leadership, governance, advocacy and management among Community Based Organisations and local governance structures were also low. CSOs lacked the capacity to run effective institutions and did not understand how they could effectively promote inclusion, women empowerment and enhance community people's participation in governance including in development planning and sustainable development processes. The major economic activity was agriculture that was seriously affected by unavailability of credit and loans, women's lack of access and control over land and other resources. The project targeted communities were found to be highly patriarchal characterised by community members' limited understanding of women's rights and empowerment issues, women's lack of access to opportunities and self-empowerment. The project baseline report recommended key specific actions to address the cited challenges that also fell within the scope of the project as highlighted in the project document.

In response to the challenges highlighted above, APT and its partners implemented a series of activities under its project *Enhancing CSOs' capacities for more inclusive governance and development processes in Kenema District*. The project document proposed an approach that would consider women's needs at personal, household and community levels to promote empowerment and participation in development processes. The document demonstrated that project design processes recognised that at all levels and with different members of society poverty, knowledge and understanding of gender and civic rights are intrinsically linked with women's participation and role in policy making, governance and holding duty bearers to account. This is an assumption that was substantiated throughout the evaluation process as will be elaborated in subsequent sections. The approach focused on building the capacity at the grass-root organizations to reach out to and include all women, working to link and integrate empowered women to participate in development processes and governance at different levels. Working through CSOs and CBOs and building their capacity to deliver community-based services including civic education, rights awareness, functional

literacy and economic empowerment, the project intended to ensure that young and adult women effectively participate in decision making, are confident and play a role in economic and governance processes. On the one hand this entailed strengthening governance, skills and capacity of CSOs and CBOs to manage their institutions and enhance their capacity in decision making. On the other hand, this also entailed impacting on local development planning processes and interventions; ensuring that duty bearers and authorities are empowered for inclusive governance processes.

The project's intermediate objectives were;

- i. Enhanced capacity of 45 civil society organizations in Kenema District to represent women and support local communities.
- ii. Increased gender equality and empowerment of women with increased inclusion in local development processes and decision making in Kenema District.

The intermediate objectives were complemented by 3 specific objectives as follows;

- i. 5 leading NGOs and 40 CBOs will have greater organizational capacity to deliver quality services to poor and vulnerable people especially women.
- ii. 5 NGOs and 40 CBOs will have proven strengthened capacity to deliver development assistance through functional literacy training, livelihoods development and gender rights awareness.
- iii. Increased participation of targeted women in decision making relating to policy and practice of local development processes in 40 communities.

1.2. Outcomes and Activities

The project has three expected results supported by a set of activities as indicated below. This study evaluated the extent of implementation of activities for each expected objective and progress made in achieving project outputs and results. Below were the project's expected results and activities.

	Indicators
Overall Objective: Enhanced CSO capacities to establish more inclusive governance and development processes in Kenema District, Sierra Leone	
1a	No. of CSOs operating more effectively and inclusively of women
1b	% of women represented in policy and practice decisions relating to sustainable development (selected processes at community, local and district leadership levels).
1c	% of women, particularly vulnerable women participating in development processes and interventions in target communities
1d	Examples of holding duty bearers to account
Specific Objective 1: Leading NGOs and CBOs have greater organizational capacity to deliver quality services to poor and vulnerable people, especially women and PWDs	
1.1	No. of NGOs secured specific skills according to their audit e.g. inclusion of gender/ PWD, grant/sub-contract, management, proposal development, governance, advocacy
1.2	No. of staff trained and implementing skills above

1.3	No. of CBOs with improved leadership and governance: Documented evidence of i) proactive action to represent their communities ii) effective plans and procedures; inclusive of women/ vulnerable groups
Specific Objective 2: NGOs and CBOs have proven strengthened capacity to deliver development assistance evidenced through literacy training, livelihoods development and improved gender rights awareness	
2.1	No. of vulnerable women effectively reached and benefiting from rights awareness, literacy, business skills and apprenticeships.
2.2	No. of organizations with increased capacity and practical experience
2.3	% of women participating in household decision making
2.4	% of women participating in local governance and decision making in target communities
2.5	No. of men and women reached through outreach awareness and % increased understanding of gender rights
2.6	No. of joint advocacy activities engaged in by CSOs on specific issues for women
Output 1.1: Five local NGOs and 40 CBOs will have greater capacity to increase the reach and quality of delivery to poor and vulnerable people particularly women and PWDs	
1.1.1	Organizational human resources capacity of NGOs and CBOs e.g. number of trained staff able to produce strategic plan, gender policies, proposal development, training delivery etc.
1.1.2	No. of NGOs experienced in managing CBO training/ projects
1.1.3	CBOs outreach governance and service delivery inclusion
1.1.4	No. of NGOs and CBOs capacitated to deliver FAL apprenticeships and business skills training for women
Output 2.1: Community mechanism established to support rural women to access REFLECT and functional adult literacy (FAL) through community facilitators	
2.1.1	No. of CBOs with capacity to maintain literacy training in communities
2.1.2	No. of community facilitators trained in REFLECT modules
2.1.3	No. of FAL circles established and functional with no. of participants attending each
Output 2.2: Community mechanism established to support young mothers and women with disabilities to acquire livelihood skills to earn income sufficient to meet their basic needs and support their empowerment	
2.2.1	No. of CBOs and NGOs with capacity and experience of running apprenticeship and business skills training for women and supporting savings and credit groups functioning
2.2.1	No. of women trained in business skills and % of increase in income
2.2.3	No. of women access to savings and credit
2.3.4	No. of local artisans identified and enrolled at community level
2.3.5	No. of women completed apprenticeship training
2.3.6	No of women earning income in trade of training

Output 2.3: Community mechanism established to support women’s empowerment with gender awareness and GBV prevention	
2.3.1	No of NGOs and CBOs trained in gender awareness and GBV prevention
2.3.2	NGOs have upgraded gender and disability awareness policies
2.3.3	No. of women trained in gender laws and rights
2.3.4	Community participation – no of men and women in action groups raising awareness of women’s rights
Output 3.1: Women and men in the communities have increased capacity to organize and advocate for the rights of women and other vulnerable groups, influence local policy and development planning	
3.1.1	No. of duty bearers trained/ sensitized
3.1.2	No trained as part of REFLECT in civic education
3.1.3	Outreach activities: gender awareness raising/ GBV prevention/ civic education: No. of radio broadcasts; No of community awareness campaigns; IEC materials produced
3.1.4	Evidence of proactive advocacy efforts in case studies
3.1.5	No. of joint advocacy activities undertaken

Table 1: Project Indicators

1.3. Project Activities

- 1.1. Organisational capacity audit and development of plan to implement above activities according to strengths and weaknesses and developing capacities of NGOs.
- 1.2. Training and mentoring NGOs in Managerial, Organizational and Technical Skills
- 1.3. Organizational development training for 40 CBOs
- 2.1. Identification, registration and training of community facilitators
- 2.2. Supporting the implementation of functional literacy circles
- 2.3. Mentoring and Support to Literacy Circles for sustainability.
- 2.4. Business Skills Training and Linking with Loan Schemes for business development.
- 2.5. Identify and train local artisans for apprenticeship training.
- 2.6. Profiling and placement of young mothers and vulnerable women to local artisans.
- 2.7. Training support and inputs to artisans.
- 2.8. Training support and input to apprentices
- 2.9. Disability Inclusion
- 3.1. Gender Based Violence Prevention Training - Single sex dialogue sessions.
- 3.2. Cross Gender Transformative Dialogue sessions - developing Community Action Groups.
- 3.3. Follow up support to CBO Women’s empowerment/Action Group.
- 3.4. Broadening awareness-raising of gender issues and civic education.
- 3.5. Celebration of International Women’s Day and 16 days of Activism against GBV.
- 3.6. Sensitization of duty bearers on gender and inclusion policies.

1.4. Evaluation Overview

The overall purpose of the end of project evaluation exercise was to assess progress made in the achievement of results, document lessons emanating from the project and share

recommendations that can be operationalized for effective and efficient programming. The evaluation reviewed the achievements of the project against objectives and outputs. It looked at the project's key successes and challenges and documented best practices that support the improvement of good governance practices and enhance the participation of vulnerable groups in decision making processes. Furthermore, the evaluation attempted to detail factors that enhanced success. The project evaluation focused on seven core criteria as the basis for evaluation, analysis and reporting i.e. relevance; effectiveness; efficiency; inclusiveness, early signs of impact, and sustainability. The report produced a set of specific recommendations for similar, future project designs, and identified cross-cutting lessons and key learning points. The key audience of the evaluation findings will be APT, CARD, MUWODA and the downstream partners, the European Union and other funders. The evaluation results will also benefit other stakeholders especially the relevant MDAs, NGOs and INGOs implementing similar projects.

1.4.1. Evaluation Objectives

The overall objectives of the final evaluation were to;

- iii. Evaluate the impact of the project on NGOs, CBOs, (individual beneficiaries including women and PWDs), their households, and wider communities including chieftdom authorities.
- iv. Assess the success of the project in meeting its outcomes, expected results and (indicators including any unintended outcomes – positive or negative).
 - a. Identify key contributing factors which have enhanced and/or hindered these prospects.
 - b. Assess the project's overall performance in terms of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, economy (including value for money) impact and sustainability.
 - c. Identify key learning points and make recommendations for future operations of similar projects.

1.4.2. Evaluation Questions

This evaluation sought to address the following questions:

- i. To what extent was the project successful in enhancing the organizational capacity of targeted Civil Society Organizations in Kenema District to represent women and support local communities?
- ii. To what extent was the project successful in increasing gender equality and empowerment of women with increased inclusion in development processes and decision making in Kenema District?
- iii. What were the key challenges experienced in program delivery?
- iv. What are the key lessons drawn from the project and how can they inform future programming?

1.4.3. Evaluation Criteria

The proposed evaluation criteria aimed at understanding how the implementation of the project unfolded in the 36 months of project implementation. Seven evaluation criteria were used with a set of evaluation questions per criteria is indicated in the table below.

No.	Criteria	Learning or evaluation questions
1.	Relevance	To which extent was the project design relevant – and remained relevant to the needs of the beneficiaries?
		To which extent did participatory approaches to project implementation enabled the project to stay relevant to community needs along the project timeline?
		To what level did project activities contribute to the changes noticed in the communities during the period?
		To what level were the capacity building exercises under this project; relevant to inclusive decision making and development processes?
2.	Effectiveness	Has the project achieved its intended outcomes?
		What are the outcomes that the project has contributed to?
		What is the relative effectiveness of the project strategies in achieving the project outcomes?
		What changes were witnessed among CBOs, apprenticeship groups, literacy circles and facilitators as a result of project implementation?
		To which extent did enhanced organizational capacity among targeted NGOs and CBOs contribute to participation in policy making and interaction with duty bearers?
3.	Efficiency	To which extent did the project effectively use its time and resources to achieve good outcomes? To what extent has the project represented good value for money?
		To what extent has the increased capacity of implementing partners contributed to high quality implementation of projects?
		How did the project use its Monitoring and Evaluation results to ensure ongoing adaptation and better results?
		Did the use of participatory methodologies prove effective?
4.	Inclusiveness	To which extent has the project been inclusive of the most marginalized? (Women, children, PWDs)
		What difference did the project bring to citizens' participation in decision making processes especially women and persons with disabilities?
		Which mechanisms have enabled inclusiveness?
5.	Impact	What are early evidences of the local economic impact that the project has had on beneficiaries?
		What real difference has the project made to the beneficiaries?
		How many people have been affected? (It is important to use disaggregated data for gender, age, disability and others as applicable)
		What was an effect that was not anticipated or expected?
		Were there also negative effects and consequences?
		How was the project perceived by the beneficiaries?

6.	Accountability	To which extent have the community feedback and complaint mechanism in place been effective to address key issues raised by the communities?
		What major factors contributed to the project being timely or late in delivering the intervention
7.	Sustainability	To what extent are the benefits of the project likely to be sustained over time?
		What role do the target beneficiaries play in the sustainability of project gains?
		What were the major factors that influenced the achievement or non- achievement of project sustainability? How could this have been improved?

Table 2: Evaluation Criteria

1.4.4. Scope of the Evaluation

This is a final qualitative and quantitative assessment of a European Union co-funded project implemented from September 2018 to August 2021 by APT UK and its partners CARD and Moloma Women’s Development Association (MUWODA). The project titled “Enhancing CSOs’ capacities for more inclusive governance and development processes in Kenema District” was implemented for three years. The evaluation was informed by data collected from implementing and downstream partners (APT and 5 NGOs), 40 beneficiary CBOs, groups and individuals supported under the project within the targeted 40 communities. The project evaluation reached sections of the targeted groups. Targeted groups included 3,500 women, 200 girl mothers, 140 FAL circles, 700 duty bearers, 40 artisans, 140 VSL groups, 40 EMAPs.

2. CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Design

The study employed a mixed methods research design. This approach was considered the most appropriate as it provided an in-depth understanding and derived results from both qualitative and quantitative research methods. A mixed methodology produced triangulated results and ensured data generated from one source was verified with data from other sources. While quantitative data focused on statistics; qualitative data revealed attitudes and perspectives that can hardly be assessed through a traditional quantitative approach that is essentially designed to measure and quantify. This approach also helped to understand project implementation by obtaining information from project staff, participants, beneficiaries and stakeholders who participated in the project activities.

2.2. Methods for Data Collection

The evaluation collected both quantitative and qualitative data through a mini survey, face to face administration of key informant interviews and focus group discussions. Data was collected in all of the five targeted chiefdoms from a total of 205 survey respondents, 114 FGD participants and several Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). In addition, to reviewing a broad range of relevant documents, the research team interfaced with a range of key stakeholders whose portfolio involved direct and indirect interaction with the project. Described below are the methods employed.

Respondents	Data collection tool	District/ National	Chiefdom/ Community	Totals
Project Implementing NGOs	KII	10		10
District Planning Officer	KII	1		1
M&E Manager (CARD)	KII	1		1
Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry	KII	1	2	2
Family Support Unit	KII	0	2	2
Community Radio Station	KII	1	0	1
CBOs	Survey	0	64	64
CBOs	KII	0	10	10
Rainbo Initiative	KII	1	0	0
Village Development Committees Members	KII	0	5	5
Ward Development Committee members	KIIs	0	5	5
Village Development Committee Members	Survey	0	20	20
Local Council	KII	2		2
Line Ministries	KII	4		4
VSLAs	Survey	0	42	42
Functional Adult Literacy Group members	Survey	0	37	37
Youth Groups	Survey	0	8	8
Oversight Committee	KIIs	0	5	5
Men, youth, women & PWD beneficiaries	FDGs	0	20	100
Men, youth, women & PWD beneficiaries	Survey	0	205	205

Table 3: Respondents/ Participants per data collection tool

2.2.1. Desk Review

To understand the project in detail, including planned activities, expected outcomes and project background; the consultant reviewed project documents comprehensively including the concept note, grant proposal, log frame, project baseline report, mid-term review report and progress reports. The consultant also reviewed other documents produced by the project team as part of this project or by the beneficiaries as a result of previous project activities. This provided insight on the project and its outcomes.

2.2.2. Semi-Structured Open Ended Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

Semi Structured, open ended KIIs were administered to relevant key informants and institutions who participated in the project and interacted with project activities. The purpose of the KIIs was to get a deeper understanding of how different project participants benefited from the project and

what they consider as project successes, challenges, and prospects. These included among others;

- Partner organisations
- Heads of beneficiary NGOs
- Representatives of Community Based Organisations
- Local Government Representative
- Traditional Leaders/ Chiefs
- Staff of relevant Government Ministries
- Youth leaders
- Women leaders
- Representatives of Disabled People's Organisations
- Community Action Groups
- Oversight Committees
- Functional Literacy Groups
- Representatives of duty bearers

See annexes for the KII Guides.

2.2.3. Focus Group Discussions

The purpose of the FGDs in this study was to probe, explore and identify any changes in behavior and generate data regarding facts and attitudes from target beneficiaries. Women, persons with disabilities and youth were interviewed separately in five chiefdoms to capture the different perceptions and attitudes. In conducting the study, great care was taken to avoid questions and ways of asking them which offend or insult the informants. Two FGDs were conducted in each chiefdom for women and men and each group included persons with disabilities. Each group was composed of representatives of CBOs, literacy circles, trained local artisans, functional literacy groups and members of the public who participated in project activities. Each FGD was composed of up to 12 participants including at least 3 persons with disabilities.

2.2.4. Mini Survey

The mini survey held several closed ended questions to collect data from direct project beneficiaries. The mini survey was administered to project participants. The mini survey targets a total of 205 respondents composed of 151 (73.7%) women and 55 (26.3%) men. Among them were 41 PWDs (20%). Respondents were selected purposefully from the participant registers of each of the targeted communities. The consultant recognized the importance of the beneficiary categories of this project and thus ensured the representation of women, and PWDs in the sample.

The survey questionnaire (Annex 1) was electronically administered in the 9 chiefdoms. The consultant facilitated the training of six enumerators who conducted the electronic data collection process. The training covered guidelines, research ethics, baseline questions, administration of the baseline tools, cultural sensitivity, consent seeking and the "do no harm" principle. The training was conducted in English, accompanied by local language translations as appropriate. Each question was read, interpreted and translated into the local language and pretesting done. Data was collected digitally through google forms by use of smart phones.

2.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis was systematically done as follow;

2.3.1. Quantitative Data Analysis

The data received from the survey in the automated platform (google forms) was exported into an excel spreadsheet. This automatically provided graphs and charts showing the frequencies of responses as survey data was entered.

2.3.2. Qualitative Data Analysis

After the data collection process the note takers and the consultant team worked together to compile the notes. In analyzing the findings, the evaluation team paid special attention to direct quotations, statements of appreciations, challenges and recommendations that spoke to the questions and the evaluation criteria. In addition, the team compared inter-chiefdom findings for verification and authentication.

3. CHAPTER THREE: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter presents detailed findings of the results obtained from engaging various project beneficiaries and stakeholders through employing the methods stated above.

3.1. Demographic information of respondents

The survey reached 205 respondents who participated in the project from the project's nine targeted chiefdoms. In total the survey reached 205 respondents composed of 151 (74%) women and 54 (26%) men as indicated in the chart below.

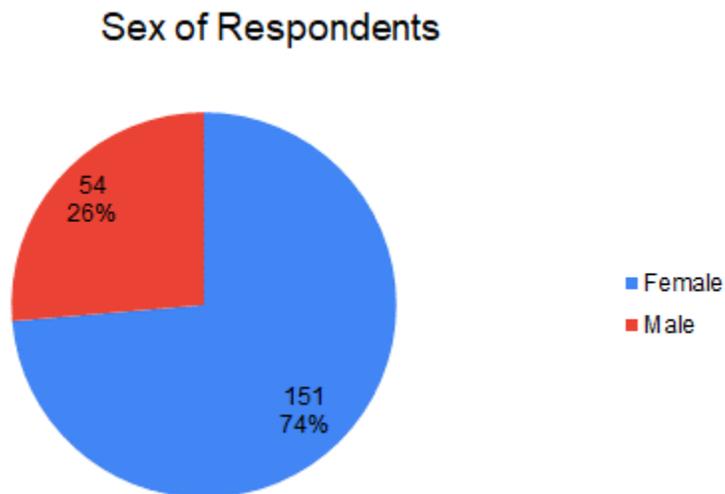


Figure 1: Respondents disaggregated by sex

Disaggregated by age 33% (68) of the respondents were youth aged between 18 and 35, 66% (136) were aged between 36 and 60 and only 1% (1) above the age of 61.

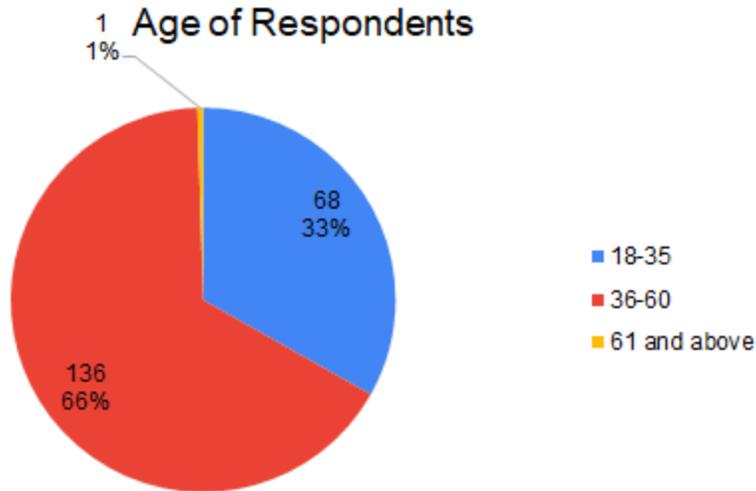


Figure 2: Respondents disaggregated by age

20% (41) of the survey respondents were PWDs, of which 12% (5) were male and 88% (36) were female as illustrated in the chart below.

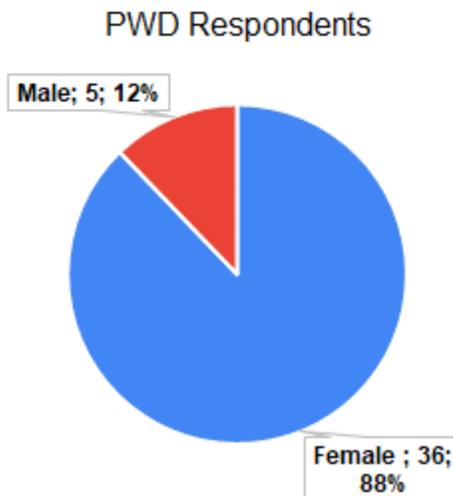
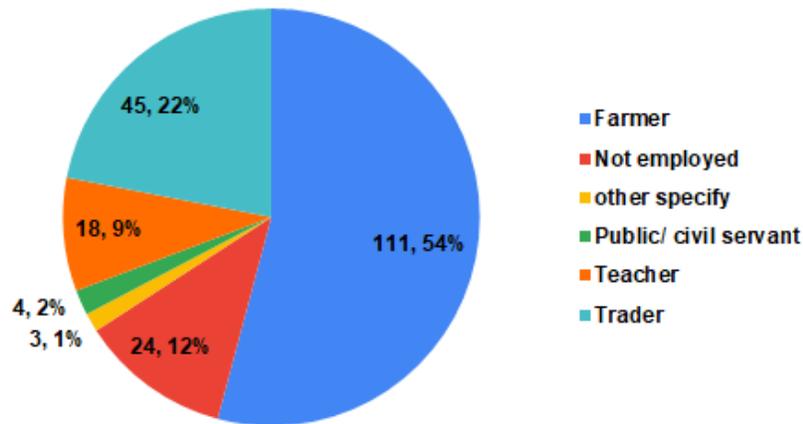


Figure 3: PWD respondents disaggregated by gender

The employment status of the respondents reflects the several targeted groups that the project served. 54% (111) of the survey respondents classified themselves as farmers, 22% (45) were traders, given the fact that the project also sought to empower traders. 9% (18) of the survey respondents were teachers, 2% (4) public servants as shown in the chart below.

Employment Status of Respondents



Respondents were also asked to indicate the project group to which they belong to. The chart below summarises the responses.

III. Which of the following groups do you belong to?

205 responses

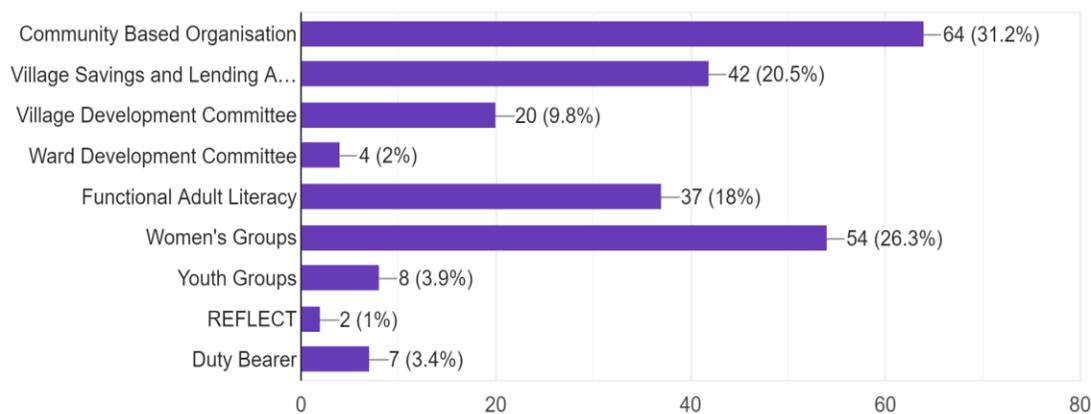


Figure 4: Respondents disaggregated by project groups

31% (64) of the respondents classified themselves as members of CBOs, 26% (54) as women's groups, 21% (42) as members of Village, Savings and Lending Associations and 18% (37%) as members of Functional Literacy Groups. Additionally, 9.8% (20) indicated that they were members of the Village Development Committees, 4% (8) members of the Youth Groups, 4% (7) duty bearers, 2% (4) Ward Development Committee members and 2 (1%) REFLECT members. The study therefore showed that most of the respondents were in several categories of beneficiaries; for instance, some Women's Group members were also seen as members of the Village Savings and Lending schemes.

3.2. Progress in Outcome Achievement

Overall, comparison of the indicator values at baseline and at end line show significant achievement of outcomes as summarised in the table below.

Outcome Achievement Analysis Table

	Indicators	Value at baseline	Target	Value at end line	Status at end of project
Overall Objective: Enhanced CSO capacities to establish more inclusive governance and development processes in Kenema District, Sierra Leone					
1a	No. of CSOs operating more effectively and inclusively of women	0	5 NGOs and 40 CBOs	5 NGOs and 40 CBOs	Achieved
1b	% of women represented in policy and practice decisions relating to sustainable development (selected processes at community, local and district leadership levels).	31% of which 62% active	Increase of additional 5% (Yr 1), 10% (Yr 2), (20% Yr 3)	43% of whom 91% active	Overachieved
1c	% of women, particularly vulnerable women participating in development processes and interventions in target communities	1406 members of CBOs (47 WWD)	Increase of additional 5% (Yr 1), 10% (Yr 2), (20% Yr 3)	1632 members of CBOs	Achieved
		0 literacy programmes		3,517 women with 313 WWD (8%)	Achieved
		0 Apprenticeship		202 women with 45 PWDs	Achieved
		266 women in 7 CBOs involved in VSLA		1632 women, 3517 FAL members, 40 CBOs	Achieved
		0 women in Community Action Groups		40 CAGs with 450 members, 50% female	Achieved
1d	Examples of holding duty bearers to account	0 Examples of holding duty	At least 40 examples	43 reported examples	Achieved

		bearers to account			
		Specific Objective 1: Leading NGOs and CBOs have greater organizational capacity to deliver quality services to poor and vulnerable people, especially women and PWDs			
1.1	No. of NGOs secured specific skills according to their audit e.g. inclusion of gender/ PWD, grant/sub-contract, management, proposal development, governance, advocacy	Capacity audits with plans and targets	5 NGOs showing annual improvements	5 NGOs showing a range of improvements	Achieved
1.2	No. of staff trained and implementing skills above	0	25 staff trained and implementing skills	38 staff attended over 300 training times, 15 training sessions	Overachieved
1.3	No. of CBOs with improved leadership and governance: Documented evidence of i) proactive action to represent their communities ii) effective plans and procedures; inclusive of women/ vulnerable groups	7 registered CBOs	40 CBOs showing annual improvements	40 CBOs showing annual improvements	Achieved
Specific Objective 2: NGOs and CBOs have proven strengthened capacity to deliver development assistance evidenced through literacy training, livelihoods development and improved gender rights awareness					
2.1	No. of vulnerable women effectively reached and benefiting from rights awareness, literacy, business skills and apprenticeships.	Rights awareness 15%; literacy 13%; business skills 9.6%; apprenticeship 11%	3500 women increased literacy; 40 VSL groups; 40 CBOs & 200 apprenticeships	3542 benefiting from literacy skills with 8% PWDs	Overachieved
			3500 women in literacy circles at least 7% with disabilities	3900 (PWD 9%)	Overachieved
			3500 business skills training (8% PWDs)	Business trainings delivered to 3517 women	Achieved

			200 apprentices in communities	219 women in complete apprenticeship	Overachieved
			128 FAL groups with VSLA – 3500 women members	128 FAL groups with VSLA - – 3517 women members	Achieved
			40 savings and lending	40 CBO VSLA women members (3517)	Achieved
2.2	No. of organizations with increased capacity and practical experience*		5 NGOs and 40 CBOs Annual Capacity update against specific agreed plans	5 NGOs and 40 CBOs assessments completed	Achieved
2.3	% of women participating in household decision making	Household decision making on use of agricultural income (8%) for women; 16% joint decision making	10% (Yr1) 20% (Yr2) 30% (Yr3) increase in women reporting increased participation in household decision making	73.4% joint decision making (300% increase)	Achieved
2.4	% of women participating in local governance and decision making in target communities	Chiefdom Administration Committee (26% female of which 38% active); b) Chiefdom Development Committee (23% of which 32 considered active)	5% (Yr1) 10% (Yr2) 20% (Yr3) increase of women participating in policy and practice decision making at different levels in at least 40 communities and a positive increase	43% (increase by 38%) 91% active in 15 VDCs	Achieved
2.5	No of men and women reached through outreach awareness and % increased understanding of gender rights	12% Knowledge of gender rights	12,000 men and women reached by project end with 50% increase in knowledge of gender rights	Not ascertained directly. Survey showed	Likely Achieved

				widespread understanding	
2.6	No. of joint advocacy activities engaged in by CSOs on specific issues for women	No joint advocacy	3 joint campaigns by project end	10+ at chiefdom level	Overachieved
Output 1.1: Five local NGOs and 40 CBOs will have greater capacity to increase the reach and quality of delivery to poor and vulnerable people particularly women and PWDs					
1.1.1	Organizational human resources capacity of NGOs and CBOs e.g. number of trained staff able to produce strategic plan, gender policies, proposal development, training delivery etc.	0 trained staff in 5 NGOs	5 (3–5 year strategic plan available and other policy documents including gender)	5 Strategic Plans & organizational policies prepared, 25 staff of 5 NGOs trained	Achieved
		0 staff trained on Gender Policy in 5 NGOs		15 trainings, 25 staff of 5 NGOs trained	Achieved
		1 staff in 1 NGO with proposal development training		25 staff trained in 5 NGOs	Achieved
		2 NGOs trained in training delivery		25 staff trained in 5 NGOs	Achieved
1.1.2	No. of NGOs experienced in managing CBO training/ projects	0	5 Local NGOs have effectively delivered empowerment activities in 40+ communities by end of project	5 NGOs trained 43 CBOs	Achieved
1.1.3	CBOs outreach governance and service delivery inclusion	0	5 NGOs and 40 CBOs	43 CBOs improved governance, financial management, registration, constitutions	Overachieved

1.1.4	No. of NGOs and CBOs capacitated to deliver FAL apprenticeships and business skills training for women	2 NGOs	5 NGOs and 40 CBOs	5 NGOs and 40 CBOs	Achieved
Output 2.1: Community mechanism established to support rural women to access REFLECT and functional adult literacy (FAL) through community facilitators					
2.1.1	No. of CBOs with capacity to maintain literacy training in communities	0	40 CBOs	A few CBOs but communities have increased capacity	Achieved
2.1.2	No. of community facilitators trained in REFLECT modules	0	140 Yr 1; 140 Yr 2; 140 Yr 3	143 facilitators	Overachieved
2.1.3	No. of FAL circles established and functional with no. of participants attending each	0	3500	3517	Overachieved
Output 2.2: Community mechanism established to support young mothers women with disabilities to acquire livelihood skills to earn income sufficient to meet their basic needs and support their empowerment					
2.2.1	No. of CBOs and NGOs with capacity and experience of running apprenticeship and business skills training for women and supporting savings and credit groups functioning	0	5 NGOs, 40 CBOs	5 NGOs, 40 CBOs	Achieved
2.2.1	No. of women trained in business skills and % of increase in income	0	40 CBOs Business Skills Training	40 CBOs completed Business Skills Training	Achieved
2.2.3	No. of women access to savings and credit	7 CBOs with VSLA (190 women)	70% of 3500 women accesses Savings and Credit group with 30% increase in average income	40 CBOs have VSLA (1481 membership)	Achieved
2.3.4	No. of local artisans identified and enrolled at community level	0	40 artisans enrolled with 202 apprentices	43 artisans with 202 apprentices	Overachieved
2.3.5	No. of women completed apprenticeship training	0	200 vulnerable women completed apprenticeship training	202 completed apprenticeship training	Overachieved

2.3.6	No of women earning income in trade of training	0	200 vulnerable women completed apprenticeship training and earning at least 50% more than at start of training	202 earning income, some not significant due to COVID-19	Achieved
Output 2.3: Community mechanism established to support women's empowerment with gender awareness and GBV prevention					
2.3.1	No of NGOs and CBOs trained in gender awareness and GBV prevention	1 NGO, 0 CBO	5 NGOs trained; 40 CBOs sensitized	5 NGOs and 40 CBOs	Achieved
2.3.2	NGOs have upgraded gender and disability awareness policies	1	5 NGOs	5 NGOs	Achieved
2.3.3	No. of women trained in gender laws and rights	0	30% of 3500 women trained in Yr1; Yr2 70% cumulative and Yr 3 100%	3628 women; many more men and women in the communities have understanding of the issues	Achieved
2.3.4	Community participation – no of men and women in action groups raising awareness of women's rights	0	Cohorts of 600 men and 600 women knowledgeable and proactive in gender rights and GBV established in 40 communities	40 groups formed and active with 450 participants (over 50% female)	Achieved groups
Output 3.1: Women and men in the communities have increased capacity to organize and advocate for the rights of women and other vulnerable groups, influence local policy and development planning					
3.1.1	No. of duty bearers trained/ sensitized	0	700 duty bearers sensitised	2156 (person times) over 700 duty bearers	Overachieved
3.1.2	No trained as part of REFLECT in civic education	0	3500 by project end	4917	Overachieved
3.1.3	Outreach activities: gender awareness raising/ GBV prevention/ civic education: No. of radio broadcasts; No	0	9 Radio broadcasts; 10 community campaigns	24 radio broadcasts; 10+ community campaigns	Achieved

	of community awareness campaigns; IEC materials produced				
3.1.4	Evidence of proactive advocacy efforts in case studies	0	3 Campaigns on GBV, women's rights	Steering committee set up in 4 Chiefdoms; IEC materials produced on Gender Acts and Covid 19; 3 campaigns	Achieved
3.1.5	No. of joint advocacy activities undertaken	0	Advocacy plans set and 3 joint activities carried out by project end	2 Advocacy Plans; 3 campaigns on GBV, Women Rights	Achieved

Table 4: Outcome Achievement Analysis Table

This evaluation was conducted before the closure of the project prior to the compilation of the project's final report by the implementing team. Results may therefore change to reflect activities implemented after the evaluation process. Though COVID-19 presented a major challenge to the project, and expanded project focus to include the incorporation of COVID-19 messaging in advocacy and campaign message, the project continued implementation thus the end results were not affected. However, some activities were implemented later than scheduled.

3.3. Evaluation Criteria

3.3.1. Relevance

It was revealed through survey results, KIs and FGDs that the project activities were highly relevant to addressing community needs. The project baseline articulated challenges with respect to CSOs' and CBOs' lack of organisational and technical capacities, limited involvement of women in household and community development decision making, increased poverty arising from lack of control over income and women's low participation in income generating activities. In addition, prior to the implementation of the project, the baseline study noted limited knowledge on human rights and civic responsibilities, weak accountability and transparency, duty bearers inability to address women and PWD issues and lack of alignment between women's issues and issues covered in the District Development Plans. High illiteracy and poor business management skills were noted among women farmers and young mothers. The project's activities were found to be relevant in addressing these challenges identified prior to project implementation.

Project activities were relevant in developing NGOs' staff capacity in project writing, management, disability and inclusion, financial and project management as well as monitoring and evaluation skills among other skills. The evaluation team was informed that the project witnessed the development of organisational policies by project NGOs as a result of capacities imparted by APT-UK. Evidence of Finance and Procurement Policies; Gender, Inclusion and Disability Policies; Safeguarding Manuals; Strategic Plans; Monitoring and Evaluation frameworks and tools developed during the course of project implementation; were noticed in the offices of the 5 NGOs. In addition to Strategic Plans NGOs were able to set up Monitoring and Evaluation Units, separate financial responsibilities from programmes and institute checks and balances. The capacity development activities for NGOs were relevant in building a vibrant civil society and an engaging citizenry able to challenge and influence decision makers to prioritise women's issues. However, COVID-19 affected the physical connection between APT, implementing partners and beneficiaries. As a result of COVID-19 associated travelling restrictions, APT was not able to visit the project locations as often as had been initially planned.

Meetings conducted at the onset of the project including inception meetings with partners and stakeholders ensured that the project targeted the most deprived communities and targeted beneficiaries in need. Periodical monitoring and review processes led by APT in collaboration with CARD and MUWODA ensured that the project remained relevant; in addition to the coordination meetings and feedback from the targeted communities. Stakeholders including duty bearers and chieftom authorities appreciated the project for being clear in terms of the key issues it was designed to address, with specific activities towards addressing those activities and clear targeted groups.

Project stakeholders appreciated the relevance of the project in enhancing women's participation and changing patriarchal perceptions and attitudes. Duty bearers including representatives of the Ministry of Gender and Children Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Youth, and the Sierra Leone Police acknowledged that the improved interest of women and PWDs in policy making, governance and accountability issues were a result of increased advocacy and mobilisation brought about by the project. In addition, functional literacy was deemed relevant by many of the people engaged by the evaluation team because it empowered women to read and do simple

calculations, thus addressing a huge capacity gap. Apprenticeship was also found relevant in addressing livelihood challenges and ensuring women participate in the economy through tailoring, weaving, embroidery and hairdressing among other trades. Improved women and PWD involvement in income generating activities is attributed to project activities by most stakeholders spoken to including traditional leaders, community radio stations, VSLAs, women's groups and EMAP Community Action Groups. EMAP community Action Groups were also acknowledged by the community members as empowering and relevant for influencing positive masculinity. FAL Circles, apprenticeship and EMAP activities were found relevant in improving the status of child mothers and vulnerable women. In an evaluation report by the NGOs, a child mother was quoted;

Honestly I have started realizing my worth. The boy who impregnated me is nowhere to be found. My mother has struggled hard to support me and the little kid over the years. With this project, I have regained my flesh and respect because I have a hope of survival. Now people come to help rather me going to them.

Some of the apprenticeship beneficiaries told the evaluation team that they have risen to the level of being breadwinners in their families, who started off as beggars. They indicated that they are now eating well, dressing well and running as a result their self-esteem was boosted. In appreciation of the VSLA one survey participant said;

With the help of this scheme, I can now foot most of the bills in my family which includes medical, some school materials etc. Also, the scheme has also given rise to helping me repay my loans

The evaluation team noted especially high familiarity and ownership of the project among beneficiary groups such as REFLECT, EMAP, VSLAs, FAL circles, Oversight Groups and CBOs. Project NGOs and CBOs noted that the project was unique in as far as it worked with community structures, building their skills and ensuring these skills translate into real change in terms of empowerment and inclusive decision making. This was an approach considered relevant to community needs.

Advocacy and awareness raising on women's issues were relevant in bringing to the attention of key challenges women face and promoting proactive action. The Ministry of Gender and Children Affairs representative indicated that the project was key in bringing out issues concerning women's marginalisation, gender-based violence, rape and sexual assault and resulted in communities taking action to address these issues. Wife battering, GBV and rape declined as reported by the Family Support Unit and this is considered a key outcome of the project. Additionally, the project's relevance was enhanced through the timely incorporation of COVID-19 messaging with an emphasis on prevention and reporting. The evaluation found evidence that such messages contributed to promoting positive hygiene practices.

Generally, the project was found to be aligning with the priorities of the Kenema District Development Plan and contributed to promoting food security and increasing household income by linking up women to income generating activities through the VSLA programme, apprenticeship, and literacy programmes. In addition, the project also responded to the District Development Plan's priorities of promoting women's and girls' issues and ensuring the inclusion of PWDs in development activities, governance, and decision-making processes. The project was relevant to development priorities in as far as it promoted prevention and response to domestic violence, sexual and gender-based violence including rape and sexual assault. It enhanced women's participation in leadership and decision making; and their access and control over land; which are cited as key strategies in the Kenema District Development Plan. Additionally, through strengthening the capacity of NGOs and CBOs; as well as enhancing coordination between duty bearers and civil society the project responded to key strategic areas of the District Development Plan. Considering these factors, the project was not only relevant to the development priorities of

the Kenema District but also to the key priorities of Sierra Leone's Medium Term National Development Plan (MTNDP, 2019 to 2023). This is especially so for cluster five of the MTNDP, namely "empowering women, children and persons with disability" and cluster seven, which is "addressing vulnerabilities and building resilience".

3.3.2. Effectiveness

The project approach was found to be highly effective in meeting the intended outcomes. Staff of implementing partners (CARD, MUWODA, ISLAG, CCTD and Brighter Futures) informed the evaluation team that the project owes its effectiveness to the clarity of roles spelt out from the onset of the project. They noted that while APT provided technical support, overall monitoring and evaluation; while CARD and MUWODA (co-applicants) played a coordination role and implementation chiefdoms were shared among the five partners (co-applicants and sub-grantees). The project document was found to be articulate in terms of partners' responsibilities, especially tapping on the skills possessed by each partner. APT, given its international experience in working in partnership with NGOs and CBOs was considered well positioned for the role assigned to it, with visible signs of impact. CARD and MUWODA, were also well positioned given their experiences in working on women and gender issues including grassroots capacity development activities. ISLAG, CCTD and Brighter Future were also found to have had experience in adult literacy programming, volunteer training and management, awareness raising and promotion of women and youth rights among other issues. Thus, the experiences brought by each of the partners, and a clear articulation of their roles, plus technical support provided by APT promoted project effectiveness.

The findings of the study revealed that, the mentoring, coaching and training methodologies and content employed to build the capacities of project NGOs were effective in enhancing inclusive governance and development processes. APT empowered project NGOs by providing skills in gender mainstreaming, inclusivity; as well as building capacity in managerial, organisational, and technical skills. These skills were translated into improved inclusivity and improved organisational management. CBOs reached confirmed that they improved their organisational management skills and were influenced to officially register with the District Council and / or Ministries of Agriculture and Forestry; Ministry of Social Welfare; Ministry of Gender and Children Affairs. As a result of this, their status within the community was enhanced including their confidence to conduct community level and partner with bigger NGOs. This was confirmed through the KIs, FGD and survey responses. Asked whether the CSOs were inclusive in working with women, 72% (148) of the respondents said absolutely, 27% (55) said somehow and only 2 (1%) said not really and none said definitely not.

Are CSOs inclusive in working with women?

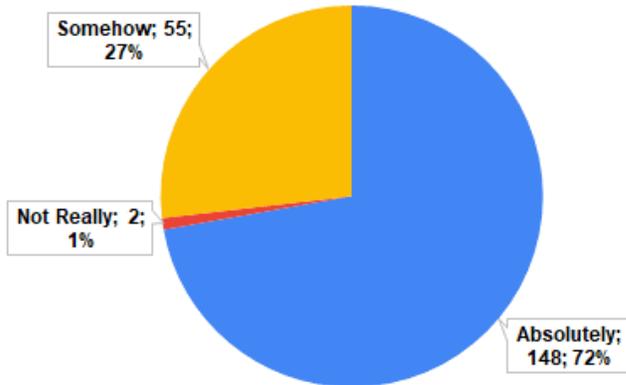


Figure 5: Perceptions of Respondents on whether CSOs are inclusive in working with women

Project NGOs demonstrated improved skills in inclusion, grant/ sub-contract management, proposal development, governance and advocacy. The study confirmed that coaching and mentoring sessions provided by APT were key in enhancing the skills of the NGOs. It was noted that CSOs and CBOs created platforms that brought duty bearers and community members together and allowed participatory decision making. 98% (201) of the respondents indicated that they have participated in events organised by CSOs and CBOs that promoted participatory decision making.

Have you ever attended an event organised by CSOs and CBOs that promoted participatory decision making

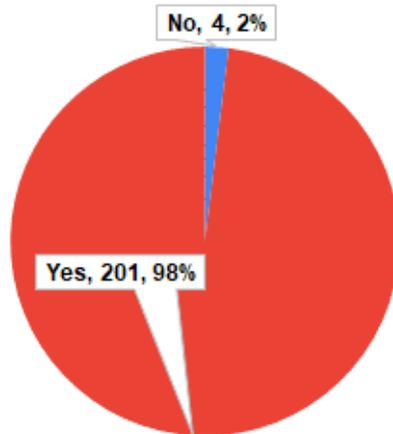


Figure 6: Participation in events organised by CSOs and CBOs that promoted participatory decision making

The study proved that CSOs embarked on trainings focused on literacy, Village Savings and Lending, livelihood development, advocacy, business management and income generation. It was noted that these trainings were ongoing. Most of the participants of the trainings indicated that they were able to put into practice the skills they acquired into practice.

Were you able to put skills acquired during trainings into practice?

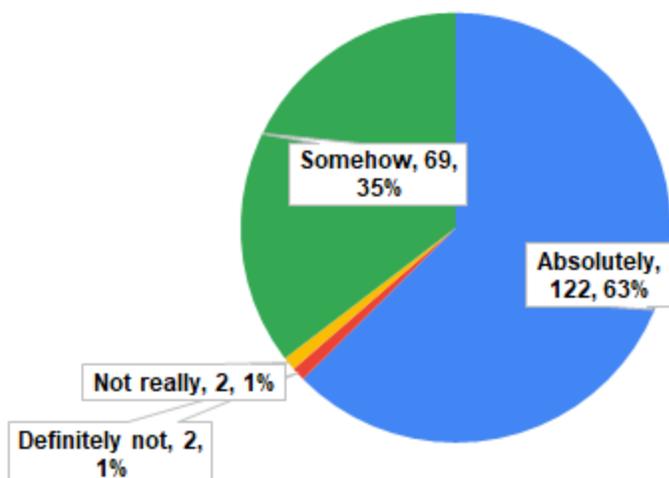


Figure 7: Whether skills acquired during trainings were put into practice

Capacity development of CSOs and CBOs empowered them to conduct outreach activities on gender rights. It was noted that CSOs and CBOs conducted several outreach activities on gender rights in their communities. The outreach activities were seen by community members as informative and providing them with influenced changed norms and attitudes for women's empowerment. In particular, project CSOs and CBOs were seen to be advocating for women's issues in the community.

Have the project CSOs and CBOs advocated for any particular women's issues in your community?

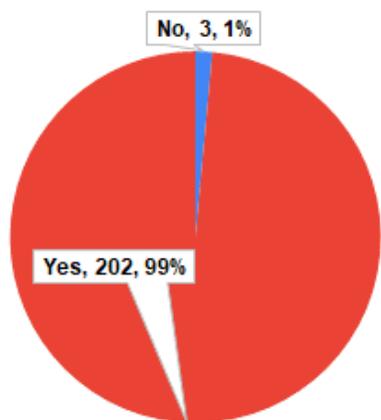
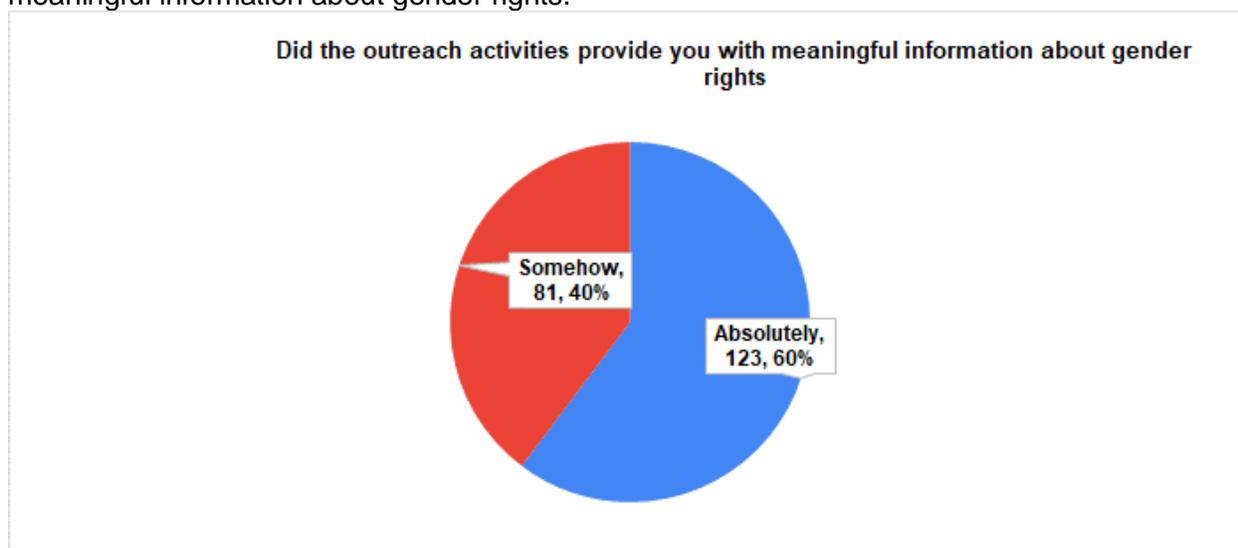


Figure 8: Project CSOs and CBOs ability to advocate for women's issues

Just as an example, FGDs with men and women confirmed that CSOs and CBOs influenced decision makers to set aside plots of land for use by women's groups for agricultural activities. This was considered unique to this project, and appreciated as a move that promoted women's economic development. In Nongowa Chiefdom, one participant of the FGD for women highlighted;

Women had never worked together in the same agricultural project before. The CSOs and CBOs helped us to get land for us to work together as one united family. We take pride in that today and will continue to use this land.

Survey respondents confirmed that outreach activities by CSOs and CBOs provided them with meaningful information about gender rights.



KII and FGD participants emphasised the role the CSOs and CBOs played in creating awareness around teenage pregnancy, harmful cultural practices against girls, early marriage, Gender Based Violence, rape and sexual assault. They noted that CSOs and CBOs played a key role in providing referral services for survivors of GBV. In addition, they influenced duty bearers to include women in positions of authority.

Capacity development activities for CSOs and CBOs were effective in empowering them to deliver different kinds of trainings under this project. The evaluation team confirmed that targeted groups participated in various trainings offered by the project through project CSOs and CBOs. 95% (195) of the survey respondents indicated that they participated in trainings organised by the CSOs and CBOs. Asked to specify the trainings they participated in, respondents mentioned Advocacy, business management, income generation, GBV, Functional Literacy, Proposal Development, Skills Development, VSLs. 63% confirmed that they were able to put into practice skills acquired, 35% said they somehow put the skills into practice and only 1% said otherwise.

Were you able to put skills acquired through the training into practice?

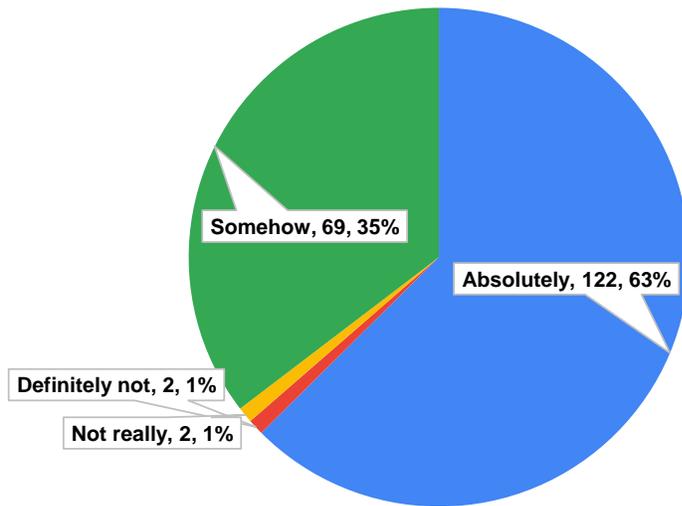


Figure 9: Ability of trainees to put into practice skills from trainings by CSOs & CBOs

The study also confirmed that the project was effective in enhancing the participation of women in decision making processes at chiefdom, community and village levels. It was noted that as a result of project implementation, women, youth and PWDs took part in platforms for decision making in their communities. Such platforms included Ward Development Committees, Village Development Committees, Oversight Committees and other community related platforms. The survey, KII and FGDs revealed that these platforms allowed the voices of community members to be heard especially women and PWDs. The chart below summarises findings when survey respondents were asked whether they had participated in decision making platforms.

Have you ever participated in any forum or platform on decision making in your community?

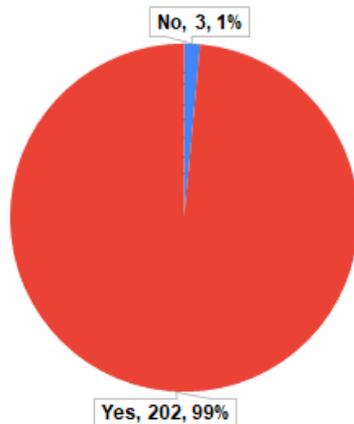


Figure 10: Respondents' participation in decision making platforms

One FGD participant in Lower Bambara chiefdom said;

The project brought awareness to our local authorities that they should work hand in hand with our community members especially when making decisions that impact on us.

The study revealed that platforms created by this project also served as decision making spaces because duty bearers engaged community members through these platforms. In addition, project participants also participated in existing community platforms such as chiefdom committees, VDCs and WDCs where decisions were made.

Name the forum or platform of decision making that you have participated in within your community		
Platform	Respondents	Percentage
CBO	27	13%
Chiefdom committee	66	32%
Council	48	23%
FAL	114	56%
Oversight committee	48	23%
Village development committee	44	21%
Ward development Committee	22	11%

Table 5: Participation of community people in decision making platforms

Asked whether they felt platforms for decision making allowed voices of citizens especially women and PWDs to be heard, 100% of the respondents said yes.

Findings from KIIs, FGDs and survey demonstrated enhanced involvement in decision making by community members, acquired from participation in project activities. Increased engagement of women and PWDs by duty bearers and community stakeholders led to increased participation in development processes and influenced duty bearers to be committed to include vulnerable women in development processes and interventions. 97% of the survey respondents indicated that through activities implemented under this project, they learnt how to be involved in decision making in their communities. In addition, 70% (144) of survey respondents indicated that women were absolutely participating in Chiefdom Development Committees while 29% (59) said they somehow participated.

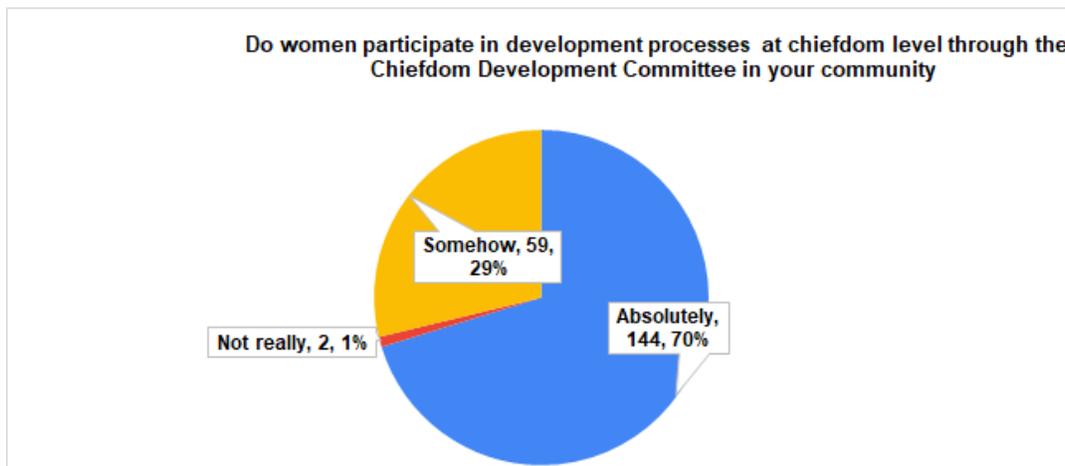


Figure 11: Women's participation in development processes at Chiefdom level

66% (135) of the survey respondents believed the project absolutely influenced duty bearers to be committed to include vulnerable people in development processes, 28% (58) said somehow while only 6% (12) said not really and none said definitely not.

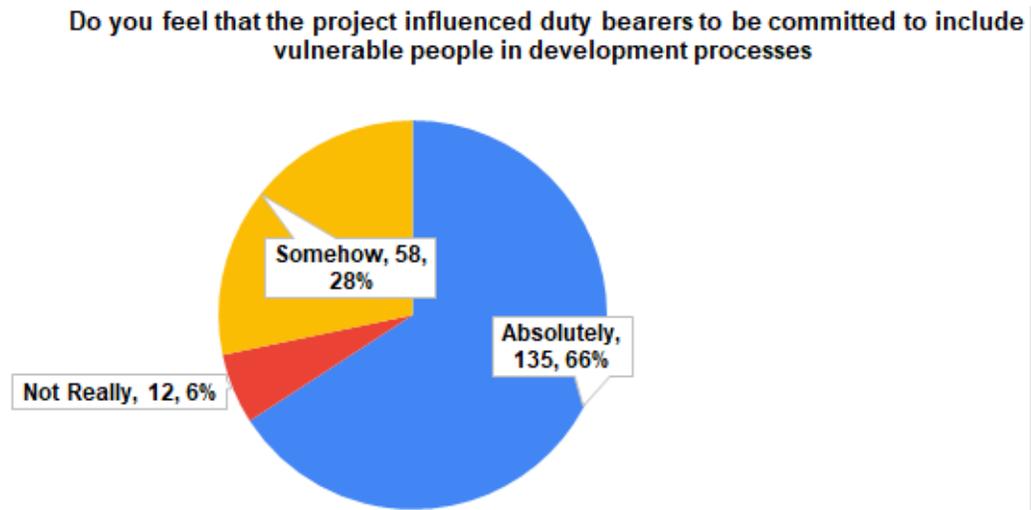


Figure 12: Perceptions of community members on whether the project influenced duty bearers to be committed to include vulnerable people in decision making processes

Additionally, the study found that the project was effective in creating platforms for local authorities to interact with citizens on issues concerning development especially with regards to agricultural development projects. 99% of the survey respondents indicated that they have participated in meetings with local authorities to make decisions about agricultural development projects in their chiefdom. The study revealed that as a result of this project community members including women and PWDs have influenced the provision of land to women; contributed to the choices of development projects that the community embarked on; influenced the district development planning and budgeting processes and decisions in the selection of beneficiaries for government programmes.

Moreover, it was determined that duty bearers were empowered to address community issues and enhance participatory decision making. The empowerment of duty bearers and support provided to them to engage women and PWDs were therefore found effective in ensuring that they take on board the desires and aspirations of women and PWDs. The demands made by CSOs and CBOs for inclusive decision making were also considered effective in influencing positive changes among duty bearers. 67% of the survey respondents believed that duty bearers absolutely pay attention to the demands for inclusive decision making, 33% said somehow and none said not really nor definitely not.

Do you feel that duty bearers pay attention to the demands for inclusive decision making and accountability by CSOs and CBOs

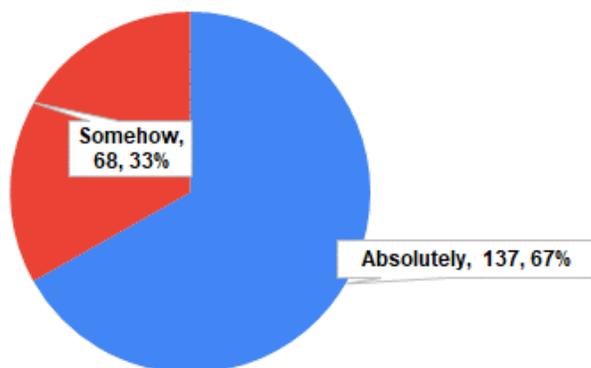


Figure 13: Perceptions of respondents on whether duty bearers pay attention to the demands for inclusive decision making and accountability by CSOs and CBOs

Community Action Groups and EMAPs established under the project were active in conducting public education activities including outreach, sensitisation and awareness raising on the harmful effects of domestic violence, wife beating, rape, early marriage, teenage pregnancy and child abuse. It was noted that skills in provision of referral services empowered the CAGs to report and monitor GBV issues including linking up survivors to service providers. These activities were effective in creating public knowledge on gender rights and influencing decision makers. For example, some widows informed the evaluation team that as a result of the project awareness raising, they were able to get back the property they had lost to their husband's relatives. CAGs have also been influential in limiting Female Genital Mutilation and initiation of girls below the age of 18. One duty bearer said;

We have banned and fined some Bondo heads throughout the Chieftom Administrative Committee for initiating girls below 18 years.

CAGs have been instrumental in supporting survivors of rape and sexual abuse to report to the police and other service providers. They have also supported in ensuring criminal cases are reported to the police.

The REFLECT methodology was found to be effective in promoting adult literacy and especially in making sure that members of the literacy cycles make use of the knowledge gained. FGDs and KIs confirmed that vulnerable women and PWDs participated in functional adult literacy trainings and were supported to identify trades of interests. They were linked up with relevant women identified in the communities to provide apprenticeship and transfer skills for them to earn income through particular trades such as weaving, hairdressing, tailoring, tie and dye among others. As shown in the chart below, 95% of survey respondents confirmed to having participated in a training of a particular trade under the project.

Have you been trained in a particular trade under this project

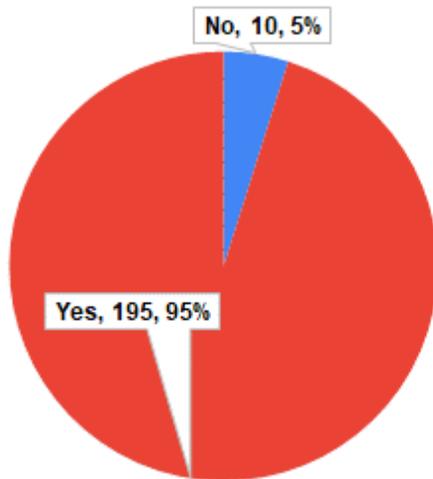


Figure 14: Participation in apprenticeship trainings

The survey further ascertained that the apprenticeship and trainings in trade were able to empower community members to earn income through the trades they were trained in; with a confirmation response of 99%.

Were you able to earn income through that trade

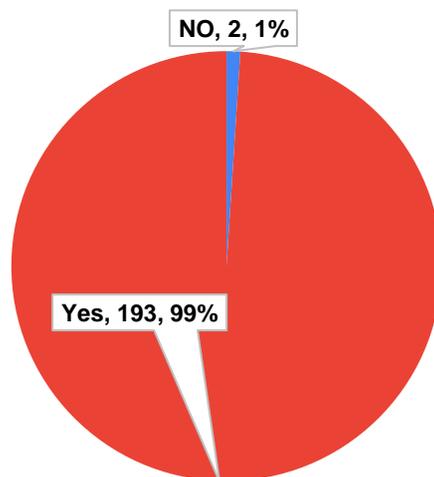


Figure 15: Ability to earn income through trade of apprenticeship training

The approach used by the project was confirmed effective in creating a multiplier impact as other community members learnt to associate themselves with people of a particular trade to adopt the trade practices, even outside the project. FGD participants highlighted that apart from receiving capacity development on trades, some were also part of the VSLs where their capacities to save money and loan to each other for purposes of boosting their businesses was enhanced. Each VSL Box they received contained seed money that supported their initial business activities and sustained the VSLs.

3.3.3. Efficiency

Overall, the project was found to be efficient in its use of time and resources. It was ascertained that project beneficiaries especially NGOs, CBOs, duty bearers, REFLECT members, Literacy Cycles, women groups and traders were convinced that the project was highly efficient and represented value for money. The evaluation team confirmed that project inception meetings held at the onset of the project were vital in directing the project to address real needs and target deserving beneficiaries and this avoided wastages. As a result, capacity development programmes and engagement meetings were found efficient in as far as they empowered the local communities and ensured beneficiaries put into practice the skills acquired.

Project NGOs confirmed that technical skills and mentorship provided under this project enabled the project to save resources instead of hiring separate consultants and experts. Project NGOs were able to acquire skills in resource mobilisation, grant management, quality programme implementation and monitoring and evaluation practically under this project; through their interaction with APT. In addition, as a result of the capacity development they were able to put in place control systems and develop their own policies and strategic plans without the intensive use of consultants, which would have costed the project a lot. The interaction with APT was a thorough process that ensured that project NGOs were supported regularly; and that the project remained relevant, efficient and effective throughout its lifespan. One of the coordinators of the NGOs said;

Before project implementation we did not have a book-keeping system and were not following any particular format in terms of accountability. Now, as a result of the trainings acquired, I am happy to inform you that our programmes unit is totally separate from finance, admin and M&E. We now have a system of making requests and getting them approved before activity implementation. After implementation, receipts and reports are submitted and we keep files. I am so proud of this project.

Additionally, working with locally based CSOs and CBOs ensured that activities were organised and implemented locally. This was found to be cost effective rather than acquiring external experts to conduct trainings, organise meetings and create awareness raising; which would have demanded a lot of resources in covering their flight tickets, accommodation and feeding costs. Most importantly, working through locally established CSOs, CBOs partners and stakeholders saved the project from setting up project management structures at chiefdom and community level that could have attracted huge costs. Although APT had no district offices to support project operations, there was evidence of proper coordination and collaboration by its co-lead partners.

Project beneficiaries were purposefully selected and this contributed to project effectiveness. Apprenticeship facilitators were selected from people engaged in certain trades in a participatory manner involving community stakeholders. This ensured commitment and continuity. Project CBOs on the other hand were selected based on a mapping exercise with a criteria that looked at the most disadvantaged, but had been engaging in governance and women empowerment projects.

3.3.4. Inclusiveness

The project was found to be inclusive in terms of reaching out to different categories of beneficiaries. Each group of beneficiaries included vulnerable women, PWDs including women PWDs and child mothers. There was notable evidence that gender and disability considerations

were made in the recruitment of participants of capacity development activities, trainings and recruitment of apprenticeship members.

Additionally, it was also noted that within the implementing consortium, decision making was inclusive and mostly involved all the consortium partners. However, MUWODA felt that its relationship with CARD was not equal as CARD ended up playing much of the coordinating role and making decisions on behalf of MUWODA. It was also noted that CARD's previous Coordinator who played an active role in designing the project passed away within the inception phase of the project and this affected the morale of other members. Fortunately, CARD's M&E Coordinator stepped up to ensure continuation. The project partners had a general active WhatsApp group that kept partners informed of individual activities and provided status on activity implementation.

Importantly, the project was found to be inclusive in terms of challenging patriarchy, gender stereotypes and norms that perpetuate inequalities. It was determined that the project contributed to shifting gender norms by promoting women's access and control over land, their participation in household and community decision making processes and enhanced participatory planning and decision-making processes. In addition, the project empowered women economically due to income generation activities brought about by the apprenticeship, participation in VSLA, control over household assets and equality in economic decision making at household level. The project was able to build positive masculinities through building public knowledge on the rights of women and PWDs, thus contributing to eliminating the barriers to women's participation in development including in decision making and in economic activities. Traditional and religious leaders who are custodians of culture and religion were involved in the project as duty bearers and attested to having changed their perceptions with regards to women's inclusion and empowerment. The FGDs with men revealed changed attitudes and norms. One male FGD participant in Tunkia chiefdom said:

We had intergenerational dialogue sessions with the young men; had meetings involving CSOs and CBOs who opened our minds to understand that some of the things we were doing in the name of culture were combining to make our women miserable and we were in fact violating their rights. A lot of changes happened as a result of this project, including reduced wife battering and involvement of girls in education.

The evaluation established that knowledge of disability issues improved. Before project implementation, communities were side-lining PWDs with little understanding of their needs. PWDs expressed appreciation over the project's ability to influence perceptions, norms, and attitudes. One PWD beneficiary supported by the project said:

Before the project, they used to call me names and treat me like an abandoned person. Now they've started changing their attitudes towards me. The discrimination is beginning to reduce due to awareness raising. Now I serve them and their children so they start to acknowledge that anyone can do something when exposed to opportunities.

Confidence levels were seen as having improved among PWDs. In addition, PWD issues are being mainstreamed into community byelaws and public service provision. One PWD said:

Because people's perceptions about disability are changing; they are now providing more support to PWDs, and there are even byelaws put in place to protect PWDs. PWDs now have access to land for agricultural activities.

One of the artisans confirmed the participation of PWDs in apprenticeship activities:

There are women PWDs that are interested in my trade. I have been training a woman PWD, and she moved from the streets where she was begging because Brighter Future brought the EU/APT Project. She admitted joining and has benefitted greatly.

FGD and KII participants highlighted that the project created awareness on the importance of girl child education and therefore contributed to changing perceptions and attitudes. It was therefore ascertained that wife battering and abuse reduced and reporting of cases of GBV including rape and physical assault increased. This was confirmed by both the Ministry of Gender and Children Affairs, traditional authorities and the Family Support Unit. One CBO member said, in an interview;

So many bad things would have continued to happen if CARD and its partners had not come to this Chiefdom. I am talking about the marginalisation, abuse, rape and violence against women and PWDs. The people would have continued to be in the dark and remain marginalised. This, worsened by the illiteracy and poverty would have just made the rest of our people so so sad.

The District Council confirmed that women and PWD participated in the needs assessment and articulation of issues to be included in the District Development Plan; as part of the activities implemented by project NGOs and CBOs. They also participated in validations and budget accountability sessions where they asked critical questions aimed to promote transparency and accountability. One representative of the PWDs said in a FGD;

More than ever in the history of Kenema, this project made me and other PWDs feel that we are part of the development process. I took part in meetings to talk about allocation of agricultural inputs that were being distributed by the Ministry of Agriculture, I also went to talk on Radio to demand authorities to look into PWD issues during COVID-19; many thanks to CARD and Brighter Futures.

One of the traditional leaders interviewed believed the project was inclusive because, while empowering the women; it also targeted men for awareness raising on the rights of women and positive masculinity. This ensured that men do not resist the empowerment activities for women. In addition, he stated that homeless and street mothers were also included in the project, in apprenticeship and literacy programmes thus giving them opportunity to raise income and lead independent lives. He additionally noted that in Nomo and Rambia Chiefdoms, they were able to start 8 more FAL cycles following the methodologies employed by CARD.

3.3.5. Impact

The impact of the project is a product of its responsiveness to the needs of the targeted beneficiaries. As has already been articulated above, the project was designed to address specific challenges associated with CSOs' and CBOs limited skills as well as the low participation of women in sustainable development activities, illiteracy, marginalisation and poverty among other ills. The evaluation team noted signs of impact economically, socially and culturally at individual, community and structural levels.

Signs of impact were noted among project NGOs and CBOs. Policy documents produced during project implementation were seen in the offices of project NGOs, who testified that their understanding of enhancing accountability and instituting control systems were built through capacity development activities implemented under the project. NGOs also noted their ability to train CBOs, conduct timely activity implementation and reporting as signs of project impact. One of the NGO representatives interviewed said;

This organisation's capacity was enhanced. Now we have a Strategic Plan (2021 to 2025). We also developed our Finance and Procurement Policy, Disability and Safeguarding Policy, Code of Conduct, reviewed our Constitution and our Board

now has an equal number of men and women. We now have systems for monitoring and evaluation including templates for tracking attendance, monthly, quarterly and annual reporting. Before this time, we were just implementing activities and our partners, mostly INGOs were responsible for reporting.

It was ascertained that CBOs also improved their capacity and status. The project empowered CBOs to formally register their organisations and put in place appropriate systems to ensure effective project implementation. Project CBOs indicated that, as a result of project implementation, they were able to frame their mandate, objectives and key result areas. In addition, they no longer just implement and attend activities; but plan, budget, implement and report. Almost all the CBOs spoken to opened bank accounts, improved financial management and record keeping as a result of their association with the project.

The project was also found impactful in terms of building the capacity of CSOs to promote the inclusive decision-making processes, women and PWD empowerment, and building trust between duty bearers and rights holders. The Project Coordinator for one of the NGOs highlighted.

Before project implementation, we did not actually know the strategies we should employ to get the authorities to pay attention to the demands of youth, women and PWDs in a non-violent manner. There was a lot of friction between civil society and local authorities. This project empowered us by giving us the tools and empowered the authorities to pay attention to us and to be responsive, which is a win-win situation for the betterment of our communities.

Additionally, NGOs also indicated that because of skills acquired from the project, they have been engaged in resource mobilisation activities and submitted grant proposal applications. There was evidence that project NGOs were able to expand their activities to other chiefdoms and communities because of knowledge acquired from this project.

Public sensitisations and trainings in women's rights, inclusion and GBV were key in developing the confidence levels of women and their ability to express themselves. One women's leader propounded;

Before this time, our women were ashamed to express themselves in public, but this project has empowered them so much that some of them are even more bold to face the duty bearers and their abusers.

In addition, the project was impactful in terms of positioning women to take part in leadership structures at household and community level by shifting patriarchal norms and challenges. The results of the FGDs and KIIs show that within the past 36 months representation of women at community and chiefdom level decision making structures improved. The evaluation team met women who noted having been appointed in Village, Chiefdom and Ward Development Communities who confirmed their active participation and decision making within these structures. Other communities that did not have the position of Mummy Queen¹ before the project implementation also indicated that this position is now being highly recognised and respected. One of the women FGD participants in Lower Bambara Chiefdom said;

¹ Mummy queen is the female representative of the chiefdom

Because of the agricultural activities that this project encouraged us to participate in, we have started earning monies from our proceeds. As a result, we have changed our methods because we now understand how to calculate our profits. We gained a lot of power and respect from our husbands, their relatives and the community in general.

In another FGD discussion with men in Nono chiefdom; one participant said;

The trade and business training activities helped women to generate income. Now they are contributing to meeting household needs and we share household responsibilities unlike before. They have money and that means they are deciding on issues related to expenditure and use of finances in the homes. This was also easier for us the men because, we engaged in various trainings facilitated by CARD and other organisations.

Indeed, women also confirmed this. One woman said;

Before the project, to be honest, a lot of us women thought that making money was the responsibility of the men while we women will be taking care of the house, cleaning and cooking. This has changed. We now are able to raise money and now we share responsibilities with the men. When we go for our income generation ventures, they sometimes accept to stay home and be with the children until we return back.

One female member of a CBO interviewed said;

We the women are now enjoying our rights better than before. We are taking decisions and participating in development processes in our homes, at community, chiefdom and district levels. This is a result of the intervention of CARD and its partners. Men now understand that even in the groups we establish at community level; women have the right to vote and to be voted for including in any local authority position.

The impact of FAL activities was witnessed as FAL members testified that prior to project implementation they were totally illiterate but were now able to write and do simple calculations to manage their businesses. This was also confirmed by the FAL facilitators. The project created the culture of promoting literacy among community members. The approach used was easier for CBOs and FAL facilitators to replicate at minimal cost. One of the CBOs said;

Here, we targeted 700 women. I can confirm that over 500 are now able to do basic reading and calculations. In each of the 28 circles that have 25 learners, at least 19 per circle now consider themselves literate.

To appreciate the impact of the FAL programme on her life; one woman said;

Some of us were not able to read and write; but now we can do it. It has helped us to be bold in our communities and minimise the public embarrassment that comes with illiteracy. Now I can talk with confidence and understand how to count my monies and plan for my expenditures.

A majority of the FAL members were found to be VSLA members who also used proceeds from VSL activities as seed money for their small businesses. VSA kits were distributed including seed

grants. Project beneficiaries including duty bearers confirmed that VSL groups established under the project were active, with bank accounts and savings. FAL members acknowledged that they understood their business well because they were able to keep daily records of their daily transactions, calculate profit and loss, keep databases of clients and shopping lists. Additionally, FAL activities empowered them to understand how to do cash books and manage time.

The evaluation team visited the business sites of ten young women across the targeted communities engaged in various trades including tailoring, weaving, hairdressing, and embroidery who confirmed that they were putting into practice skills acquired from the apprenticeship trainings. The comprehensive apprenticeship and business management trainings were influential in grooming young women including child mothers into business management and income generation. Income levels among the women increased leading to enhanced status and recognition at household and community level. Women's decision making and respect to their human rights increased at household and decision making. Apprenticeship and business management trainings were therefore impactful as they led to women's meaningful participation in income generating activities. The Ministry of Gender and Children Affairs, said in an interview;

Before this time most women in these communities thought that tailoring was a male only business. This project changed the narrative by encouraging women, building their skills, providing apprenticeship training and seed money. Now people understand that what men can do, women can even do better.

One Religious Leader (Pastor) said;

You see, these activities minimised laziness among our young women and youth in general. We have seen PWDs and young women more ambitious to make money than never before. Inculcating this culture was never easy, and the project helped us.

Though acknowledging the overall positive impact of the project, it is vital to note that the apprenticeship programme and women's business ventures were affected by COVID-19. During the COVID-19 period women's income generating activities recorded a drop in profits as a result of increased prices of goods and services.

Advocacy and awareness raising on women's and PWDs' rights and gender related issues were found impactful in building public knowledge around GBV, which led to a reduction in GBV cases and increased reporting. Increased knowledge and use of the GBV referral pathway was evidenced with the stories of survivors of GBV who managed to get justice through the legal system and were supported to physically heal. One of the key partners of the NGOs, Rainbo Initiative, an organisation that provides free health and psychosocial care to survivors of SGBV confirmed that they have supported survivors brought to their centre by project CBOs. Through creating an empowering Action Groups who attended EMAP sessions, the project implemented community activities able to create awareness around GBV and support survivors to access services. It was confirmed that domestic violence cases declined because of the project implementation. In addition, there was increased uptake of Reproductive Health products, and this is attributed to awareness created by this project.

Signs of impact were also noted with changes among duty bearers who were key beneficiaries of the project. Duty bearers enhanced their inclusivity arising from increased awareness around gender and women empowerment. One of the traditional leaders said;

We were collecting monies from women who were reported by their husband for refusing to have sex with them; as a form of penalty. This has stopped because we now understand that they have a right and it is not a crime for them to refuse their husbands; rather it is a violation of their rights for their husband to force them.

Duty bearers confirmed that their perceptions changed as a result of the trainings offered through the project. They expressed increased knowledge of gender laws and the GBV service providers. Women were also noticed among duty bearers and this was an outcome alluded to the effectiveness of the project. In another male discussion group, one participant said;

This project really informed us about key actions that constitute violence against women. It created space where women, men and children including those with disabilities can together to discuss about their rights and responsibilities within the home and the community. I should say, I came out a different person, much respectful and tolerant of my wife and my children's views. If there are issues, we talk and settle them as a family, no need for fighting.

The evaluation team found evidence to conclude that through the capacity building sessions, community groups strengthened their skills and knowledge on existing local governance structures and how they work to develop communities. The trainings empowered not only CSOs but women, youth and PWDs; through various platforms to champion community outreach sessions and media sensitization. Some of the CBOs reached indicated that they were linked to Starline Radio and thus conducted media engagement activities including radio discussions promoting women's issues and advocating for inclusive decision-making processes. Most of the key informants as well as the FGD respondents interviewed in all the communities perceived the sensitization messages on health as an eye opener for participation and women's rights. Project reports have also shown that the community structures were able to monitor budgets and the implementation of chiefdom development plans.

3.3.6. Accountability

Findings of the evaluation exercise revealed that the project's accountability processes were active in ensuring community feedback and regular communication with the consortium. Project beneficiaries view the project as highly participatory and engaging. Officials of the District Council found the inception meetings and mapping exercises conducted to select target communities and beneficiaries as acts of accountability. The evaluation found the project to be highly accountable because impacts and changes were driven by community members which resulted in ownership of project activities. Project beneficiary groups including FAL members, VSL groups, REFLECT participants, duty bears, women groups and Action groups revealed that they have had access to review meetings of project implementation including meetings with APT and European Union. They see these as processes of not only promoting transparency, but also ownership and beneficiary empowerment.

Consortium partners reported mutual accountability among members and noted that systems and processes for ensuring accountability were set up from the onset of the project. Regular coordination meetings ensured that they were accountable to each other. This included quality programme implementation systems as well as financial accountability and transparency. APT was active in ensuring transparency and promoting donor accountability among implementing partners. Additionally, internal accountability was promoted within each of the implementing partners as they instituted control systems that promoted accountability.

The project revealed collaboration between the consortium and the different players involved in project implementation i.e. both beneficiaries and stakeholders. Each of the project NGOs had Project Officers stationed in the project sites providing a clear feedback and complaints mechanism. Project CBOs reported that they were linked up in constant communication with the project CSOs and provided continuous support to other beneficiary groups. The project steering committee met twice per year and included 31 representatives composed of women, young mothers (one each from each chiefdom), two CBOs, two NGO members from each NGO, ONE PWD representative, Kenema District Council representatives and Line Ministries (Youth, Gender).

The impact of the project was also seen with women and youth including those with disabilities being active in demanding transparency and accountability in public service provision. As a result of the platforms set for community members to interact with chiefdom and community level authorities, community members were confident to seek clarity and ask questions to authorities regarding public service provision. This is a result of the EMAP, Action Groups and Civic Education activities brought about by the project. In a FGD one woman said;

The project helped us to be involved in how public services were delivered through provision of information from staff of the council, Chiefs and MDAs, teachers, nurses and Agriculture Extension Officers. We have been asking them questions and even telling them the kind of development we want to see. They have also gone on radio to explain issues we are concerned about and some changes have taken place.

Additionally; a Council Official said;

Now communities understand how they can get their issues included in the District Development Plan, how they can participate in the budgeting processes and even monitor and evaluate public service providers in their own interest. We have seen increased collaboration between the community and public servants as a result of this project.

3.3.7. Sustainability

The evaluation team noted significant capacity of CBOs and CSOs in the management of their organisations including in instituting control systems and processes for quality project implementation and reporting. Capacity development programmes targeting project NGOs and CBOs promoted a culture of organisational development that is likely to thrive beyond project implementation. Additionally, the project brought together duty bearers and citizens including vulnerable women and PWDs to decision making platforms that enhanced participatory planning and promoted accountability in service provision. Strong collaboration between CSOs/ CBOs and the media in terms of bringing out issues related to public service delivery, inclusion and women's issues was seen as a positive outcome of this project that is likely to continue. Benefits of this relationship, inculcated by the project are likely to be sustained beyond project implementation. The project positively impacted on patriarchy, shifting norms and attitudes towards respect for women and PWDs' rights at community and household levels. These changes that permeate society and have influenced the composition of key chiefdom and village structures for inclusive and participatory decision making are likely to be endured after project implementation.

The project created structures that gave status to community people such as FALs, VSLA, Action Groups, apprenticeship groups, and REFLECT platforms. The evaluation team cannot say with certainty that it ascertained continuation of activities at the same pace as under the project; but

established that beneficiaries would want to continue to be associated with the groups established by the project. VSLAs in particular were found to be self-sustaining given the fact that members mastered the art of running the schemes, run bank accounts providing credit to each other and a system of continually saving. Some VSLA members told the evaluation team that they were ready to support a FAL group composed of out of school girls that they recently mobilised and hoped to replicate the same methodologies that were employed under the project. Almost all the FGDs members confirmed that VSLs were functional and were to continue. In addition, evidence of continuity was noted with women engaged in various trades who already acquired skills from the apprenticeship programme. The community's active involvement in preventing and responding to domestic violence, GBV and sexual abuse including rape is likely to be sustained beyond the implementation of the project. Knowledge of referral pathways increased and communities are likely to use the referral pathways beyond this project. In addition, increased uptake of SRH products is likely to continue.

Participants of the VSLs and apprenticeship project were found to be well connected with their artisans and determined to improve their business ventures. For instance, the survey conducted by the NGOs quoted a woman saying;

I and my bosom friend are planning to erect a kiosk and start working on our own.

Another one said;

I am working on opening my business hairdressing salon

Other beneficiaries of the VSLs expressed desire to grow the scheme outside the chiefdom, train other people who were not part of the scheme such as religious group members, friends and family.

The project generated a lot of community interest in young mothers, women, and PWDs' participation in economic activities. Participants are concerned that the involvement of other people who did not benefit from this project would require investment in initial capital and seed money which is complicated without a funded programme. Similarly, the literacy activities require investment in academic materials like stationery that the project provided for. The same applies to the apprenticeship programme because training materials and equipment are also required. However, it is hoped that VSLAs will continue to be sustained and support some of these activities.

4. CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. Conclusions

- The project's activities were found to be relevant in addressing the challenges identified prior to project implementation. Project activities were relevant in developing NGOs' staff capacity in project writing, management, disability and inclusion, financial and project management as well as monitoring and evaluation skills among other skills. Project stakeholders appreciated the relevance of the project in enhancing women's participation and changing patriarchal perceptions and attitudes.
- The evaluation team noted especially high familiarity and ownership of the project among beneficiary groups such as REFLECT, EMAP, VSLAs, FAL circles, Oversight Groups and

CBOs. Project NGOs and CBOs noted that the project was unique in as far as it worked with community structures, building their skills and ensuring these skills translate into real change in terms of empowerment and inclusive decision making.

- Generally, the project was found to be aligning with the priorities of Kenema District Development Plan and contributed to promoting food security and increasing household income by linking up women to income generating activities through the VSLA programme, apprenticeship, and literacy programmes.
- The project approach was found to be highly effective in meeting the intended outcomes. The project document was articulate in terms of defining partners' responsibilities, especially tapping on the skills possessed by each partner.
- The mentoring, coaching and training methodologies and content employed to build the capacities of project NGOs were effective in enhancing inclusive governance and development processes. APT empowered project NGOs by providing skills in gender mainstreaming, inclusivity; as well as building capacity in managerial, organisational, and technical skills. These skills were translated into improved inclusivity and improved organisational management.
- the project was effective in enhancing the participation of women in decision making processes at chiefdom, community and village levels. It was noted that as a result of project implementation, women, youth and PWDs took part in platforms for decision making in their communities. Such platforms included Ward Development Committees, Village Development Committees, Oversight Committees and other community related platforms.
- the project was effective in creating platforms for local authorities to interact with citizens on issues concerning development especially with regards to agricultural development projects. 99% of the survey respondents indicated that they have participated in meetings with local authorities to make decisions about agricultural development projects in their chiefdom. The study revealed that as a result of this project community members including women and PWDs have influenced the provision of land to women; contributed to the choices of development project that the community embarked on; influenced the district development planning and budgeting processes and made decisions in the selection of beneficiaries for government programmes.
- The REFLECT methodology was found to be effective in promoting adult literacy and especially in making sure that members of the literacy circles make use of the knowledge gained. FGDs and KIs confirmed that vulnerable women and PWDs participated in functional adult literacy trainings and were supported to identify trades of interests.
- Overall, the project was found to be efficient in its use of time and resources. It was ascertained that project beneficiaries especially NGOs, CBOs, duty bearers, REFLECT members, Literacy Circles, women groups and traders were convinced that the project was highly effective and represented value for money. Project NGOs confirmed that technical skills and mentorship provided under this project enabled the project to save resources instead of hiring separate consultants and experts.
- Additionally, working with locally based CSOs and CBOs ensured that activities were organised and implemented locally. This was found to be cost effective rather than acquiring external experts to conduct trainings, organise meetings and create awareness raising; which would have demanded a lot of resources in covering their flight tickets, accommodation and feeding costs.
- The project was found to be inclusive in terms of reaching out to different categories of beneficiaries. Each group of beneficiaries included vulnerable women, PWDs including women PWDs and child mothers. There was notable evidence that gender and disability considerations were made in the recruitment of participants of capacity development activities, trainings and recruitment of apprenticeship members.

- Importantly, the project was found to be inclusive in terms of challenging patriarchy, gender stereotypes and norms that perpetuate inequalities. It was determined that the project shifted gender norms by promoting women's access and control over land, their participation in household and community decision making processes and enhanced participatory planning and decision-making processes.
- The impact of the project is a product of its responsiveness to the needs of the targeted beneficiaries. Signs of impact were noted with changes among duty bearers who were key beneficiaries of the project. Duty bearers enhanced their inclusivity arising from increased awareness around gender and women empowerment.
- The evaluation team found evidence to conclude that through the capacity building sessions, community groups strengthened their skills and knowledge on existing local governance structures and how they work to develop communities. These trainings empowered not only CSOs but women, youth and PWDs; through various platforms to champion community outreach sessions and media sensitization.
- Findings of the evaluation exercise revealed that the project's accountability processes were active in ensuring community feedback and regular communication with the consortium. Project beneficiaries view the project as highly participatory and engaging.
- The evaluation team noted significant capacity of CBOs and CSOs in the management of their organisations including in instituting control systems and processes for quality project implementation and reporting. Capacity development programmes targeting project NGOs and CBOs promoted a culture of organisational development that is likely to thrive beyond project implementation.
- The project was implemented throughout the COVID-19 period. Thus, project output achievement was not affected. However, individual income declined as a result of the downturn of the economy as well as increased prices of goods and services.

4.2. Recommendations and Lessons

Given the above mentioned findings and conclusions, the following recommendations were made.

4.2.1. Programming Design

- The project was found to be designed based on defined needs of communities ensuring the active participation of beneficiaries and stakeholders from the onset of the project. Given the success of this project in influencing positive masculinity, promoting women empowerment and addressing poverty issues, it is recommended that similar approaches to programme implementation be replicated in future designs.
- Capacity development of NGO and CBO structures facilitated a trickle-down approach and empowered grassroots organisations to be active and vibrant in the promotion of social accountability, inclusive development planning and economic development. This approach is unique and commendable for its ability to ensure gains are sustained beyond project implementation. It is therefore recommended that future programming consider this approach.
- It was also noted that activities were clearly defined among consortium partners promoting mutual accountability and transparency. This is a positive principle that should be considered in designing projects in future.
- Incorporating economic empowerment activities into projects targeted at enhancing inclusive decision making was found to be a favourable approach.
- However, despite the positive aspects in project design noted above; it was indicated that the project was packed with too many activities distributed among several beneficiaries.

Concentrating on a particular set of beneficiaries over time can be an alternative best option that the evaluation team would like to recommend.

- Some NGO staff indicated that project resources were overstretched because the project sought to impact on the lives of many people. Logistics was a challenge particularly in terms of transportation given the fact that the consortium acquired only one vehicle under the project.

4.2.2. Partnership and Synergy

- The project owes its success to a strong consortium that integrated capacity development into programme implementation, thus promoting transparency, accountability, effectiveness and efficiency. Project implementers improved the management of their organisations while also strengthening implementation, accountability and reporting. This is something commendable and worth emulating in partnership strengthening.
- However, there was no evidence of a sustainability plan that would ensure continued tracking of the benefits gained that have potential of continuity. Indeed, there were evidences of project sustainability among key gains as cited above. If this is clearly articulated in a sustainability plan that ensures shared responsibilities among consortium partners and stakeholders, it would ensure that such gains are tracked and that consortium partners will not lose track of these gains.
- The project did well in promoting in-house capacity building support and this can be a lesson in other settings.

4.2.3. Monitoring and Evaluation and Knowledge Management

- Knowledge management is self-empowering and institutions such as APT have comparative advantage in building the capacity of NGOs and CBOs to effectively put in place mechanisms for organisational development including departmental growth.
- Development of standard reporting mechanisms and structures for project implementation and reporting with key specific indicators is key to promoting project success. The study revealed that investing in Designing, Monitoring and Evaluation is key to knowledge management.
- Some of the project stakeholders expressed uncertainty over project continuity. FAL members for instance, indicated that they were still attending FAL sessions and wanted them to continue. Project closure workshops are a good way to end a project and gain community feedback. These sessions are also key in facilitating participatory appraisals and action planning for sustainability.
- There seemed to be limited experience sharing and internal learnings among project beneficiaries. This could have been enhanced through exchange visits and community of practice sessions. There could be much to learn among beneficiaries that could enrich the experience of each partner. Thus, knowledge and experience should have a place in future project through an approach that demonstrates value for money and better knowledge management.

4.2.4. Scaling Up

- Expanding this intervention in other communities and districts would be worthwhile given the progress made. Replicating it in other parts of the country should be considered to give a stronger voice to women's issues, citizens' participation and inclusive decision making at household and community level.

Response from CARD and APT on the Evaluation Recommendations

Comment: *The project was packed with too many activities distributed among several beneficiaries. Concentrating on a particular set of beneficiaries over time can be an alternative best option that the evaluation team would like to recommend.*

Response: The scope of the project did engage with many different beneficiary groups, but this was necessary to enable disadvantaged groups to also be fully engaged in a strengthened civil society in the medium-term. In this process, it was necessary to engage duty bearers, young people, women, people with disabilities, local CSOs, local NGOs and Chiefdom authorities in order to achieve the results. Some activities were added in order to ensure sustainability of the groups, such as the revolving loans for both CSOs and literacy groups.

Comment: *Some NGO staff indicated that project resources were overstretched because the project sought to impact on the lives of many people. Logistics were a challenge particularly in terms of transportation given the fact that the consortium acquired only one vehicle under the project.*

Response: Transport was a challenge. But it was difficult to justify the purchase of two vehicles when project locations could all be reached by motorbike. The budgets for transport for the three downstream partners was quite low, and this was increased during the project.

Comment: *There was no evidence of a sustainability plan that would ensure continued tracking of the benefits gained that have potential of continuity. Indeed, there were evidences of project sustainability among key gains as cited above. If this is clearly articulated in a sustainability plan that ensures shared responsibilities among consortium partners and stakeholders, it would ensure that such gains are tracked and that consortium partners will not lose track of these gains.*

Response: The sustainability plan was implemented after the evaluation was conducted in the final months of the project. Each community and CBO were reminded of their responsibilities and oversight committees have been set up to provide support to ongoing to the CBOs (including their VSLAs), apprenticeships, literacy classes and for the Action Groups for the EMAP. Funds were not available for continued monitoring of the project under the contract with EU. The 5 NGOs are all committed to maintaining contact with and following up on the progress of the communities and groups and are planning further projects with some groups.

Comment: *Some of the project stakeholders expressed uncertainty over project continuity. FAL members for instance, indicated that they were still attending FAL sessions and wanted them to continue. Project closure workshops are a good way to end a project and gain community feedback. These sessions are also key in facilitating participatory appraisals and action planning for sustainability.*

Response: Project closure meetings were held in each Chiefdom and with each CBO prior to the end of the project. The communities were encouraged to provide the funds themselves to continue the FAL circles without the need for external support. This is happening in some cases, with Chiefdom support and participants bringing their own writing materials.

Comment: *There seemed to be limited experience sharing and internal learnings among project beneficiaries. This could have been enhanced through exchange visits and community of practice sessions. There could be much to learn among beneficiaries that could enrich the experience of each partner. Thus, knowledge and experience should have a place in future project through an approach that demonstrates value for money and better knowledge management.*

Response: Noted. The main experience sharing activities were within each Chiefdom, which had on average 4 CBOs. These met together regularly and had opportunity to share experience. The project team and evaluation team were also able to share learning across the project to the beneficiaries. The 5 NGOs had frequent opportunity for internal learning and experience sharing. Due to the costs and logistics of travel, these opportunities were fewer for the CBOs, and this was further hindered with Covid 19 outbreak. We will incorporate more in future projects, although it is recognized that women and PWD in particular are less likely to travel for such meetings so may not be well represented. This is also a reason why we tried to keep all activities local.