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**ACTIONAID SIERRA LEONE  
2020 ANNUAL REPORT**

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## Glossary

AASL	ActionAid Sierra Leone
ACDEG	African Charter on Democracy Elections and Governance
AGA	African Governance Architecture
AP	Affiliate Programme
CCTT	Child Centred Teaching Technique
CCYA	Centre for the Coordination of Youth Activities
CGG	Campaign for Good Governance
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
CSP	Country Strategy Paper
CWDs	Children with disability
FSU	Family Support Unit
GATE	Girl Access to Education
GEC	Girls Education Challenge
GEM	Girls Education Movement
GRPS	Gender Responsive Public Services
GTT	Government Transition Team
HDI	Human Development Index
HRC	Human Rights Commission
IEC	Information Education & Communication
LA	Local Authorities
LRPs	Local Rights Programmes
MBSSE	Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education
MPs	Members of Parliament
MSWGCA	Ministry of Social Welfare Gender & Children's Affairs
PVs	Project Volunteers
SGBV	Sexual Gender Based Violence
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
VSLA	Village Savings and Loan Associations

## Foreword

Our esteemed readers, we are very pleased to share with you ActionAid Sierra Leone Annual Report for 2020. As we completed the first half of our six-year Country Strategy Paper (CSP), this 2020 annual report presents our achievements, challenges, learning and impact stories amidst a sustained health emergency, powered by a dedicated and resilient team.

The year 2020 presented a pandemic context to the world, putting to test the resilience of not just the communities in which we work but the whole world. Adapting to change, ActionAid Sierra Leone was resilient in making progress to enhance social justice for people living in poverty and exclusion. We quickly adapted to new ways of working by adopting a flexible work approach that ensured continued programme implementation, whilst at the same time prioritising the safety and wellbeing of our staff.

The many regulations instituted to reduce transmission rates of the corona virus created a shadow pandemic of hunger and gender-based violence, making vulnerable groups especially women and girls most affected by the pandemic. With support from our various Supporters and Donors, we responded to the emergency by strengthening community women and the neighbourhood watch groups to lead awareness raising on COVID and on issues of sexual and gender-based violence, provided hand washing facilities to all our communities, bursary items, dignity/hygiene kits and emergency food supplies to adolescent girls and sponsorship children.

Our advocacy and campaign work remained significant, pushing for the provision of gender responsive public services and for public financial accountability. Significantly, we worked with other civil society organisations to demand for transparency and openness in the delivery and use of COVID-19 funds. We conducted an assessment on school preparedness for reopening amidst covid-19 and used the findings to advocate for the provision of more WASH facilities in schools, more furniture to enhance social distancing and teacher training on classroom management in health emergencies. These and many other impacts we made keeps us motivated.

Our Board and Assembly members effectively carried out their oversight role despite the many limitations of the pandemic on their normal schedule. All quarterly and subcommittee meetings were held either virtually or in person following Covid19 regulations. This level of commitment enhanced the effectiveness of management and the smooth run of the organisation. We want to appreciate the Board and Assembly members for their commitment and oversight role they provided in this uncertain time.

We recognise the role played by our partners, staff, volunteers, and communities in this journey and for that we want to thank them for standing with us in these difficult times.

We would like to express our gratitude to our supporters (in the United Kingdom, Italy, Sweden, Greece) and donors (the European Union, FCDO, Million Foundation, John and Grace Perkin, Paul Meier) for their tremendous support to ActionAid and contribution towards strengthening civil society and building the resilience of the poor and excluded people in our communities.

With your support, we will continue to fight for social justice, restore the dignity of people living in poverty, and make society a fairer place for all.





Foday Bassie Swaray  
Executive Director AASL



Emmanuel A. B. Turay  
Board Chair AASL

## Introduction

This Annual Report presents the work of AASL in 2020, led by our Implementing Partners in the respective Local Rights Programmes (LRPs) in Sierra Leone.

During this reporting period, AASL continued the implementation of its six years Country Strategy Paper (CSP) (2018 – 2023). The Affiliate Programme (AP) with unwavering commitment, implemented activities in line with its CSP priority and focus areas across seven LRPs in seven administrative districts of Sierra Leone. Our child sponsorship (CS) scheme continues to be the bedrock of AASL's interventions while donor-funded projects continued to expand its scope and reach beyond the usual Child Sponsorship communities.

As we continue to make strides to enhance power to the ordinary people in local communities, the social order of patriarchy continues to challenge our programme delivery. Our successes remain insufficient to see a transformative development for all even with the enormous strides towards reducing or ending male dominance in communities. However, women in AASL's operational communities have gained increased confidence as a good proportion of them now demonstrate their ability to compete for crucial leadership positions and speak up on issues that deter their development. Governance within AASL's operational communities in the regions in Sierra Leone continued to be in the hands of local chiefs, religious leaders, and community elders who remained to be mostly men.

A dicey situation still lingers as young people continue to be under-represented in leadership roles and have not sufficiently participated in democratic decision-making processes, which often leaves them relegated into drivers of conflicts in communities. Through AASL's interventions, we continued to foster the inclusive participation of particularly young people and people living with disabilities in governance and democratic processes especially at the local level.

As disaster incidents like flooding and fire keep reoccurring, AASL continues to deepen its engagements on emergency preparedness and response while it also responds to emerging issues that align with AASL's programmes portfolio. Communities keep gaining grounds on being first time responders and becoming resilient.

## Who we are and What we do

AASL is a member of the global federation of ActionAid International (AI) that shares a common vision, mission, and values with a commitment to finding sustainable solutions to end poverty and injustices in the World. AASL works in all regions (Southern, Northern, North-Western, Eastern and Western Area) of Sierra Leone and in eight districts (Bo, Bombali, Kambia, Kono, Moyamba, Tonkolili, Western Area and by default, Karene district), which represents 50% of the sixteen administrative districts in Sierra Leone.

Established as a Country Programme (CP) by ActionAid UK (AAUK) in 1988, AASL became an Associate Programme in 2008 and an Affiliate Programme (AP) in 2011. This transition saw AASL inaugurate its first national board and registered as a national organization whilst being a

member of the AAI federation. It also gave AASL a dual identity in Sierra Leone as a Local and as an international entity. The outcome of this transition has deepened AASL's downward accountability with rights holders, created more space for its policy engagements at national level and strengthened local ownerships. All these outcomes have contributed to enhance its legitimacy in Sierra Leone.

AASL has contributed immensely towards improving the lives of its constituents through its programmes in various sectors. AASL's understanding of the complexities associated with poverty has shifted its programme from a purely welfare or service delivery organization to a development-oriented organization and now human rights-based organization; a trend that has continued in line with its status.

This year, AASL is mid-way through the implementation of its third CSP, the "Enhancing People's Action for Social Justice 2018 – 2023" which looks at three Strategic Priority Areas and seven focus Areas as indicated below



**Priority 1:** Engage the structural causes of violence against marginalized women & girls and promote the recognition, reduction, and redistribution of unpaid care work for economic justice

- **Focus Area 1:** Violence against marginalized women and girls
- **Focus Area 2:** Unpaid care & decent work



**Priority 2:** Improve public accountability for the provision of responsive basic public services

- **Focus Area 1:** Women and youth participation in democratic processes strengthened
- **Focus Area 2:** Public financial accountability improved
- **Focus Area 3:** An effective and efficient public service responsive to the needs of people



**Priority 3:** Advance responsive humanitarian action prioritizing women & girl's safety, participation, leadership in emergency preparedness, response, and prevention.

- **Focus Area 1:** Build Resilience of women & Young People with robust accountable processes in Disaster Response
- **Focus Area 2:** Ensure a Community & Women-Led Humanitarian Preparedness



## Strategic Context

The Covid-19 pandemic had serious ramifications on AASL's programme in the reporting period. Infecting 2,612 and killing 76 people in 2020<sup>1</sup>, the Government of Sierra Leone declared a state of public health emergency, putting on hold congregational prayers and restricting other large gatherings. Other measures included temporal inter-districts lockdowns, stay at home, and imposition of curfew across the country. Major economic activities were disrupted leading to a rise in prices of food and other basic commodities in markets, negatively impacting the lives and livelihoods of people especially for poor and vulnerable families. Sierra Leone as a country grapples with a weak healthcare system which was further exacerbated by the pandemic.

Amidst the pandemic, violence against women and girls in Sierra Leone was prevalent in 2020 so the Government of Sierra Leone took significant steps in curbing issues of violence against women and girls (VAWG) including the setup of a sexual offences model court and the review of the sexual offences' statute. Access to justice for survivors of violence against women remained a major challenge for women and girls living in remote communities. Funding was also a big challenge to relevant institutions responsible for addressing VAWG issues as most of the available funds were redirected towards Covid-19 response activities, creating a shadow pandemic for women and girls.

As the number of reported cases of the virus increased in the second quarter of 2020, the government enacted several restrictions including the closure of schools and other learning institutions across the country. The significant reduction in cases of COVID in the last quarter of the year led to the removal of some COVID restrictions and the eventual reopening of schools and other learning institutions.

The Government of Sierra Leone actualised the long-awaited repeal of part five of the 1965 Public Order Act (POA) that criminalized libel and sedition, a move that was regarded as progressive by citizens and many civil society organisations. The Government on the other hand proposed a cyber security bill which many civil society and legal activists say has the potential to restrict citizens' rights to free speech and further shrink space for CS organising and holding the state accountable. AASL contributed to the development of position papers, made press releases and other actions that raised issues geared towards promoting good governance and government's accountability in the utilisation of public resources.

Access to public services, especially health, water and sanitation continues to be a major challenge especially for people living in remote communities. The national development plan prioritises human capital development, however, the seeming public-private partnership (Build Operate and Transfer) model in the delivery of public services such as health, may further hinder access to health and deepen inequality.

Amidst this context, the AASL's 2020 approved plans and budget were significantly disrupted by the pandemic, and we had to repurpose funds to respond to the emergency.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/mic.gov.sl>

## Our Achievements

**Priority 1: Engage the structural causes of violence against marginalised women & girls and promote the recognition, reduction, and redistribution of unpaid care work for economic justice.**



### Focus Area 1: Violence against marginalised women and girls



Addressing the root causes of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) remains a topmost priority in our strategy. AASL enhanced its collaboration with partners in the fight against VAWG contributing to speedy prosecution of perpetrators of VAWG in our LRPs. AASL supported survivors of VAWG with accommodation, transportation, and refreshment all through their court sittings, and on the other end supported the Ministry of Social Welfare Gender and Children's Affairs with stationery and fuel for recording and taking actions on cases of VAWG. *"Investigation processes have been very challenging especially when the perpetrators are in far to reach areas. We are usually challenged with fuel,"* District Social Service Officer, MSWGCA Moyamba. Our actions contributed to the conviction of perpetrators for cases including child neglect, sexual penetration, and domestic violence among others.



Advocacy and campaigns formed a greater part of our work on ending VAWG this year. Making use of national platforms, we joined many other partners to voice out key messages on ending VAWG, during the 16 days of activism, international women's day, international day of the girl and on World Aids Day. Under the DfID funded Girls Education Challenge – Transition Project, AASL reached over 4,700 children in 183 schools, MDAs, and Local Authorities in Moyamba and Bo with IEC materials conveying key messages on gender-based violence, child protection, early marriage, sexual and reproductive health rights. Broadcast of Radio jingles in two dominant local languages in Kono and Moyamba Districts were carried out for 16 days in four dominant local languages in the two districts giving non-literate parents/care givers a chance to relate well with the messages undiluted and popularizing the 116-toll free line for reporting cases of GBV.



Global Platform Sierra Leone towed the line of the fight against GBV by making a visit to the Female Correctional Center inmates in Bo. Reaching out to 10 inmates, the youngest of which was 18 and pregnant, GP volunteers helped them understand GBV and identify GBV issues they face as inmates. Many of them were convicted for crimes whose root causes cannot be disconnected from GBV and as such they identified issues ranging from lack of proper hygiene facilities in the Center to nonavailability of safe homes for survivors of GBV in the district. These and other human right issues identified were escalated to the Ministry of Social Welfare which made a public commitment for action during the 16 days of activism.



A global walk for survival campaign was initiated and supported by the ActionAid federation to send louder voices against all forms of violence women and girls. As the world continue to fight Covid-19, a shadow pandemic on women and girls remained ignored. They continue to be subjected to indiscriminate sexual and gender-based violence, leaving them unprotected by law and societal structures. AASL staff, Board/GA members and its partners engaged in a walk calling on the government for a more robust measure in ending SGBV. AASL Activista and singer named Odelia composed a song for the walk which received a federation wide recognition. In the seven LRPs where people had walked, a total of 2,582km was covered by 227 staff and partners in the company of influential local musicians and comedians, marking AASL's contribution to the Global Walk of 40,000km to say *no to violence against women and girls*.

## Focus Area 2: Unpaid care & decent work



The recognition, redistribution, and reduction of unpaid care work is gaining grounds in our LRPs. We facilitated house-to-house campaign within five communities in Bo district and solicited the views of men on possible measures that could be appropriate in reducing the burden of care on women and girls. Not seen as new model, a good number of men heartily recognized this fair model and had long been looking forward to ways unpaid care work can be reduced on women such that they can spend more time on paid work that earns the family more revenue for increased livelihood. Over 200 men in these communities now serve as models for the recognition, reduction and redistribution of unpaid care work in their communities.



Stemming from this, domestic workers in the Western Area gained significant knowledge and understanding on the human rights issues associated with their job. This was achieved through our campaign and support to them on the commemoration of International Day for Domestic Workers (IDDW) – a platform AASL used to raise awareness on convention 189 that emphasizes the rights and dignity of domestic workers. This category of workers was able to develop and present a position paper on how to make a decent work a reality. The position paper was widely circulated on social media for more attention and action. Furthermore, to cushion the hardship on these women, many of whom were stopped by their employers because of the pandemic, food baskets of sixty (60) women were replenished with basic food items.



As strides were made to bring women into paid jobs, women's economic empowerment remains significant to our work. AASL's Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) continued to be a sustainable economic empowerment for women all over AASL's LRPs. In the reporting year, over 300 VSLA groups were established through AASL's sponsorship scheme, GEC-T Project and the EU project in Kambia, successfully made contributions to the tune of Le 800,000,000 (60,545.57 GBP) despite the economic pressures caused by the pandemic. Newly formed VSLA groups by the EU Project in Kambia were trained on the VSLA model to ensure community ownership and sustainability of project interventions. 200 VSLA groups already established by the GEC-T project were trained on Financial Management and Business Entrepreneurship and received a total grant of Le1,666,500,000 (120,493 GBP), 8,332,500 each, to cushion the economic effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.



## Priority 2: Improve public accountability for the provision of responsive basic public services



*Child Sponsorship children receive food and sanitary items*

### Focus Area 1: Women and youth participation in democratic processes strengthened

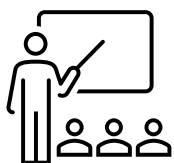


In our CSP, a picture of change we envisaged, is increased citizens engagement in public finance allocation, utilisation, and reporting processes. Working on achieving this, AASL participated and contributed to the production of an Audit Report scorecard on ten MDAs under the Non-State Actors (NSA) Audit Network, supported by the Ministry of Finance. This was followed-up with assessment on the 2017 and 2018 External Audit recommendations released on the use of public resources by MDAs, which are significantly increased year in year out despite public accountability reforms by government. Key findings revealed that in 2017, three out of the ten MDAs (Mostly Category A MDAs with huge budgetary and donor support) had outstanding performance with ratings of 100% (meaning that they resolved all audit recommendations); whilst four were within the range of 60 -70 percent (meaning implementation of audit recommendation was highly satisfactory); one did not implement at all with 0% rating. In 2018 only one out of 10 MDAs was rated 100 % while only two rated 50 % and the rest with very poor and significant concerns. Some of the reasons ranged from lack of political will, lack of punitive measures for non-performers, capacity, poor record keeping etc.





Under our European Union (EU) CSO/LA project target districts (Bombali, Kono, Bo and Western Area) we conducted community scorecard on Gender Responsive Public Services (GRPS) in 20 communities in each district, targeting 30 people per meeting to ascertain their views on how gender responsive the public services are. The same data was collected from Ministries, Department and Agencies, Local Councils and Traditional Authorities. These community views were later validated and launched at community and district levels. A total of 50 stakeholders mostly key duty bearers attended at district level and 100 people attended the launch at community level. As a best practice for accountability, other civil societies organizations have started applying the community scorecard methodology, helping communities to assess the performance of government service providers in sectors such as education, water and sanitation, and local government. The greatest value of the district-level multi-stakeholder forums was the opportunity for dialogue they created. Different levels of stakeholders that normally never even meet each other had an opportunity to interact and understand each other's point of view. Another positive outcome was the forum's effect on community members' level of understanding of the issues. They realized that it is possible for any community to have a dialogue with any duty bearer to seek and demand accountability.



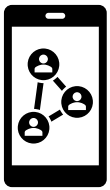
Intuitional capacity gap in CSOs especially those in rural areas has been a great challenge. An assessment of CSOs capacity in Western Area, Bo, Kono and Bombali by AASL and partners, revealed that many of them had weak institutional capacity impeding their ability to function effectively. In addition to series of capacity building under the EU CSO/LA project, AASL and partners provided grant of €1600 to 20 CSOs in the five districts. This intervention proved very timely and effective as the grant recipient CSOs showed evidence of increased human and administrative resource capacity making them more equipped to function well. Similarly, through another EU funding for Kambia District, AASL built the capacity of 30 CSO and network representatives on Accountability and Civic Education, Leadership, participatory accountability, and fundraising. This capacity building increased CSOs' knowledge giving them a better footing to work on governance issues; a knowledge gap which duty bearers used as an escape to provide services without due accountability.



Women and youth are key stakeholders in development and as such, AASL works towards building their capacity to better position them for both political and non-political leadership positions. The Global Platform (GP) initiative was introduced to promote the potential of young people through training and mentoring to engage in national development programmes. To ensure young people have a safe space to meet, discuss and learn these skills to strategically engage in national development, a makeshift structure was erected in the Bo LRP office. Twenty-six (10 male, 16 female) were inducted through an online zoom meeting with ActionAid Denmark and ActionAid Italy. The outcome of the meeting led GP Sierra Leone to have an interim executive. These young volunteers were trained for four days on Basic Facilitation for Political change and how GP initiative works. The training helped young people understand and use their collective power to start occupying spaces to inspire, connect and act as a network to enhance national development.



AASL through Empowering Youth Led Volunteering in Local Level Responses (YLVO) supported by EU Aid Volunteers trained 60 young people on effective use of social media. This was to shift power and responsibility to young people and their movements and to ensure they contribute meaningfully to nation building by spreading positive messages that will prevent misinformation that have the tendency to cause mayhem. ACDEG project Youth Ambassadors from Bo, Western Area and Bombali in April 2020, mounted a social media campaign demanding for accountability on 2020 Covid funds. This was based on a proposed regulation that was rumored to be laid in Parliament that leaked to the public. Due to this engagement, the Ambassadors contributed to getting government to deny the Covid fund regulation, which otherwise would have given duty bearers to utilize these funds with limited accountability.



AASL made use of social media platforms to reach out to the wider populace on our advocacy strides amidst the pandemic restrictions. AASL in partnership with the African Rising Movement (ARM) commemorated the African Liberation Day with the theme: “*Active citizenship against Covid 19*”. The week was observed with series of action including a digital nationwide call-in response to the theme – done by activists, CSO leaders, women’s group leaders through WhatsApp reaching 5000 citizens. Additionally, a virtual conference was organized on the theme via Zoom with one international guest from the ARM secretariat and national guests including AASL Executive Director. The conference was educative, and members expressed the need for such in near future. A ‘mask up’ campaign was also done in vulnerable communities/groups distributing 1000 customized Africans Rising Face Masks. A massive regional engagement was undertaken in the regional towns on the theme which raise the profile of the Movement and the call to action about the fight against the pandemic. ARM-SL also contributed to the call for fund raising campaign to support the change of the narrative on how Africa is handling the fight against Covid 19.

## Focus Area 2: Public financial accountability improved



AASL in partnership with Budget Advocacy Network (BAN) and other accountability platforms/networks produced and published on social media expressing concern over the suspension of key accountability laws that will undermine public trust in Sierra Leone government’s corona virus response efforts. This was in response to the propose leaked regulations that was to be laid in Parliament. This engagement contributed to the withdrawal of the proposed regulation from the house of parliament. In Moyamba, ActionAid supported quarterly accountability meetings organized by the Moyamba District Council to create an opportunity for communities to dialogue with council and Ministries Department and Agencies (MDAs) on their deliverables in 2020. All MDAs and NGOs presented their budget and activities undertaken in different communities. This process, first of its kind in the district, paved the way for an accountable and transparent process that has created confidence among the masses for their elected officials, NGOs, and other MDAs.

Through the EU CSO LA Project, 40 participants from CSOs were trained on budget tracking and analysis further cascading to 160 participants from CSOs and their networks mobilized from the Western Area, Bombali, Kono and Bo. This action resulted in them acquiring skills and

techniques to track public budgets for onwards engagement with the public. A significant outcome of the training was the production of a district report and the National report with support from Budget Advocacy Network.



Public service delivery has been a key challenge for the people of Kambia as stated in the 2018 and 2019 Audit Report. The report also noted that Kambia District Council was the worst council across the country in those periods (2018 and 2019). ActionAid and partners conducted a training that provided real and timely information on the processes of auditing targeting CSOs and local authorities. 40 participants became knowledgeable of the establishment of the Audit Service Sierra Leone, mandate of the audit service, principles of auditing and the audit reports of the Kambia district council considering devolved functions such as primary health care, education, social services, and water resources. Furthermore, participants were shown the total figure that was unaccounted for by the various parastatals as well as local revenue that was not reported on. The training provided a channel through which participants were given the audited report of the Kambia district council simplified in cartoon format.



Advocating both on global and national fronts, AASL supported the Tax Movement Sierra Leone (TM-SL) to commemorate Global Day of Actions with the theme “*Tax Justice amidst the Covid-induced Crisis*” in partnership with Global Alliance for Tax Justice. The members organized a 1-day meeting on Tax justice in Sierra Leone and had an in-depth understanding on the 2020 Finance Act especially the progressive provisions government had in the act, to have it popularized for increased citizen knowledge.

### Focus Area 3: An effective and efficient public service responsive to the needs of people.



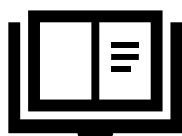
Education in emergencies give a different narrative to the schooling norm of children. It demands adaptation and more resources to ensure children have the desired educational outcomes. To cope with this, an online-learning was introduced by government through radio teaching programmes. Through our sponsorship scheme and the Girls Education Challenge – Transition project, AASL contributed to keeping children engaged at home following the closure of schools and their smooth return and transition. ActionAid in collaboration with MBSSE, TSC and the Local Councils supported radio teaching and learning programmes for pupils. To keep on track with the audio learning, AASL through the GEC-T project distributed 1,420 Solar Powered Radios to 527 Programme Volunteers (teachers), 173 Heads of Schools, and 720 Pupils both in Kono and Moyamba districts. In Kono District, AASL paid for the airing of recorded lessons which the children could not access online.



The Government of Sierra Leone relaxed some of the COVID-19 measures and eventually reopened schools in October following marked improvements to the adherence to COVID preventive development measures. Prior to this AASL conducted a school preparedness assessment amidst covid-19 in our LRPs and with support from African Charter on Democracy Elections and Governance (ACDEG) project in more schools in the western rural area. The assessment

revealed that schools were prepared for reopening and most of them lacked adequate WASH facilities and only few teachers had been trained on classroom management in emergencies. Parents, with all the hardship caused by the pandemic, found it challenging to provide school materials for their children as they went back to school.

Through the GEC-T Project ActionAid intervened by reaching out to 761 children (609 Moyamba; 152 Kono) with bursary items which include school bag, exercise books, pens, eraser, sharpener, pencils, ruler, graph books, logarithmic book and geometry set. Also, in Tonkolili, ActionAid supported 38 sponsorship community schools with recreational materials. Face masks were also provided to sponsored children and hand washing stations installed in their schools across the 7 LRPs. These interventions helped enhance the safety and protection of children in school amidst covid-19.



To enhance literacy for children in primary school, ActionAid provided additional learning materials including 780 supplementary readers to 10 sponsorship reading circles in Bombali.

ActionAid also constructed 3 three-classroom buildings in three of our sponsorship communities to help reduce overcrowding and enhance social distancing as children returned to school in a Covid-19 context. Furnitures were also provided for all the classrooms in the three schools. This enhanced the safety of children those in schools.

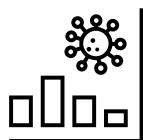


### **Priority 3: Advance responsive humanitarian action prioritising women & girl’s safety, participation, leadership in emergency preparedness, response and prevention.**



Neighbourhood Watch Group practicing handwashing | PC: AASL

#### **Focus Area 1: Build Resilience of Women & Young People with robust accountable processes in Disaster Response**



The outbreak of Covid-19 in Sierra Leone in March 2020 and its effects on communities reemphasized the need to build community resilience focusing on women and young people. AASL contributed to necessary actions that aligned to its humanitarian signature (localization, women-led and accountability) and government regulations needed to address the menace. In 2020, AASL’s contribution to the containment of Covid-19 was noted under five (5) broad categories namely Awareness Programmes, Provision of Food Items, Support with Non-Food Items, Leadership/coordination, and Capacity Development.



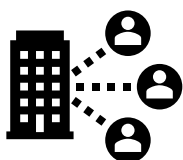


Learning from the communication gaps and misinformation during the Ebola outbreak in 2014/15, AASL and partners helped decrease the myths about Covid-19, increase knowledge, understanding and acceptance of facts of the pandemic. These gains resulted from our community outreach, awareness programmes on the transmission mode of the virus, signs, symptoms, and preventive measures. In our regular community outreach, efforts were made to inform the masses on reporting Covid-19 cases through 117 toll free line, incidences of violence against women and girls through 116, and measures to take in collectively protecting themselves and their communities. Radio panel discussions and jingles centered on Covid-19 messages were aired in all our target districts reaching out to communities. Through the GEC-T Project, AASL distributed 1,568 (820 in Moyamba and 748 in Kono) Covid-19 prevention and response stickers reaching to the project targeted schools and PHUs in the communities.

Through the District Corona Virus Emergency Response Centers (DiCOVERC) in our LRPs, AASL supported quarantine homes with food and non-food items and at national level, food, non-food, and hygiene items were also provided through NaCOVERC. Regardless of the collective effort, the demand for food to cushion the effect on people in isolation and quarantine homes was paramount. AASL also further replenished the Centers' rice supplies in Moyamba, Western Area and Bo LRPs. Due to food hardship, many people became reluctant to observe government restrictions especially the stay at home. In this difficult moment, AASL provided 4,177 sponsorship children and their mothers emergency food supplies which includes bags of rice, oil, and other condiments. This emergency food aid was a concrete means to restore the livelihood of children linked to supporters in various Funding Affiliates and their families. Similarly, through the GEC-T project, 3,543 children including children with disabilities were provided with rice, beans, and other condiments to cushion the hunger effect of the pandemic on their families.



Beyond the supply of food items, AASL provided protective gears and other items including facemasks, sanitizers and hand washing stations to children and their communities. Additionally, AASL restocked Peripheral Health Units in some of our communities with Hand gloves and Disinfectants. This was done to lessen the burden on PHUs who receive limited government attention and supply of essential items. This pandemic clearly manifested a trending occurrence of same. To cushion the effect on rural people, AASL reached out to twenty-eight (28) PHUs (10 in Bombali, 6 in Kambia, 5 in Bo and 7 in the Western Area) with hand gloves and disinfectant. Through the YLVO project, AASL provided hand washing materials to 40 rural communities, and protective gears for health personnel in Peripheral Health Units (PHUs), including hand washing stations, veronica buckets, soaps, tissues, hand gloves, disinfectant, solar lights, facemasks, and sanitizers.



As part of the collaborative effort to end Covid-19 nationwide and prevent it from entering districts that recorded zero cases, AASL and Caritas Sierra Leone co- led the district coordination of NGOs against Covid-19 in Bo District. ActionAid coordinated weekly meetings and NGOs' activities working closely with the Bo DiCOVERC team. As AASL provided update to DiCOVERC on weekly basis, information from the response team was also shared with the NGO network in weekly Friday meetings. This well coordinated response effort prevented communication gap and duplication of efforts, and there was a sense of common direction. Remarkably, AASL led other NGO

colleagues in demanding accountability from DiCOVERC. Progress and challenges recorded on weekly basis had been shared with the presidential task force through the NGO Coordinating Unit at SLANGO.

## Focus Area 2: Ensure a Community & Women-Led Humanitarian Preparedness



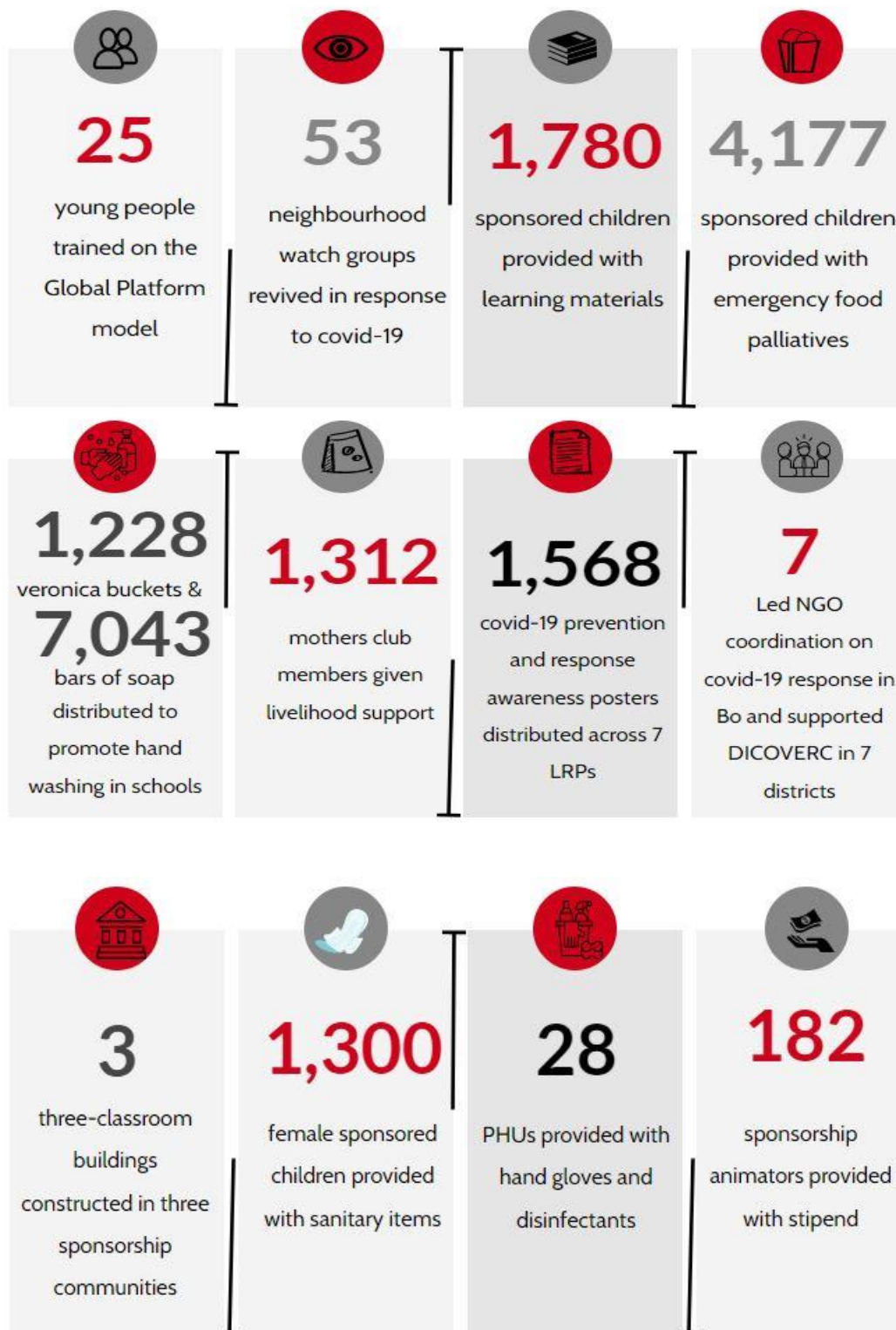
AASL CSP III pictures strong collaborations with women and young people to enable preparedness at all levels, with women leading community-based protection mechanisms in response plan and actions. Gains on bringing this picture into reality have been made with evidence of sustained and resilient community disaster response groups. Building on this existing emergency preparedness structure, AASL crash trained the self-reactivated Neighbourhood Watch groups in all our communities, contextualising their knowledge to Covid-19. These groups reached out to homes and schools with Covid-19 messages, emphasizing the interconnectedness between the pandemic and SGBV, creating a shadow pandemic. These groups also educated community members on the new laws and penalties on teenage sexual offenders. AASL completed several coaching sessions on referral protocols after any sexual related violence on children. Members of these groups were also linked to the Ministry of Social Welfare, Rainbo Centre, Family Support Unit and DiCOVERC to report SGBV issues. As a result, there was significantly low rate of Covid-19 cases in AASL operational communities and sequentially low SGBV incident reports in 2020.



*Women leading AASL response to Covid-19, PC: ActionAid Sierra Leone*

## 2020 Outputs

### Sponsorship Income

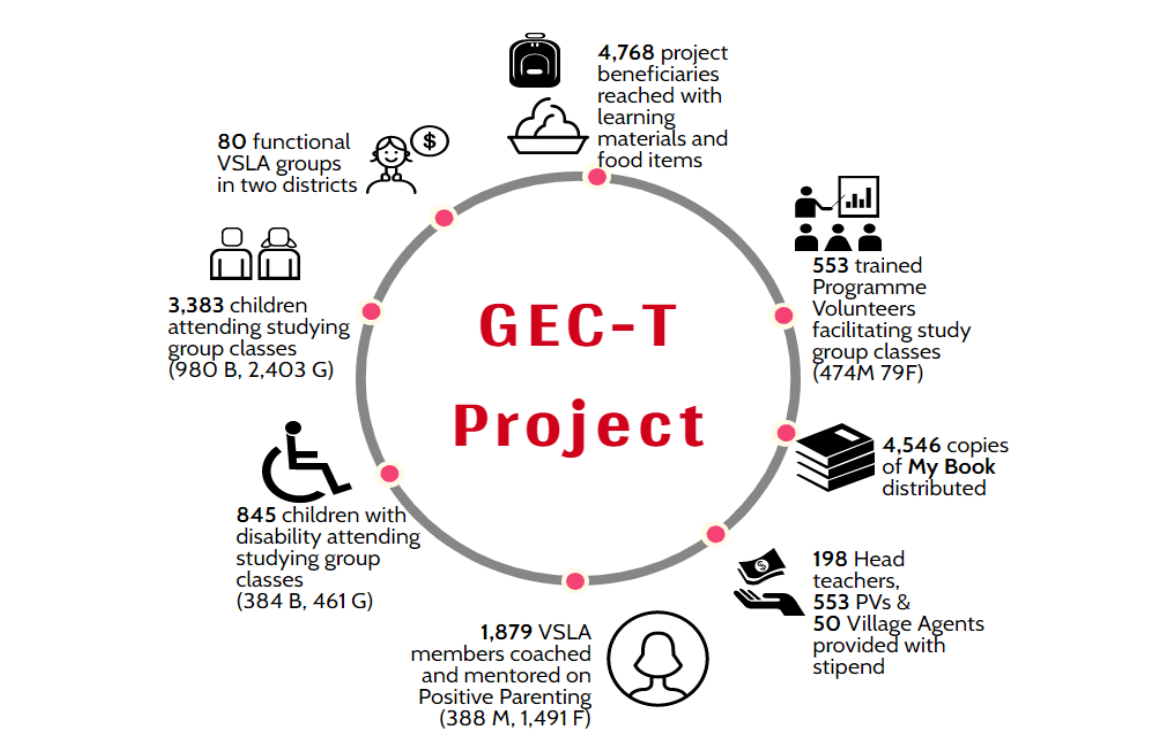


# Building an Active Civil Society for Improved Gender Responsive Public Service Delivery especially for women and girls to attain sustainable development in Sierra Leone

## EU CSO/LA Project



## Girls Education Challenge-Transition Project





## Action for inclusive social economic delivery in Kambia District

### EU Kambia Project

#### CSO capacity enhanced

- 30 CSOs trained on local democratic governance and accountability
- 30 CSOs trained on fundraising and leadership for organizational sustainability
- 30 CSOs trained on financial management and procurement
- 40 CSOs and Local Authorities trained on the principles of auditing, basic audit processes
- 30 members of the Kambia Budget Tracking and Advocacy Network (KaBTAN) capacitated to conduct basic budget tracking processes within devolved sectors in the district.



#### People's capacity enhanced

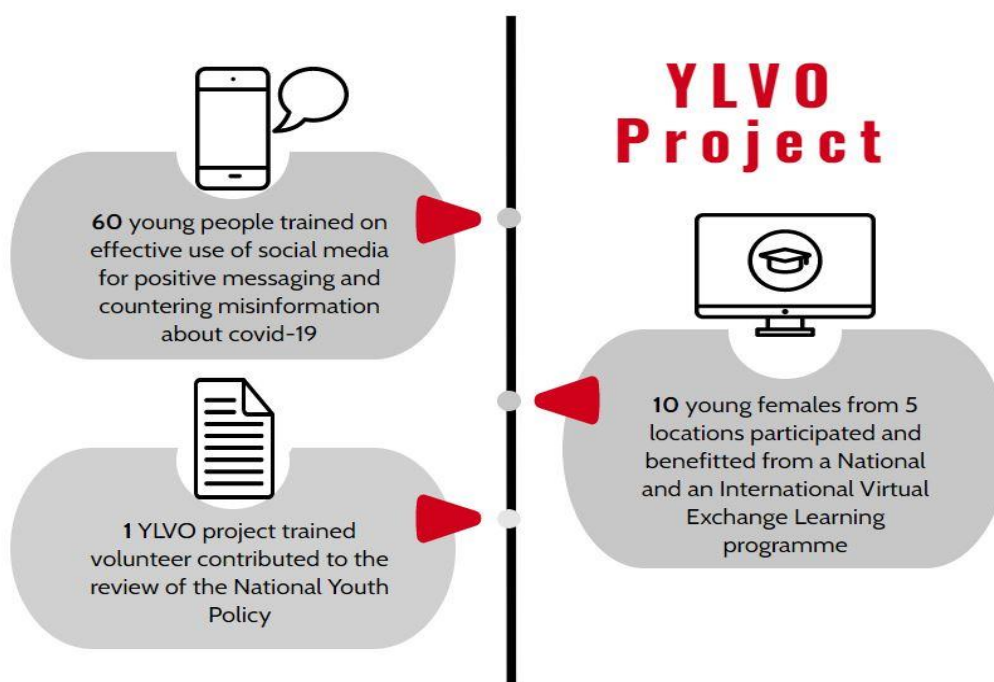
- 12,139 people's capacity built to claim their socio-economic rights is increased (7779 Women, 1800 Girls, 2400 Men and 160 People living with disability)
- 50 Village, Ward and Chiefdom Development (VDC, WDC & CDC) Committee members trained on participatory planning processes

#### Increased Accountability

- 1 accountability session held between Kambia District Council and its electorates
- 2 annual audit reports (2018 & 2019) simplified into cartoon format for easy understanding by stakeholders at all levels



## Humanitarian Response and Youth Voluntarism (YLVO) Project





## Resourcing our work

### Human Resource

#### Covid-19 Staff Safety & Security:

AASL Staff Safety & Security Plan for Covid-19 was fully activated throughout the second, third and last quarters of 2020. Work hours were rescheduled to 09:00am to 04:00pm and a work from home alternative schedule applied. As the case trend flattened and heightened in different months, AASL accordingly reviewed the safety measures applied. Management ensured all AASL offices installed hand washing stations, while staff were encouraged to wash their hands frequently, use hand sanitizers, wear face mask, and maintain social distance. Internal meetings were conducted in two ways; physically – adhering to the safety protocols, or virtually via Microsoft -Teams. Covid-19 awareness raising, and safety measures continued via email and WhatsApp to all staff and volunteers. Throughout year 2020, no case of Covid-19 was reported among AASL staff and their families neither was any of them under quarantine. No safeguarding or SHEA issue was reported concerning AASL staff throughout 2020.

#### Team Building

To wrap up the year, the Senior Management Team (SMT) had a two-day retreat in Kono, preceding the annual staff retreat. An annual staff retreat was also held in Kono following the SMT retreat. AASL conducts annual staff retreats for all its staff as a form of team building to ensure cohesion and bonding amongst staff across all cadres. 2020 was a difficult year due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it disrupted planned work and programmes and employee motivation was dampened as no one was sure of how long the pandemic would last. The retreat aimed at building a strong, motivated, and dedicated team that will deliver on AASL's strategy despite the existence of Covid-19. The theme for the 2020 Annual Staff Retreat was "Building a resilient organization".

#### Staff Capacity Building

As a people centred organisation, we strengthen our people power by investing and intensifying capacity building, valuing our diverse staff & strengthen women's leadership and ensure mutual accountability. We create an enabling environment for our staff to realise their potential and contribute to ensure a just and effective world of social change.

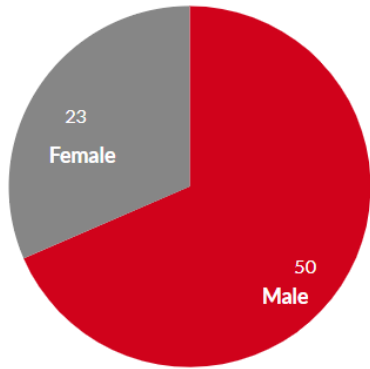
All staff of AASL received at least one form of capacity building in year 2020. The Affiliate Programme spent a total of Le 136,757,050.87 on staff training support. Staff were supported in various capacity building courses ranging from academic to professional and skills training.

#### Staff and staffing

We continued working towards ensuring an equitable gender balance in our staffing by prioritizing the recruitment of more female staff. In recent years, AASL has experienced an influx of volunteers, interns and national youth coppers supporting our work at various levels.

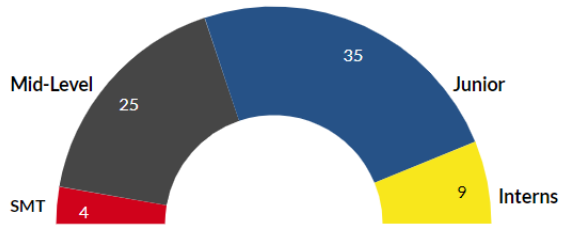
At the start of 2020, the programme has **73** staff categorized by gender and grade of senior, middle and junior grades as follows:

### AASL Staff Compliments 73



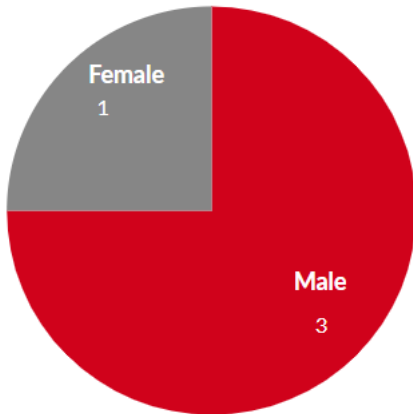
Male (68.49%) Female (31.51%)

### Staff by Hierarchy



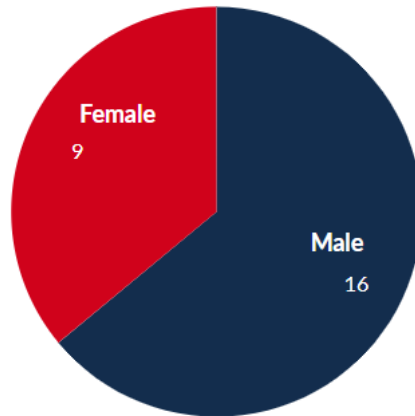
SMT (5.48%) Mid-Level (34.25%) Junior (47.95%) Interns (12.33%)

### Senior Management Team



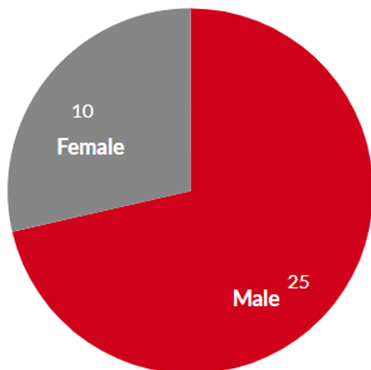
Male (75%) Female (25%)

### Mid-Level



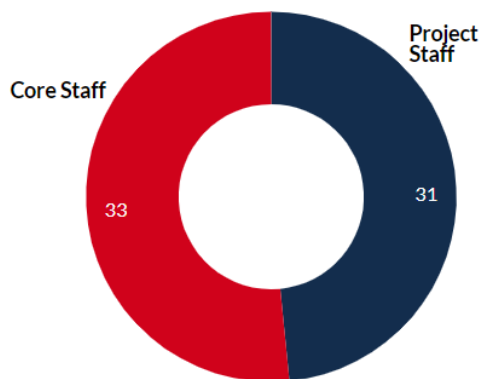
Male (64%) Female (36%)

### Junior Level

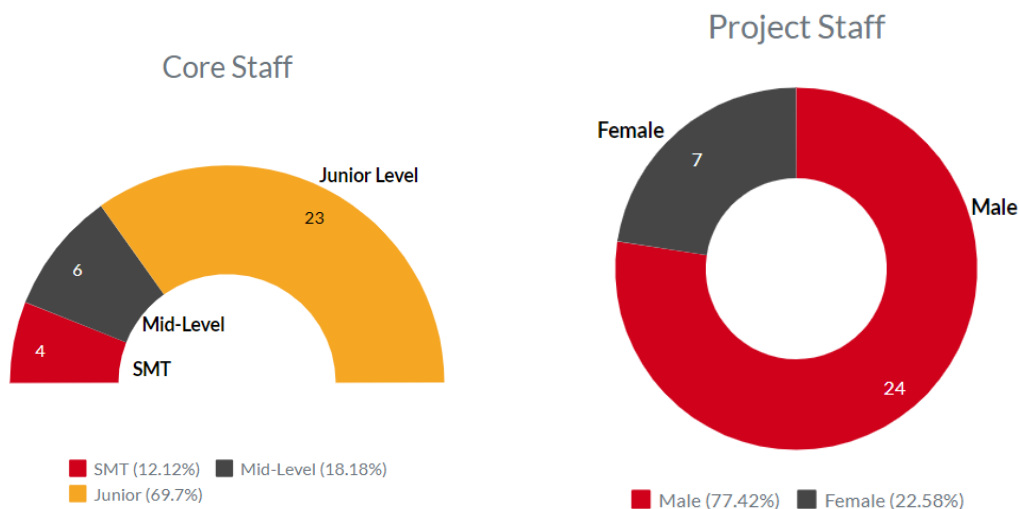


Male (71.43%) Female (28.57%)

### Staff Categories



Project Staff (48.44%) Core Staff (51.56%)



## Governance

### Board

The Affiliate Programme continued to be governed at the highest level by the national Board and General Assembly. Despite the pandemic, the Board/General Assembly continue to perform their oversight role. For the reporting period, a total of 4 general and 16 subcommittee and 1 General Assembly meetings were held where the Board/GA took the following strategic decisions: Approval for management to revise their plans and allocate resources to respond to the emergency, approval of annual, external and internal audit reports, appointment of external auditors, approval of plans and budget, etc. At the international level, the Board Chair participated in the International Assembly Meeting that was held virtually and made contributions to the discussions and subsequent approval of the AAI Annual Report, Annual Accounts, the Long-term Finance and Funding Strategy (LTFFS), Annual Assurance Report, appointment of External Auditors, etc. AASL continues to make significant contribution to the international governance processes with the election of former Board Chair, Mr. Umaru Fofana, as 2021 Assembly Convener.

### Internal audit

During 2020, the Internal Audit (IA) conducted one audit at headquarters, two field audits, and issued 3 assurance audit reports. The IA supported AA International Auditor with AASL Audit as he was unable to travel over to Sierra Leone due to the Covid restrictions. The IA worked with various unit heads including project managers to identify key risks that may affect AASL operations and overall goals and objectives. These risks and possible mitigating action identified led to drafting of risk register and was approved by the Finance and Audit Committee of the Board. Based on report submitted by the Internal Audit Unit, Annual AAI Self-Assessment Assurance and Compliance with AAI Policies, the outcome indicated that AASL compliance rate by policy is 92%.

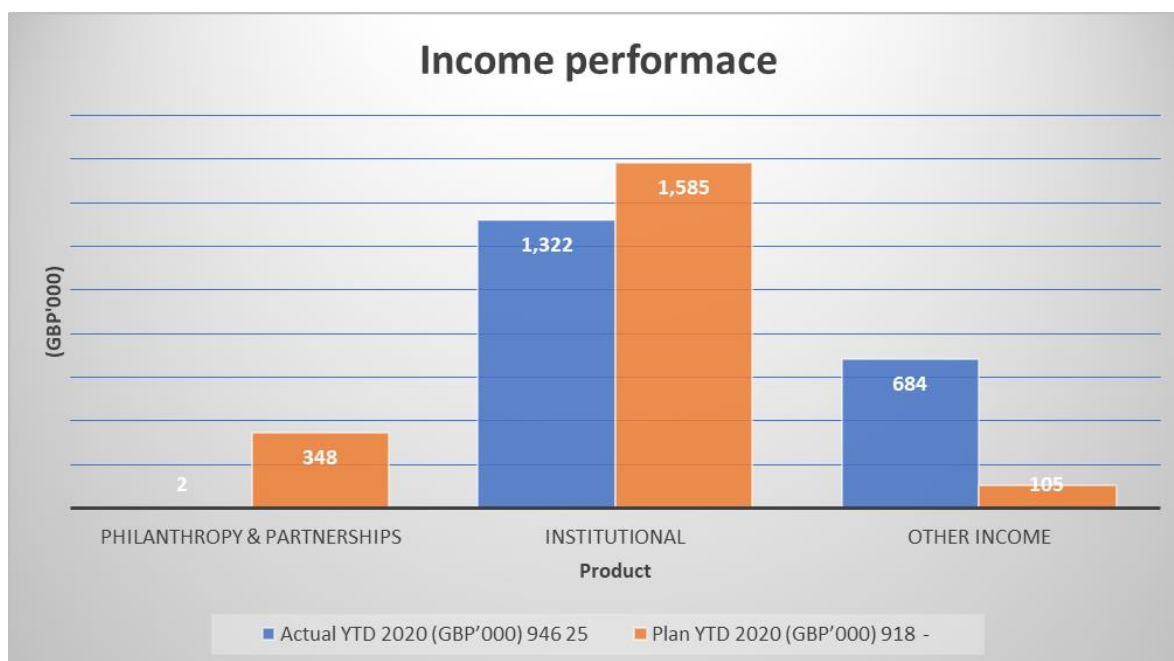
## Finance

### Income Performance January – December 2020 Vs. 2019

Income by Product	2020			2019
	Actual YTD (GBP'000)	Plan YTD (GBP'000)	CSP Target YTD (GBP'000)	Actual YTD (GBP'000)
Individual Giving – Regular	946	918	916	972
Individual Giving – Other	25	-		1
Philanthropy & Partnerships	2	348	840	110
Institutional	1,322	1,585	1,805	1,512
Other Income	684	105	45	361
<b>Total External Income</b>	<b>2,979</b>	<b>2,956</b>	<b>3,606</b>	<b>2,956</b>

Table 1: Income Performance by Product 2020 Vs. 2019 (source: AASL Income Report Jan – Dec 2020)

The above **Table 1** indicates Actual Income performance Vs. Planned Income for Jan – December 2020. Total Actual YTD Income as at December 2020 was slightly above planned by £23K which represent 0.8 percent approximately. This increase was as a result of two key products, such as Regular giving and other income (Revaluation gains). Below **figure 1** represents an illustration of graph to depict Actual Income compared to Planned income for 2020.



Income Performance (Source: AASL Income Transaction Jan – Dec 2020)

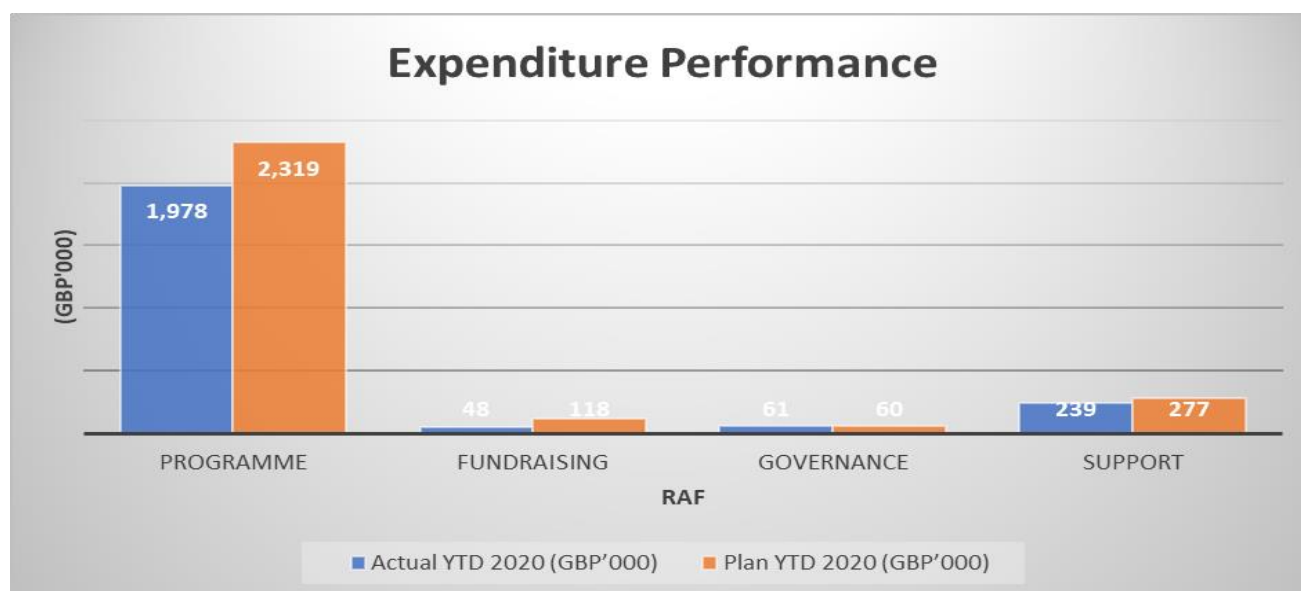


## Expenditure Performance 2020 Vs. 2019

Expenditure	2020			2019
	Actual YTD (GBP'000)	Plan YTD (GBP'000)	CSP Target YTD (GBP'000)	Actual YTD (GBP'000)
Programme	1,978	2,319	2,978	2,231
Fundraising	48	118	200	149
Governance	61	60	65	60
Support	239	277	328	341
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>2,326</b>	<b>2,774</b>	<b>3,571</b>	<b>2,781</b>

Table 2: Expenditure performance 2020 Vs. 2019 (Source: AASL Expenditure Report Jan – Dec 2020)

Table 2 above illustrates Expenditure performance Jan – Dec 2020 Vs. 2019. We also compared CSP Projections to Planned and Actual. The overall Actual expenditure for 2020 was below planned by £ 448K, representing 16% of Planned spending for the reporting year, 2020. Comparing Actual 2020 to 2019, expenditure is still lower in 2020 by £455K and this was due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Below is an illustrate graphs to compare both 2020 Actual expenditure Vs. 2020 Planned.



Expenditure Performances (Source: AASL Expenditure report Jan – Dec 2020)

Table 3; below is RAF to compare the 2020 Actual, Planned and CSP performance respectively. RAF target for 2020 was met and are in line with Planned.

RAF KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	2020			2019
	Actual YTD	Plan YTD	CSP YTD	Actual
Programme target > 65% of total spend on programme, policy advocacy, campaigns & communications	85%	84%	83%	80%
Fundraising target 0%-27% of total income invested in Fundraising, Voluntary + Institutional	2%	4%	8%	5%
Efficiency Target < 15% of total spend will be on Support costs	10%	10%	9%	12%

RAF Performance Indicators (Source: AASL Expenditure Report Jan- Dec 2020)

## Funding and Fundraising

### Contracts/Grants

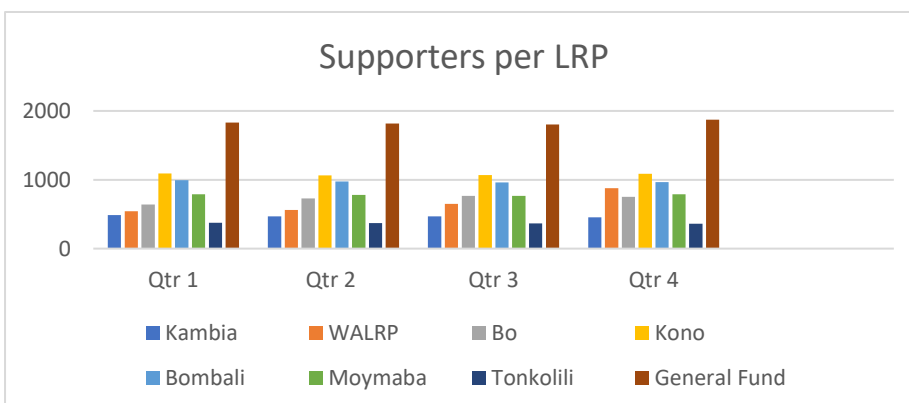
In the reporting year, there were seven (7) live projects run by the Affiliate Programme (AP). These include four (4) from the European Union of which two (2) were acquired in country and the other two (2) through ActionAid International, Perkins's phase II, Million Foundation, and a Covid-19 response project from IHART. Tremendous effort was made during the reviewed year that help to the development of five (5) proposals/and or concept notes. These proposals, though, unsuccessful, have been kept in the organization's database for further marketing.

The year also saw the completion of major projects like; The Africa We Want, Empowering Youth-Led Volunteering in Local-Level Response Project (YLVO) and Million Foundation. The AP received additional funding of £22K to implement phase II of the Perkins project in Tonkolili and £20,00 from IHART to respond to Covid-19 virus in the LRPs.

The AP's fundraising ambition has been equipped with an authentic donor scoping document and an initial draft of a Fundraising Strategy.

### Child Sponsorship

The AP started 2020 with a link of 6,841 supporters and closed with 7,066 across the 7 LRPs; below is an analysis as per LRP: -



Child sponsorship in 2020 was fraught with challenges due to the spread of COVID-19 virus across the globe and the mitigating measures introduced by the government restricted movement and gathering

of people in country. Nonetheless, the AP was able to service 95 percent of its supporters during the reporting period. Reaching out to communities and sponsored children was challenging, resorting to communication through mobile contact with animators and mothers club members. All 7 sponsorship LRPs were affected by the pandemic, but no sponsored child fell within the cracks of COVID-19. Regular update to funding affiliate was provided on the progress of events in the country. Solidarity messages that demonstrated our affection and concern for our supporters were also shared from the children and SMT.

## **ICT and Communications**

In 2020 we upgraded our network infrastructure to improve network connectivity in the Freetown office for remote access. ICT was very instrumental in facilitating the *work from home* readjustment by providing staff with remote support and access to the internet amidst the pandemic context. This heightened the need to build staff capacity on the use of Microsoft Teams and other programmes for remote collaboration and meetings. Staff were given the required training to foster effective performance. We also worked with the GS on the Pilot Phase of Project implementation of Azure cloud (Intune Enrolment) as part of the 2020 objectives.

## Stories of Change

### “Lessons Learnt! Covid met us prepared”



Adama, Neighbourhood Watch volunteer, Kuntoloh Community / PC: AASL

In Kuntoloh community, ActionAid had trained a women-led neighbourhood watch group during the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) outbreak, which quickly reactivated with the upsurge of Covid-19. With just one microphone, three women from the watch group went on door-to-door sensitization on awareness and prevention of Covid-19. The watch group worked with their local authorities to set up hand washing stations in strategic

locations within their community and made it mandatory for anyone entering the community to wash their hands with soap and water. *“We were badly affected by the Ebola virus in this community, so we are determined to fight against Covid-19 from entering our community”* said Adama, a member of the group *“we monitor strangers and make sure house to house movement is limited”* she concluded. Adama and the other women helped community members learn how to wash hands properly and with the Covid-19 posters provided by ActionAid, they could easily communicate the key messages of awareness, prevention, and solidarity.

The experience in sensitization during the previous EVD outbreak in Sierra Leone played a great role in clearing doubts, removing fear, rumours and false messages. People became confident to go about their usual businesses, adhering to the COVID-19 safety and prevention protocols and government restrictions. AASL supported Kuntoloh and other communities with hand washing equipment as neighbourhood watch groups continued sensitization.

Community structures like the neighbourhood watch groups have helped strengthen communities’ preparedness and resilience in emergencies. As communities continue to build their solidarity in preventing and ending the virus outbreak, meeting livelihood demands remained difficult. Within this time, the “Village Savings and Loan Association” (VSLA) turned out to be a dependable remedy. Many community women who have been part of the savings scheme and had contributed over a period. To cushion the hardship, members were credited various amounts to address their immediate family needs. Additionally, AASL provided covid-19 response palliative to sponsor children and their families. As a result, they would have been hardest hit livelihood period, turned out to be relatively better and communities demonstrated resilience to the effects of the pandemic. Kuntoloh and its surrounding communities recorded zero cases of covid-19 all through to date. The women-led neighbourhood watch structure in communities proved sustainable in emergency preparedness. *“Indeed, AASL learnt lessons from the past EVD outbreak so covid met us prepared”* concluded Adama.

## READING CIRCLES IMPROVE LEARNING OUTCOMES

Many children in rural communities where AASL works, have little or no access to libraries at elementary and primary levels. Access to and ownership of textbooks let alone story books is a huge challenge to the development of their literacy skills especially their reading ability. This constitutes a major reason why they most times perform poorly at public exams compared to children in urban communities. The Million Foundation through ActionAid funded the establishment of reading circles in rural communities in Western Area, Kono, Bo and Moyamba LRPs, providing them class appropriate reader books.

Maseray Koroma, 14, is a grade 6 pupil attending the Islamic Call Society Primary school in Gollu community, Bo District. She was part of the reading circle and enjoyed reading with her friends until covid-19 broke out in Sierra Leone and schools abruptly shut down. While listening to the radio teaching programs approved by the Government, Maseray also made out time to read story books by herself. For someone who only learnt how to speak English language at age 10, she was determined to be fluent and understand well, as she prepared for the national primary school examination (NPSE). She enjoyed her colorful story book daily, reading out loud to her siblings and learning to spell new words.



Maseray, 14, reading circle member / PC: AASL

When the pandemic eased and children in public exam classes were asked to return to school, Maseray was excited because she had prepared well and was confident. One of her teachers claimed that it would have been very challenging to teach Maseray without the intervention of the reading circle in her school. *“It would have taken years for us to have effectively taught her the basics in English. The reading circles helped Maseray prepare well for her public examination. Maseray can now read and write in English. She did exceptionally well during the school’s N.P.S.E mock final where she scored the highest grades in her class, topping the list of her class, with a score of 320”* he said.

With the support of AASL and her teachers, Maseray looked forward to the N.P.S.E exam with high hopes. *“I will do my best during the exams as I am ready to write it and make ActionAid, my teachers, friends and my dad especially to be proud of me”* concluded Maseray.



## Can't Stop, Won't Stop! Learning Amidst Covid-19



A stringent measure against the spread of covid-19 taken by the Government of Sierra Leone is the closure of schools. Alternatively, the government of Sierra Leone, through the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary School Education facilitated the radio teaching programme for pupils at all levels. The pupils of Kono district were not benefiting from the teaching programme, because the transmitter for Kono was faulty. This made AASL, through the GEC-T project to contract two radio stations for a period of 6 weeks to broadcast pre-recorded radio

teaching lessons. This timely intervention benefitted thousands of pupils from primary to Junior secondary schools. As a way of adding value to the programme, AASL embarked on robust monitoring of the process, to ensure that programme volunteers are there to support the pupils, to enhance proper understanding.

Mary, 12, is a pupil of Yengema Secondary School and is one of the project beneficiaries of the GEC-T Project. She received a solar powered radio from AASL which made her excited to learn in a new way. *“I missed going to school especially my favourite lessons. I was happy when the radio teaching programmes were introduced. I have learnt and understood a lot of topics in various subjects, benefitted from new teaching methods. To be frank, some topics were new to me, but with support from the Programme Volunteer (PV), I could ask questions and get better understanding”.*

The radio teaching programme created a platform where children can reflect on past lessons, listen to the key features of the topics that are taught on the radio shows, one or two pupils are asked to explain the ideas to check assess her level of understanding. *“I have now realized that effective learning can take place outside the classroom. With my radio I can't stop learning and won't stop even with covid-19.”*

Mary anticipated returning to school as soon as possible, to hug her friends and see her teachers again. According to her, life without going to school is full of domestic work.

## Challenges

AASL's biggest challenge in 2020 was low partnership income. There were limited funding opportunities due to the pandemic and most of it was skewed towards Covid-19 response. The level of competitiveness for Covid-19 funds limited our chances in fundraising and thus our low level of response to the pandemic in our communities, unlike 2014/15 when we had huge funding for Ebola response. In addition to this were other programmatic and organizational challenges not limited to the following:

- ❖ Inaccessibility to quarantine homes to provide our support to affected people and families thus limiting our ability to track the impact of our support. AASL therefore provided support through the District Response Centres.
- ❖ Programme activities stalled at the onset of the pandemic and AASL responded by seeking approval from the Board to revise the approved plans and budget to be able to respond to the emergency.
- ❖ Limited Community Engagements due to government restrictions & safety measures. AASL adapted by using mobile phones to relay and get information from communities through Animators and Programme Volunteers.
- ❖ Programme Meetings affected due to inter-district lockdowns and other government safety regulations
- ❖ Limited field monitoring of our Programme

## Learning

Amidst the challenging context, AASL had a great deal of learning.

- a. Communities can serve as first responders to emergencies when organized into self-led structures.
- b. Virtual meetings significantly helped ease work during this pandemic. Staff were able to provide regular information through meetings. Several approaches in holding meetings with minimum cost is understood and maintained.
- c. Plans are easily disrupted any time there is emergency. This happened during the Ebola outbreak and has also occurred in the corona pandemic. This shows that AASL must not only prioritise emergency work but also ensure development of flexible plans to respond to the changing/emerging contexts.
- d. The Corona pandemic exposed us to cross learning international engagement through virtual means which would have otherwise been face-to-face meetings. This saved more resources for direct programming.
- e. The burden on women persists in emergencies. Women provide more care for children and their husbands; and are mostly violated sexually and economically. Thus, plans for emergencies should also include plans for the shadow effects.

## We act together

### Meet Our Partners

-  Advocate for Social Justice and Development (ASJD)
-  Animated Area Development Committee (AADC)
-  Association for the Wellbeing of Rural Community Development (ABC-Dev)
-  Budget Advocacy Network (BAN)
-  Campaign for Good Governance (CGG)
-  Center for the Coordination of Youth Activities (CCYA)
-  Community Organisation for Mobilisation and Empowerment (COME SL)
-  Movement towards Peace and Development Agency (MoPaDA)
-  Network Support for Peace Education (NeSPE)
-  Plan International
-  Western Area Budget Advocacy Education Network (WABAEN)
-  Women in Crisis Movement
-  Women's Action for Human Dignity (WAHD)
-  Women's Forum for Human Right and Democracy (WoFHRAD)

# OUR FUNDING SOURCE

## Funding Affiliate Countries

United Kingdom (UK)

Italy

Greece

Sweden

## Institutional Donors



Foreign & Commonwealth Office

## High Value Donors

Millione Foundation

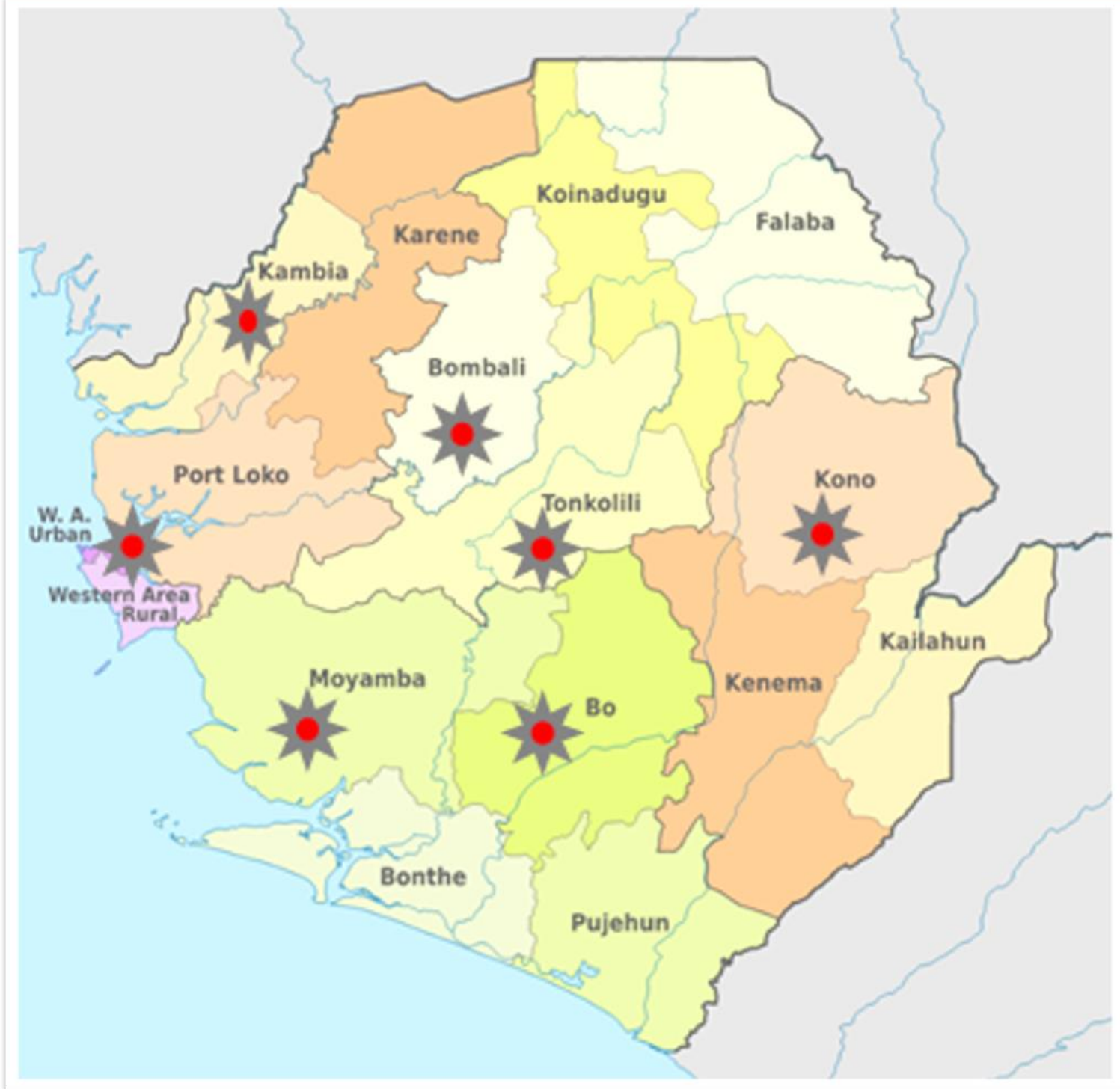
John and Grace Perkin

## Regular Giving

Paul Meir



# CONNECT WITH US



## HEAD OFFICE

**1 Amis Close | Off Signal Hill Road | Wilberforce | Freetown**