

CBO Sustainability: A Review

April 2023



A Group of women who are taking part in our 'Women Changemakers' project in Sierra Leone

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Community members of Kenemanjaila, Southern Sierra Leone.



Acronyms

CBO	Community-Based Organisation
VDC	Village Development Committee
CDC	Chiefdom Development Committee
PWD	Person with disabilities

Definitions

CBO	CBOs are organisations set up and run by the communities they aim to serve. The services any given CBO may provide are broad but can include the management and distribution of revolving loans, providing affordable access to livelihoods resources and services and establishing links within supply chains. In Sierra Leone, we work with CBOs to actively involve community members in the decision-making and leadership of our projects, the idea being that with the right tools and skills to manage their CBO, communities are able to sustain the benefits of the projects long after our support has ended.
Livelihoods	Livelihoods are the means by which households obtain and maintain access to the resources necessary to ensure their immediate and long-term survival. These essential resources are physical, natural, financial, social and political. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities, assets and entitlements both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base (Action on Poverty adapted from DFID, 2000, ' Sustainable Livelihoods Guidance Sheets ').



1. Executive Summary

MAPCO and Action on Poverty have worked in partnership to deliver livelihoods and community-led development projects in Sierra Leone since 2004. This review was carried out to enable MAPCO and Action on Poverty to review the sustainability of our interventions with 27 Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) across Sierra Leone.

This review adds to findings from the Life After MAPCO study conducted in 2018, by focusing on CBOs supported by projects which ended between 2018 and 2021.

The objectives of this review are as follows:

1. To review the sustainability of former project interventions with CBOs – including: how CBOs have managed the project exit, what they are doing now, current organisational health and capacity, experiences, linkages to local governance structures, learning and challenges faced.
2. To identify what types of support might be required for CBOs in the post-project period to maximise chances of long-term sustainability.

Key Findings:

There is a high rate of survival of CBOs supported by MAPCO and Action on Poverty. Of the 27 CBOs studied, 19 (70%) are still in operation. Of these, 30% (eight) are strong CBOs, 40% (11) are weaker CBOs and 30% of CBOs (eight) are no longer operating. Of those no longer operating, 50% (four) are dormant CBOs still continuing with group agricultural activities and the remaining 50% have fully collapsed. Given the challenges faced by CBOs in recent years, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the rising cost of living, this rate of CBO survival is a good achievement.

The CBO model is continuing to promote inclusive community-led development in rural Sierra Leone, with high levels of inclusion of women, people with disabilities and young people within CBO membership and leadership structures.



Success Factors

Key factors influencing the success of the CBOs are:

- Strong, transparent and responsive executive leadership
- Well managed revolving loan and seed bank schemes
- Effective CBO management (monthly CBO meetings, operation of bank accounts, regular leadership elections, creation of CBO by-laws)
- Improvements to CBO services and income diversification
- Effective linkages created to local governance structures (VDCs, CDCs)
- Development of plans for the future

Lessons Learnt

- The collapse of revolving loan schemes is closely linked to risk of CBO collapse.
- Agricultural support schemes (seed banks) are the most popular CBO service with better prospects for sustainability than the revolving loan scheme
- Large membership sizes of CBOs can be difficult to maintain post project exit.



Photo: Hawa, Satta, Mamakor and Koneh (l-r) from the village of Kenema Njeia, Sierra Leone, have created a revolving loan fund from the money they made farming and selling okra.

Recommendations

- Strengthen post project monitoring and follow up, particularly to improve the sustainability of CBO revolving loan schemes.
- Review CBO membership numbers in future projects, or grow the membership at a slower, more manageable rate.
- Strengthen relationships and linkages with local governance structures for improved oversight and accountability of CBO activities post-project exit.
- Strengthen CBO leadership.



2. Introduction

MAPCO (Sierra Leone) and Action on Poverty (UK) have been engaged in setting up and supporting CBOs to develop and thrive in Sierra Leone since 2004. Through several rounds of programme funding, 91 CBOs have been reached and together the partners have developed and refined the CBO model for sustainable community development.

To assess how these CBOs have fared once programme support has ended and to further refine the model, MAPCO and Action on Poverty conducted a review in 2018 of the status of 64 CBOs supported between 2004 and 2013. This review aims to follow up and build on these findings, by reviewing the current status of 27 CBOs supported between 2014 and 2021.

i. The MAPCO/Action on Poverty Partnership

MAPCO and Action on Poverty began their partnership in 1992, developing and implementing projects led by Action on Poverty in partnership with MAPCO as the implementing partner on a number of large funded projects.

Movement for Assistance and Promotion of Rural Communities (MAPCO) was established in 1986 by a group of women in Maka village, Malen chiefdom, Pujehun district, with the aim of pooling their resources together to save and provide small loans between themselves. MAPCO is a registered NGO with the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development.

Action on Poverty is a UK development organisation and registered charity (established in 1984) working in partnership with people in Sierra Leone, Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania to build a world where everyone can work with pride for a better future, by building livelihoods and transforming lives.



The MAPCO and Action on Poverty partnership has successfully implemented programmes funded by UKAid, Comic Relief and the National Lottery Community Fund, among others, across districts of the Southern, Eastern and Northern regions of post-conflict Sierra Leone.

Over the years Action on Poverty has worked with MAPCO to strengthen their organisational development, leading to MAPCO recently accessing a grant directly from the European Union for the first time in a project implementing the CBO model in Pujehun district (2019-2022), with technical support from Action on Poverty.



Baindu is the leader of a women's subgroup CBO in Koiva, Sierra Leone: 'it is the right of the woman to access food at home.'

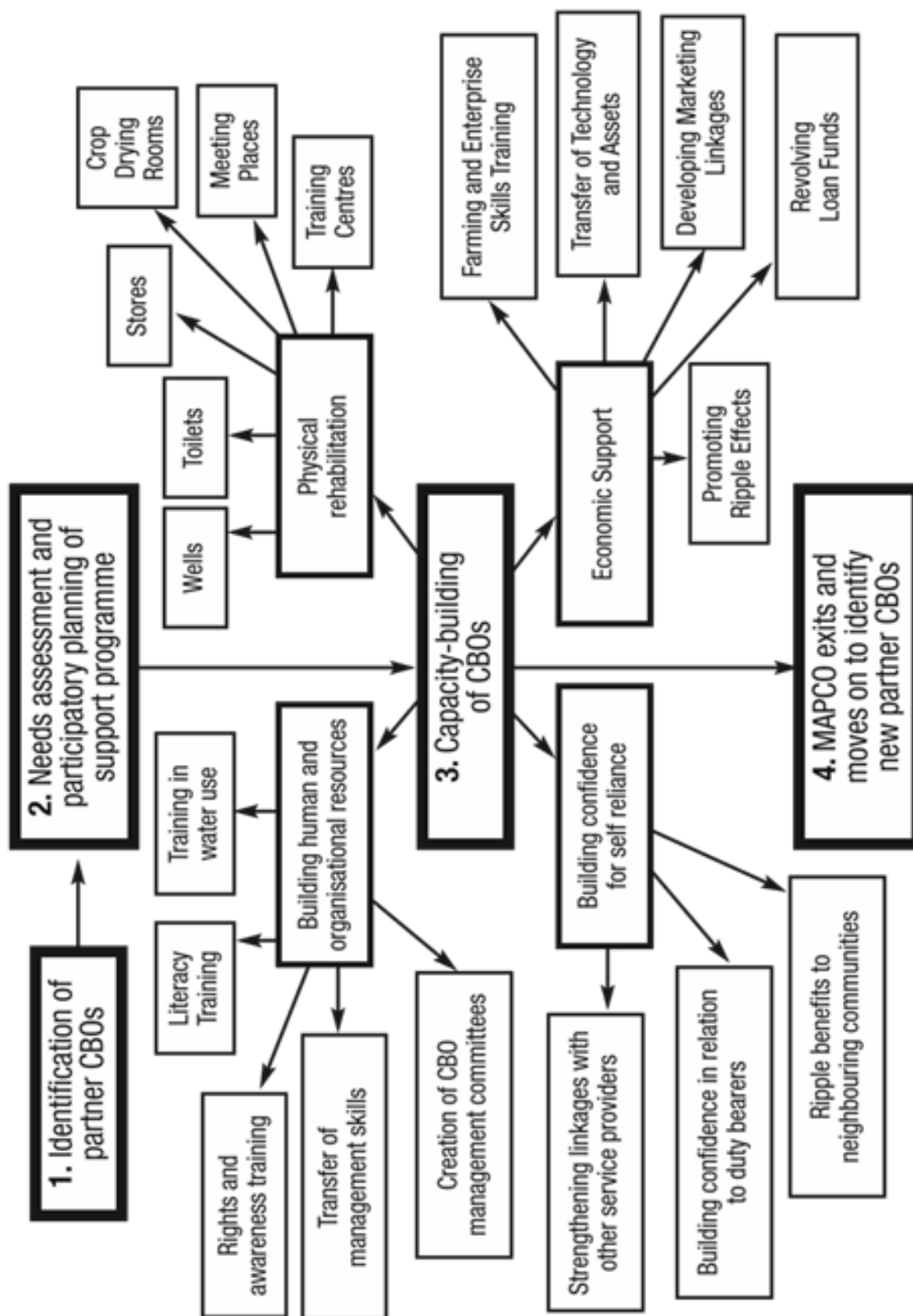
ii. Community-Based Support Model: an Overview

MAPCO and Action Poverty's Community-based support model is an approach to create, support and exit from viable, self-reliant community-based organisations (CBOs) in marginalised communities. It has been tried and tested over the last 20 years in the post-conflict context of Sierra Leone. CBOs, when operating well, can be key channels for economic and social support in communities affected by high levels of poverty.

The approach is summarised in the diagram overleaf.



MAPCO CBO SUPPORT MODEL



iii. Purpose of This Review

The objectives of this review are as follows:

1. To review the sustainability of former project interventions with CBOs—including: how CBOs have managed the project exit, what they are doing now, current organisational health and capacity, experiences, linkages to local governance structures, learning and challenges faced.
2. To identify what types of support might be required for CBOs in the post-project period to maximise chances of long-term sustainability.

iv. Selection of Communities

MAPCO and Action on Poverty have worked with 27 community-based organisations between 2014 and 2021. This period covers two projects, each lasting three years. The oldest project ended in April 2018, and the most recent project ended in June 2021.

It is recognised that there are limitations in assessing the sustainability of CBOs only one year since the most recent project ended, therefore the findings are segmented by the number of years for which the CBOs have been operating independently where applicable.

A follow-up review of CBO sustainability only one year after the end of the project also allows for potential weaknesses or issues to be identified at an earlier stage and for recommendations to be made for improving the sustainability of these CBOs, as well as applying lessons to other weaker CBOs which could encounter similar issues in future.

v. Review process

- *Desk research and documentation of CBOs established and supported during the period under review*
- *Develop survey tool for all CBOs*
- *Gather data on all 27 CBOs through community visits*
- *Identify two CBOs from each project – one successful and one weaker – for further analysis of key factors contributing to success or weakness*
- *Draft review report for feedback and discussion*
- *Finalise report for dissemination*



vi. Overview of Projects Selected for this Review

Project	Location	Activities Involved	Results Achieved
Project P187: Empowering Communities in Sierra Leone September 2014- April 2018	12 communities across Pujehun, Kenema, Tonkolili, Bonthe, Moyamba and Bo districts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WASH facilities • Revolving loan scheme • Seed bank support • Literacy training • Apprenticeships • Hygiene training • Child and women's rights awareness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1,572 families and 1,224 youth (55% women, 8% PWD) accessed social and livelihood services • 911 families and 671 youth experienced an average 74% increase in incomes • 9,090 (72%) demonstrating improved understanding and practice of safe hygiene and sanitation • All 12 communities with safe drinking water and sanitation facilities • 8,310 people with improved awareness of rights & entitlements
Project P190: Livelihoods and Food Security in Sierra Leone April 2018- June 2021	15 communities of Moyamba District, Southern Province	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WASH facilities • Nutrition training • Revolving loan scheme • Seed bank support • Literacy training • Apprenticeships • Hygiene training • Child, PWD and women's rights awareness • Fish pond development • Inclusion of satellite communities within main CBOs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 37,681 people benefitting from CBO social and livelihood services • 90% of target households (30,552 people) achieved at least a 50% increase in incomes • 15 communities with increased access to drinking water and sanitation facilities – water facilities and demonstration latrines • 99% of beneficiaries reporting eating at least two meals per day



vii. Context for CSOs in Sierra Leone

The projects selected for this review ended shortly before or during the COVID-19 pandemic. The impact of this cannot be understated, given that a report entitled 'Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Civil Society Organisations in Sierra Leone' found that 63% of CSOs were not prepared to cope with the disruption caused by the pandemic to their operations and programmes, while 38% had to close as a result.¹

The associated impact of market closures, movement restrictions and other measures severely affected the operations of CSOs and their members; the relatively new CBOs surveyed as part of this review were no exception to this—particularly in light of other challenges such as extreme poverty facing CBO communities and a volatile economic climate with very high levels of inflation.



Between 2021 and 2022, Sierra Leone's inflation rate rose fourteen points, significantly affecting livelihoods and education access for those living in rural areas, who need fuel to travel to school.

¹WACSI (2021). Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Civil Society Organisations in Sierra Leone, West Africa Civil Society Institute, Accra, Ghana



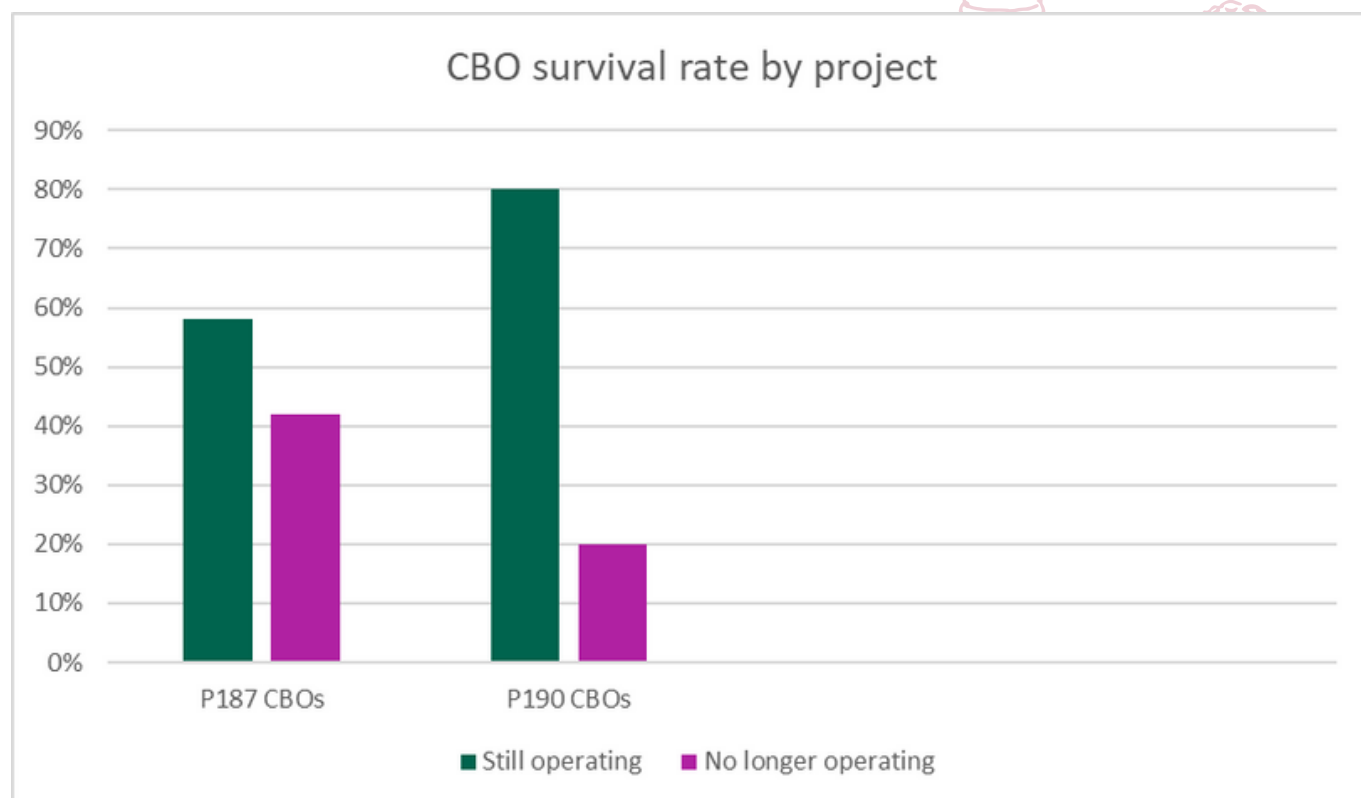
3. Results

i. Overall Findings: CBO Survival

Community visits to 27 CBOs across the six districts in three regions of Sierra Leone (North, East and South) confirmed that 19 CBOs (70%) are still operating delivering services to their communities.

Of the CBOs which have been operating independently for just over one year (Project P190), 12 of these CBOs (80%) are still in operation.

Of those which have been operating for over four years (Project P187), seven of these CBOs (58%) are still in operation. This is consistent with the rate of CBO survival reported in the Life after MAPCO study (2018) of CBOs supported within five and 11 years of the review, which found that 56% of CBOs supported by MAPCO/Action on Poverty were still in operation.



Of all the 27 CBOs studied, eight CBOs (30%) are strong CBOs, 11 (40%) are weaker CBOs and eight have collapsed (30%) since the project support ended. Of those no longer operating, 50% (four) are dormant CBOs still continuing with group agricultural activities and the remaining 50% have fully collapsed.

Strong CBOs were identified as CBOs which had continued to maintain and grow their loan fund, increased their membership or added further activities; whilst weaker CBOs were those that were still operating but with decreased membership, funds or activities. Dormant CBOs are those which have stopped operating as a fully-fledged CBO, but have continued some of the CBO activities. Collapsed CBOs are those which have completely ceased operations.

Results of Project P187

Project Duration	District	CBOs	Strong CBOs	Weak CBOs	Dormant	Collapsed	Years since project ended
2014-2018	Pujehun, Kenema, Tonkolili, Bonthe, Moyamba and Bo Districts	12	1	6	1	4	4

Results of Project P190

Project Duration	District	CBOs	Strong CBOs	Weak CBOs	Dormant	Collapsed	Years since project ended
2019-2021	Moyamba	15	7	5	3	0	1



ii. Analysis of CBOs

Members

Of the CBOs still in operation, on average 60% of their members are women, 8% are people with disabilities and 50% are young people (aged 18-35 years). This shows good levels of inclusion amongst surviving CBOs, particularly as the communities selected are mostly hard-to-reach, highly deprived communities where vulnerable groups such as women, people with disabilities and young people have traditionally been excluded from livelihood opportunities due to deeply entrenched gender discrimination and restrictive cultural norms.



Leaders



Photo: Momoh, CBO executive member in Pujehun, Sierra Leone. As a person with disabilities, Momoh told us 'it was a surprise to me that I could be part of the leadership.'

Of the CBOs still in operation, average female representation amongst the CBO executive committee was 41% (ranging between 29% and 60%). Average PWD representation on the CBO executive committee was 12% (ranging between 7% and 30%). Average representation of young people was 45% (ranging between 25% and 71%). This shows good representation of marginalised groups in leadership roles of the CBOs.

Services

Of the CBOs still in operation, 58% of these are still operating revolving loan schemes, while 42% of these loan schemes have collapsed since the end of the project. This is key as the revolving loan schemes are a powerful incentive for CBO members to attend meetings and maintain their active participation in the CBO.

Agricultural support schemes, however, were found to be more successful service overall. Of the surviving CBOs, 95% are still operating seed banks and distributing seed loans. This is particularly important for the most marginalised groups, for whom seed loans are more accessible than cash loans.



Linkages

74% of surviving CBOs engage with their respective Village Development Committees (VDCs) on a regular basis, whilst regular engagement with Ward Development Committees (WDCs) and Chiefdom Development Committees (CDCs) was less common at 21% and 26% respectively. However, many CBOs reported channelling local development issues and priorities through their VDC, to be referred onwards to WDCs, CDCs and the District Council, which suggests some improvement in linkages between community-level CSOs and local governance structures.



Photo: CBO members in Blama Massaquoi

iii. Common Trends Among CBOs Studied

Key factors for success – the following are some common trends amongst strong CBOs still in operation:

- **Strong leadership:** CBO leaders demonstrated strong leadership qualities and skills, including honesty, reliability, problem solving abilities, inclusive approaches to decision-making, willingness to learn, empathy, capacity to mobilise resources, creativity, self-motivation and initiative.
- **Well-managed revolving loan schemes and seed banks:** All of these CBOs are still operating revolving loan schemes and agricultural seed banks to support the livelihood development of their membership.
- **Monthly CBO meetings:** All of these CBOs meet regularly, on a monthly basis.
- **CBO bank accounts in operation:** All of these CBOs operate bank accounts to manage their loan funds.
- **Regular leadership elections:** All of these CBOs hold elections for the positions on the CBO management committee on an annual basis.



- **Improvements made to CBO services:** All of these CBOs reported improvements which had been made to develop their services and CBOs since the direct project support ended. CBOs also demonstrated ownership through changes that they had made to the operation of their services – for example most of these CBOs had increased the revolving loan repayment period from three months to four months based on the needs of their membership and the wider context.
- **CBO income diversification:** Some CBOs had developed their own new activities such as group farming, rice cultivation and cassava processing.
- **Linkages to local governance structures:** These CBOs described positive engagement with their local VDCs, which support them with oversight of CBO services and challenges; advising and settling disputes; and collaborative meetings on community development plans to refer onwards to WDCs and CDCs/District Council.
- **Plans for the future:** These CBOs had ambitious plans for the future of their organisations, including plans to expand the reach to satellite villages; develop into micro-finance institutions; develop enterprise and/or fundraising activities and make demands for further support from development agencies or private sector actors.

iv. Spotlight on Two Strong CBOs

CBO: Kamuyu Farmers' Association (established 2014)

Warima community

Gbokelenke chiefdom, Tonkolili district (Project P187)

- Strong executive leadership
- Well-managed revolving loan and agricultural support schemes still operating provide an incentive for the CBO membership to continue meeting on a regular basis
- The CBO is leading shareholder of the Yele community bank, enabling CBO members to benefit from a range of loan services
- Linkages established with key players in the market system – transporters, middlemen, wholesalers, regulators etc.
- Encouraging equal access and non-discrimination in access to CBO services
- Oversight roles and support from community stakeholders and relevant service providers to ensure timely repayment and disbursement of loans.



CBO: Ngewo-ye MAPCO Development Association (established 2018)

Pelewahun community

Kamajei chiefdom, Moyamba district (Project P190)

- Strong executive leadership
- CBO provides palm oil processing services to CBO members and satellite communities for an affordable fee.
- CBO has also developed its own mechanised rice farming activities to diversify its income base.
- Well-managed revolving loan scheme and seed loans provide incentive for CBO to meet regularly.
- CBO has a quarterly feedback platform to update CBO members and community stakeholder on activity progress and challenges and to discuss potential solutions
- Strong inclusion of women and PWD in access to services
- Oversight roles and support from community stakeholders and relevant service providers to ensure timely repayment and disbursement of loans.



Jusu: 'Yeah. Surely it has improved life for the community [...] they are committed because the benefits are continuing and there is more income. Even more people want to be involved than the 300+ who are in the CBO at the moment.'



v. Challenges

Common trends among weaker CBOs which are still in operation:

- **Decrease in membership:** All of the 11 weaker CBOs have experienced a reduction in their membership since project exit, with a 41% decrease in members on average. This suggests a lack of confidence of the membership in the CBO, or reduced access to services which provide the incentive for members to continue paying fees.
- **Collapse of loan schemes, but continuing seed banks:** Only three of the 11 weaker CBOs are still operating revolving loan schemes, but most (10 CBOs) continue to operate agricultural seed banks for their membership. This suggests that many CBOs are unable to manage their own loan schemes without effective external oversight.
- **Variable meeting frequency:** Most, but not all, of these CBOs meet on a monthly basis, whilst others meet quarterly or when the need arises.
- **Variable frequency of leadership elections:** Less than half (45%) of these CBOs hold elections for CBO management positions on an annual basis, while the remainder have not held elections since the formation of the CBO.
- **Variable relations with local governance structures:** some CBOs reported no engagement with their VDCs, whilst others reported supportive VDCs assisting with loan recovery, access to farm land, discussion of development issues for onward referral, and oversight of CBO services.
- **Plans for the future:** Despite their weaknesses, these CBOs also had a range of ambitious plans for the future – including: restarting revolving loan schemes on a small scale where the scheme had collapsed; establishing CBO enterprise/shop; establishing a chiefdom-level seed bank; and making requests for support from development agencies on behalf of their communities and satellite villages. This suggests that with some post-project support or mentoring they may still have capacity to strengthen their organisations.



vi. Spotlight on Two Weak CBOs

CBO: Kapuima Ndigloma Development Association (established 2014)

Taninihun-Kapuima community

Mano chiefdom, Moyamba district (Project P187)

- Collapse of revolving loan scheme due to funds taken by the Section Chief
- Decline in CBO membership as a result of the halt to revolving loan services
- CBO meetings are only held as and when necessary, e.g. for seed loan repayments and disbursements, and to update members on the progress with regards to retrieval of the stolen loan funds.
- Membership lack confidence in the CBO leadership to manage the organisation's resources; leadership were slow to respond to the CBO crisis
- No regular CBO leadership elections held
- Oversight roles by community stakeholders are weak.

CBO: Amulema Development Association (established 2018)

Manjehun-Kowai community

Mano chiefdom, Moyamba district (Project P190)

- CBO no longer generates income from the fish farming initiative and has little or no funds to rehabilitate the fish pond and is therefore losing fish to prey.
- CBO membership declined as a result of limited revolving loan services to its members – due to delays in repayments and a lack of robustness in loan collection, the revolving loan fund can no longer meet the demands of CBO membership and members have left the CBO as a result.
- Although the CBO has a food processing machine to offer garri processing services to members, the machine is poorly maintained so the income generated from this is unstable.
- CBO meetings are only held as and when necessary, e.g. for loan repayment and disbursement, or to update members on issues of concern.
- There is a lack of responsive leadership



vii. Dormant and Collapsed CBOs

Of the CBOs that have ceased operating over the last four years, key themes emerge:

- **Continuation of agricultural activities:** A common factor amongst all dormant CBOs was that they have continued with IVS rice and/or groundnut farming in smaller groups, building on the skills that they had developed from the agricultural activities in the CBO. This highlights the value placed on these CBO services by the target communities, as although they had lost faith in the CBO leadership, there was a willingness and commitment to continue group farming initiatives.
- **Weak CBO leadership:** Leadership is weak in the form of divisions within the management committee, a lack of accountability and lack of transparent decision-making by CBO leaders. All CBOs are required to develop constitutions which specify that elections for positions on the management committee will be held every three years. However, in some cases there is a trend of CBO leaders reneging on their responsibilities once MAPCO has left and refusing to call meetings or elections. This can lead to members losing confidence and discontinuing their membership, leading to collapse of the CBO in the most extreme cases.

50% of the dormant and collapsed CBOs indicated a willingness to restructure the CBOs, recover missing loan funds, restore services to the membership and seek support from development organisations, indicating that these CBOs have potential to restore their activities in future.

All of the dormant and collapsed CBOs had ceased operating within one year of the end of the project. This suggests that once a CBO has been able to operate for a year independently, they are more likely to continue on their own.

- **Revolving loan scheme weaknesses:** Collapse of the revolving loan scheme had occurred prior to the collapse of the CBOs, often for the following reasons: poor financial management and record keeping of the loan funds, high rates of loan defaulters, mismanagement or stolen funds in certain cases, and an inability to manage loan repayments, weakened by insufficient support and accountability structures in the community.
- **Weak linkages with local structures and duty bearers:** In some cases, community stakeholders are not fully engaged to support CBOs through times of crisis, loan issues or manage other challenges. This leaves CBOs with weakened capacity to restore their activities in the event of a crisis.



3. Lessons Learnt

There is a clear link between revolving loan scheme failure and CBO collapse.



Isata: 'I want to be a big businesswoman.'

For the weaker CBOs which are still operating but no longer have loan schemes in operation, this poses concerns for their sustainability in the future. It also indicates a risk of revolving loan scheme failure amongst other weak CBOs. Actions need to be taken to strengthen the loan schemes, ensure accountability and retain loan repayments after project exit. Strong and transparent leadership is essential to maintain this.

Agricultural support schemes are the most valued CBO service and most likely to be sustained after project exit.

Even if the CBO structure collapses (in the case of dormant CBOs), some CBOs choose to continue their agricultural activities in smaller groups. This could be because seed loans are more accessible to the most marginalised groups than cash loans, and are similarly easier to repay. Importantly, in a context of COVID-19 restrictions in recent years which affected movements and closed markets, community-based agricultural seed banks may have offered more stability to members.



Regina picks garden eggs.



Some of the CBOs have struggled to maintain large membership sizes of around 350 to 400 members post project exit.

However, this approach can pose challenges for sustainability post-project exit, where satellite members have to travel long distances to attend the meetings and actively participate in CBO activities. In some cases, this leads to satellite members deciding to part company with the CBO and to set up their own loan schemes in their villages using a share of the CBO funds, which can lead to disagreements around ownership of the CBO revolving loan funds.

Targets for CBO membership in recent years have been driven by demand for these services, the need to reach large numbers of people and competitiveness for donor support, whereas previously CBOs were smaller at around 200 members each. Where the target of 350 to 400 members could not be identified within the target communities, smaller satellite villages in the surrounding areas were brought in to build up the membership.

All stakeholders in the main community and satellite communities need to have a shared understanding of the purpose and use of project assets, particularly prior to project exit, in order to maintain large membership numbers.



Community women pluck vegetables at their backyard garden.



5. Recommendations

Strengthen post project mentoring and follow up.

To strengthen the revolving loan schemes and maintain accountability after MAPCO's exit from the communities, further structured opportunities for monitoring and support could be planned for in the post-project period. For example, agreements could be made between the CBO and MAPCO before project end as part of the formal asset handover process that MAPCO will carry out six-monthly follow up visits and audits of the revolving loan scheme for a defined period after exit. To make this arrangement sustainable, CBOs could agree to pay MAPCO to carry out this service (to cover fuel costs and staff travel allowances) using the interest generated on their loan funds or other income sources.

This recommendation has now been implemented in MAPCO's most recent CBO project prior to project exit, with MOU agreements signed with the CBOs. It is also recommended to reach out to the CBOs identified as weak, dormant or collapsed as part of this review to support with problem solving and work towards strengthening the CBOs where possible. MAPCO's role to continue to provide oversight of the CBO operations (such as loan scheme management) in the long term should also be incorporated into the design of future projects to offer improved prospects for sustainability. Additionally, exchange of learning and expertise between CBOs located in close proximity to one another should be encouraged as a peer support mechanism.

Review CBO membership numbers.

Consider whether smaller numbers of CBO members are more sustainable, at least in the short-term start-up phase, to build up to larger membership numbers over time once the CBO has been strengthened and gained high levels of trust at community level. Review processes for access to loans for satellite community members not based within the main community.



Strengthen leadership of the CBOs.

To ensure that CBOs have the capacity within their management structures to operate independently once the project ends, further training could be incorporated based on the specific needs of the executive leadership and the CBO's plans for the future. This could be in the form of a CBO audit which is built into the final year of the project to identify capacity development needs and subsequently provide the CBO with relevant training or support to access relevant resources. An agreement for frequent elections (at least every three years) to be held is an important requirement to incorporate into MOUs between CBOs, MAPCO and local governance structures to ensure members are able to hold their leaders to account and to avoid co-option of CBO activities by a small number of powerful individuals.

Strengthen relationships and coordination between CBOs, VDCs and other key stakeholders

CBOs benefit from support of local leaders and local governance structures. In newer projects (not included in this study), VDCs have an oversight role in the project and beyond, linked to the CBO which creates an additional structure for accountability. VDCs reduce the risk of co-option because they include a range of influential leaders, such as: women and youth leaders, headman, village chair, religious leader, PWD representatives. These links need to be established early in a project and maintained throughout. In the most recent project, MAPCO held project closure meetings and agreed MOUs for project exit to ensure all stakeholders, not only the CBOs but all relevant local leaders and committees, were clear on their roles and responsibilities to the CBO beyond project exit.





This study was co-funded by the European Union. The content, analysis and opinions in this report belong solely to the authors.

Partnership and Potential

The CBO model has brought demonstrable positive change to communities in post-conflict Sierra Leone. MAPCO and Action on Poverty have extensive experience of implementing this model in partnership with rural communities to achieve long-lasting change which particularly benefits vulnerable and marginalised groups. We are continuously learning and refining our model based on feedback from the communities we work with to maximise opportunities for sustainable impact.

Even in highly delicate social situations in a post-war context, the CBO model has shown what can be achieved within a short period of time. Our model is a simple and sustainable tool for poverty alleviation following a crisis.

Please contact us if you would like to discuss a partnership or to find out more about this model.


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