

POWER IN PEOPLE



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sierra Leone

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Message from the Executive Director

Warm Greeting from ActionAid Sierra Leone.

In this issue, we present to you some of the activities we have implemented over this period and how our work has contributed to national cohesion and building an equitable society.

The Republic of Sierra Leone held its multi-tier Elections on the 24th of June 2023. With support from Start Fund, we contributed to the process through collaboration with other CSOs to organise a training of young people on Peaceful democratic elections, ultimately promoting peace and national cohesion.

As always, we prioritize the empowerment and protection of women and other people living in vulnerable conditions while actively playing our part in the educational sector through the support of our donor partner(s).

By way of advocacy and campaigns, we continue to serve as the voice of the voiceless in society and work with their communities and other stakeholders to achieve social justice, gender equality and poverty eradication.

Happy Reading!



Foday Bassie Swarday

Women's Right Engagement with women of Manokoh Community

At the core of ActionAid Sierra Leone's work is the empowerment of women and young people especially those in the most vulnerable communities. Women in over 200 communities including Manokoh of Bombali Sheray Chiefdom have benefited from the empowerment initiatives of ActionAid Sierra Leone.

This engagement was a platform for mother's club members, other community stakeholders and AASL's women's right focal to have a frank discussion on how their daily lives unfold, what are some of the barriers they face and how the interventions of ActionAid Sierra Leone have helped improve their lives.



It was also an opportunity to discuss the findings and recommendations of the "IMF wage bill ceiling and the Sierra Leonean's right to adequate frontline workers" Report and what mothers can do to campaign for more qualified teachers and nurses in their community.

The women expressed appreciation to AASL for continuously advocating for their community and bringing up initiatives to ensure the women live independent lives. "We have played our part in campaigning for community development especially to have sufficient trained and qualified teachers and nurses who are motivated enough to stay in our community as key players in educating our children and accessing medical facility within reach. It's pleasing to know that ActionAid takes such discussions in bigger campaigns and help tackle the issues we face in our community", stated the chairlady of mother's club, Aminata Y. Bangura.

Fatmata Kanu who is a widow and mother of three children put in that, "The Education of my children is solely taken care of by ActionAid through Child Sponsorship. They are provided with books, bags, pens, pencils and other learning materials. The Village Savings and Loan Association in my community which was initiated by ActionAid has likewise been a huge support to me and other women whenever we are in dire need".

A Four-day Training and Three-day Conference for Young People on their roles in Peaceful Democratic Elections and Conflict Management



With support from Start Fund, ActionAid Sierra Leone partnered with Center for Coordination of Youth Activities, Radio Democracy, and See Beyond to train over 700 young people on their roles in peaceful democratic elections and conflict management.

The training took place simultaneously in Western Area, Bo, Moyamba, Tonkolili, Bombali, Kono, and Kambia. It featured presentations on elections related conflict drivers, Root causes of conflict in Sierra Leone, preventing violent conflict, and resolving violent conflict. There were also debate sessions among the young people on who spearhead violence during electioneering process, the causes of violence before, during and after elections, panel discussions on communicating peace in Elections that prevent violence.

According to Edward Kargbo, a peace ambassador, "I don't think I would have gotten such in-dept knowledge on elections processes if I wasn't a part of this training. The interaction with other young people was thrilling and got to learn a lot from facilitators and peers alike while discussing the causes of violence before, during and after elections, group presentations, and debate sessions.

"As young people, this is a moment to reflect. You must have heard stories of our past conflict, some young people may not understand what it means to be a refugee, to leave your family, running to seek asylum elsewhere. These were some of the things that happened during the eleven years of civil war in Sierra Leone. Over the years, we have been living as one people but the only time we experience the threat of conflict is during electioneering period. This is our investment; to ensure young people take the lead to be peace ambassadors and dismantle the perception that they are drivers of violence." Stated the Executive Director of ActionAid Sierra Leone, Foday Bassie Swaray.

"This engagement is to give young people the knowledge on how to be peaceful, law-abiding citizens and promote the message of peace in their communities." He added

According to the Representative of Political Parties Regulatory Commission, “this is a good initiative because young people are often vulnerable to be used by politicians to perpetrate violence. We register and regulate political parties to ensure they operate in accordance with the constitution, other regulatory policies and code of conduct.” He also informed the participants on their rights as citizens to belong to any political party of choice and their roles in the electioneering process.

“The Peace Commission is a recommendation from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission charged with the responsibility of maintenance of peace in Sierra Leone. We work with the civil society, departments and agencies to collaborate on our peace efforts. A huge percentage of our population is youth, and many are first time voters who need sensitization on how to go about the electioneering process as responsible citizens.” Put in the representative of Peace Commission.



During the conference, a position paper was presented by the young people to all relevant stakeholders in Sierra Leone and put forth these demands:

- As young people, we commit not to be a part of any violence before, during and after elections. We will help to prosecute anyone who gets him/herself involved in any violence.
- We are calling on the Government of Sierra Leone to provide adequate security for everyone across the country to maintain the peace and stability of our nation.
- The leadership of all political parties should denounce and disassociate themselves from any act of violence. If any political party has a concern, let it be pursued using legal means.
- Many allegations and counter-allegations are going round on issues bordering around free, fair, and transparent conduct of the elections. We therefore call on the Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone to ensure a FREE, FAIR, AND TRANSPARENT elections as provided for by the laws of Sierra Leone.
- We demand that the security forces “Police, Military Aid to Civil Power (MACP), OSD ETC be more professional in executing their state duties.
- We call on the fourth estate “Radios, TVs, Newspapers etc” to share evidence-based reports that are true and factual as a way of holding the peace of Sierra Leone.

Reading Circles improving the Quality of Education for Children in Tonkolili District

The Reading Circle is one of the many components of the “Improving Access to Quality Education for Children in Tonkolili District” project. This promotes the training of pupils in accurate and efficient reading. Sierra Leonean Readers are supplied to the children who meet with teachers three times a week after school to study those books.

The Reading Circles are in six schools including Roman Catholic Primary School in Rosengbeh, SDA Primary School in Rosengbeh, TDC Primary School in Matufulie, TDC Primary School in Rochain, TDC Primary School in Masagbla, and MCA Primary School in Masoko in Tane and Kholifa Mamutha Mayossoh Chiefdoms.



The Reading Circles span from classes 3-6, as reading is a fundamental factor in the educational development of children, which is what a lot of school going pupils lack.” Stated the Project Officer, Sylvester Amara.

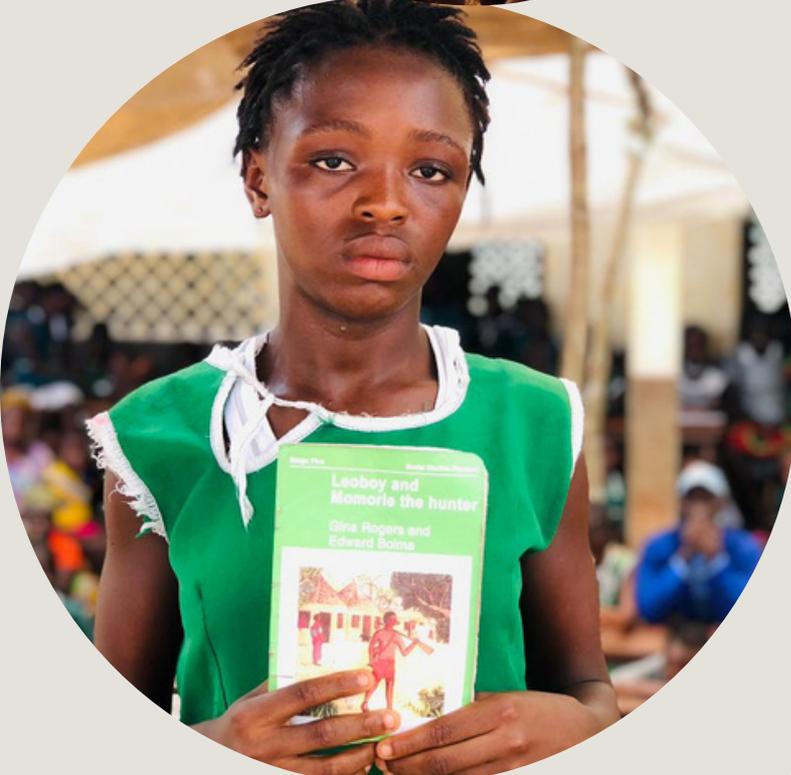
The school teachers act as facilitators of the children in the Reading Circles. Books are provided for the children so that after school, their teachers guide them specifically on how to read.

10-years old Alie Kommeh, a class 5 pupil of the Seventh Day Adventists Primary School Rosengbeh recounts how the Reading Circle has helped him improve his reading skills. “Our teachers guide us on how to read, then ask us questions on what we have read which helps us to know more about the books we read.” He went on to say that he is happy for the establishment of the Reading Circle because “before the Reading Circle, I was unable to pronounce well and not interested in reading at all but that has changed now as through the Reading Circle I has learnt a lot and can now read well.”





Another component of the Project is a Reading Competition at the end of each Term when pupils from the Reading Circles in all six primary schools covered converge in one school for a friendly competition to sharpen the reading skills of the pupils. This is an opportunity to assess how much the Reading Circles of the individual schools have impacted the children. The competitors of the Reading competition read the same books for the same level and the judges determine the best among them. The best performing classes across the six schools and the overall best pupil receive prizes including books, and other learning materials. The best performing school receive football, team jerseys and other prizes. This has encouraged the children to read and apply themselves in preparing the reading competition.



According to 13-years-old Salamatu Turay in class 5 of TDC Primary School in Matufulie Community "When I first joined the Reading Circle I was quite shy. Though not fluent in reading, I was able to pronounce some basic words. With the help of the Reading Circle Facilitators, I got better overtime and now I have been selected to participate in the Reading competition and I emerged as the best competitor for class 5 and my school, the best performing school. I received prizes including school bag, exercise books, mathematical set, pens, pencils, rulers etc.



Supporting State Institutions to respond to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

Women and children are often the most vulnerable to violence and domestic abuse. The shortfalls of systems in place to tackle the perpetrators of such offences worsen existing inequalities against women and girls and seeing a surge in cases of sexual related offences.

ActionAid Sierra Leone over the years has been championing the fight against sexual and gender-based violence in line with its country strategic priority of engaging the structural causes of violence against marginalized women & girl and curbing this menace in our society.

The family support unit of the Sierra Leone Police force in Moyamba is instrumental in investigating all forms of abuse and violence against women, children and other vulnerable members of the district.

The Executive Director of NeSPE (implementing partner of AASL), George Gbanga expressed that “We support the FSU by conducting trainings, providing stationery, and other supportive activities and materials to ensure that the police is able to respond the violations against women and other vulnerable people. ActionAid has also aided their tracking systems in-terms of information to pin sexual violence cases.”



According to Inspector Seisay Lappia, Line manager of the Family support unit in Moyamba District “I first got in contact with ActionAid while I was working with the FSU in Bo-West, we see all the interventions of ActionAid Sierra Leone especially in our work relating to domestic violence and sexual penetration cases. When I started working here in Moyamba, ActionAid had a dialogue with us to present its annual budget and I believe this is where transparency and accountability starts. We were factored into AASL’s budget whereby we were supported with stationery and other items.”

“We have a solid relationship with AASL, when they work in communities where they are met with sexual and gender-based violence cases, they immediately inform us, and we respond swiftly and bring the perpetrators of such offences to book” he continued.

Sia Mabel Musa, in charge of sexual violence cases at the Moyamba FSU stated that, “ActionAid has greatly contributed towards tackling sexual penetration cases and because of their support, we have recorded more success in sexual penetration cases. We hope that AASL continues to operate in Moyamba because its support truly backs us up in respect of our investigation processes.”

Corporal Sylvalie added that “The successes ActionAid has recorded in the district are countless, it is our one call away and we always work together as a team. FSU here deals with 12 chiefdoms that are hard-to-reach areas, we believe ActionAid will continue to support us especially in-terms of mobility regarding arresting offenders to bring them to the station.”

ActionAid Sierra Leone collaborated with other CSOs to launch the Sierra Leone Women's Manifesto



Reflecting our position on women's rights and women's empowerment, ActionAid Sierra Leone partnered with Campaign for Good Governance, the 50/50 Group, and SEND SL to launch the Sierra Leone Women's Manifesto in a bid to catalogue a series of stipulations for attaining women's inclusion and gender equality.

Under the theme "Advancing Gender Equality and Inclusion for a prosperous Sierra Leone", the engagement attracted the participation of various CSOs, CBOs, women's movements, persons with disabilities, and the media. The Manifesto presents different demands collated by women in Sierra Leone over the years as a component of their strive for national development and the advancement of women's rights.

The manifesto proffered recommendations on several thematic areas including:

- women's socio-economic well-being and opportunities.
- Women's human rights and the rule of law.
- Climate change and the Environment.
- Peace, security and social cohesion.
- Women's health, sexual and reproductive rights.
- Democracy and Good Governance.
- Women and Political participation.



Sierra Leone faces significant challenges throughout the work towards achieving women's full rights and empowerment". Cultural beliefs and stereotypes control numerous governance structures and traditional measures that support legislatures, societal standards also bound the capacity of national and civil society actions including women to track and accomplish anticipated equality and rights.

Advocacy for gender equality in Sierra Leone systematized from the pursuit to tackle gender inequalities in the country. Several NGOs and CBOs unanimously agree to work hand in hand to execute interventions to attain gender equality and increase women's leadership participation.

One of such acts is to develop the Sierra Leone women's manifesto during the electoral processes which is presented to political parties to drive action regarding the creation and management of the civic space for women to thrive.

Global Platform Sierra Leone trained 140 young people on Civic Education and Participation of youth in Electoral Processes



Ahead of the June 2023 Elections, Global Platform conducted a three-day training of 140 young people on civic education and participation of youth in electoral processes. The event which took place in May at the Bo district council hall, Falaba brought together various stakeholders including All Political Party Youth Associations, female aspirants, CSOs, District Security Committee (DISEC) and other youth groups.

With the theme “Promoting young people’s voices in Electioneering”, the event was marked by presentations on youth and violence in politics, the theory of peace, the link between peace and development, rights and responsibilities of a citizen, maintaining peace and stability for young people in Elections.

The South-Eastern Regional Manager of ActionAid Sierra Leone, Desmond Kanneh declared that “This training will capacitate young people to be inclusive, to be responsible and also occupy their rightful place when it comes to electioneering and non-violent conduct.”

The young people triggered questions on who or what really spearhead violence during Elections and what can be done to curtail the influence of those sects on the ‘violence portrayed by youths during elections.’ Lucy Koroma, a participant assert that it was difficult for her to distinguish among the Electoral management bodies and their roles in the electioneering process. “I am now aware that PPRC is responsible to register political parties and voters for elections.”

Voter Education and Training Officer, ECSL Bo District, Anthony Senesie conveyed that “we are making progress and getting to the point we want to be; bringing together informed youths on how they should participate in the civic space.”

“It is pleasing to see young people from various political parties gathered together to participate in this well-timed engagement and ActionAid has created this platform to interact with young people and admonish them on how to live as responsible members of society.” Said the District Security Coordinator-ONS, Amara Kamara.

He added that the peace and stability of the country lies on the hands of young people and they should not allow themselves to be used by politicians as perpetrators of violence.



Positive Parenting Training for Mother's Club members in Kono

With the rationale born out of the need for an amicable relationship between parents and children, this is a training of trainers who will take the message back to their communities to instill lessons learned to other parents.

It was an educative program to see families get knowledge to raise safe and healthy children and to keep those children in school. Some topics of presentation included power relations in the home, gender-based violence, valuing our daughters' aspirations and supporting our girls through menstruation.

During the training, there were lots of concerns presented by Parents regarding the lack of communication between parents and children which has led to ills in many homes and communities and has resulted to children dropping out of school, drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, and early marriage.





The message cascaded to wider community structures will prompt every parent to guide and supervise all the children in their communities, biological or not, which will ultimately contribute to the overall progress and development of these communities.

“We had many misconceptions regarding raising our children. We didn’t know that parents should continuously monitor the well-being and performance of our children in school, support our daughters who fall pregnant in their teens, and encourage our children who drop-out of school to return and complete schooling. we also thought that whether or not our girls get educated, we’ll eventually have to give them out to marriage, so we didn’t prioritize sending and keeping our girls in school. All that will now change because of the knowledge we have received from this training organized by ActionAid and its partner, Action for Social Justice and Development (ASJD)” stated Rachel Betu, one of the participants of the training.

“This training organized for women in rural communities is very timely. It was an interactive session which exposed burning issues affecting both the children and parents in these communities. I believe it has been a platform to instill a sense of communal responsibility in parents to unitedly raise the children in their communities” expressed Victoria Abu-Komboh, the training facilitator.

"Being a part of the VSLA has supported my children's education"

The Village Savings and Loan Associations supported by AASL are social and economic empowerment tools that have helped women in more than 40 communities in Kambia district to make savings, reduce their debts, and build a robust group to discuss issues affecting them in their communities and map out ways through which they can meaningfully contribute to their families and society as a whole.

The European Union project in Kambia was a platform through which hundreds of women got to know about the VSLAs initiated by ActionAid Sierra Leone.

35 years old Emma Mafereh Kamara, a single mother of two children from Masimra community, Masungbala Chiefdom describes how she and her family have benefitted from the VSLA scheme



"My husband left me when I fell ill and lost my sight. I am left to provide for my children and myself under this circumstance. I harvest palm-nuts and sell to raise income that I utilize to care for my family. Being a part of this association has helped me a lot in supporting my children's education, providing their school needs and meals. We contribute weekly to the 'Dalengehneh box' and members can get loan from the savings and pay back over a period of time". After a year of saving, the associates share the savings among all the twenty-five members of the association, they then use what they receive to support their families and businesses.



"ActionAid has done a great thing for us; it has not only improved on our economic situations but has also built a team of women who can rely on one another in times of need".

Daniel Kamara, a father of eight, whose wife is part of the VSLA was excited to tell how AASL has been instrumental to the smooth running of their home. "In fact, I indirectly contribute to the VSLA through my wife as I always add whatever little amount of money, I have to hers so that we can save it together.

Even when my wife is not around, I pay on her behalf because I know how important this is to us. During times of desperate need, my wife takes loan from the association which we pay back stress-free unlike other forms of previous micro-financing scheme.

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