

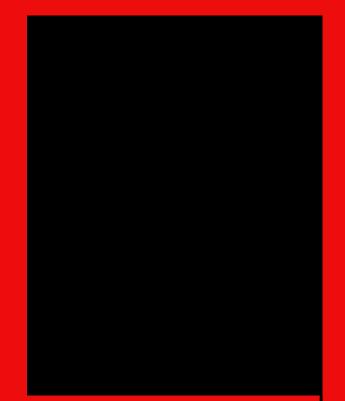
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## FOREWORD



Foday Bassie Swaray

Executive Director, ActionAid Sierra Leone

It is with great pleasure that we present the fourth issue of our newsletter, a celebration of the impactful journeys and resilient communities ActionAid work alongside. This edition showcases the lives of women farmers, adolescent girls, and persons living with disabilities who, with the help of our dedicated partners and generous donor funds, have been supported to lead change and foster growth in their communities.

In this issue, we delve into the vital work being done on climate justice, sharing the story of ActionAid's campaign to stop public finance fuelling the climate crisis. Our commitment to ensuring that everyone has a voice and a platform to thrive remains strong, and we are especially proud of the strides made in strengthening referral pathways to connect individuals with essential resources and support.

This edition also highlights awards that recognize our collective efforts and dedication in the Governance, Environment, Climate change, Energy and Natural resources sectors in Sierra Leone. These accolades are evidence of the hard work, resilience, and unwavering spirit of our team, donors, partners, and communities.

We are excited to share these inspiring stories with you and hope they offer insight into the profound impact of our work. We extend our gratitude to all our partners, donors, and supporters who made this possible. Thank you for joining us on this journey of transformation and hope.

## SUPPPORTING WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS THROUGH ECONOMIC AND EDUCATIONAL AID - THE STORY OF MARGARET KOROMA

Margaret Koroma is a resilient woman from Rochain community, Mamunta Moyossoh Section Tonkolili District, balancing her responsibilities as a mother and grandmother to 15 dependents. Her primary source of livelihood comes from farming, where she cultivates crops like pepper, corn, rice, and groundnut. However, recent economic hardships have severely impacted her ability to sustain her farming activities.

Margaret said that, "This year, I was unable to plant as much as I usually do due to the high cost of seeds." The economic downturn meant that purchasing essential farming inputs was out of reach, putting her family's food security at risk.



Additionally, Margaret faces the emotional and financial burden of caring for a sick child, who despite being a graduate, is unable to work due to an eye condition. The combination of these challenges has made it increasingly difficult for Margaret to maintain her household.

Amid these challenges, ActionAid's intervention has been a source of hope for Margaret and her family. By the introduction of a Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA), through the Perkin's Project, Margaret and other women in her community have found a support. The VSLA scheme has provided them with an alternative to the predatory microcredit schemes that often trap women in cycles of debt.

Margaret's gratitude towards ActionAid is profound. "The VSLA has not only allowed me to avoid microcredit but has also become a critical resource during my child's illness. I have been able to take out loans from the box to cover medical expenses, ensuring my child receives the necessary care."

Beyond economic support, ActionAid has also made significant strides in empowering women like Margaret through adult literacy classes. These classes have transformed Margaret's life by equipping her with essential skills. She proudly states that "I can now read, write my name, and do basic numeracy tasks. This literacy is not only a personal achievement but also an asset in managing my participation in the VSLA."

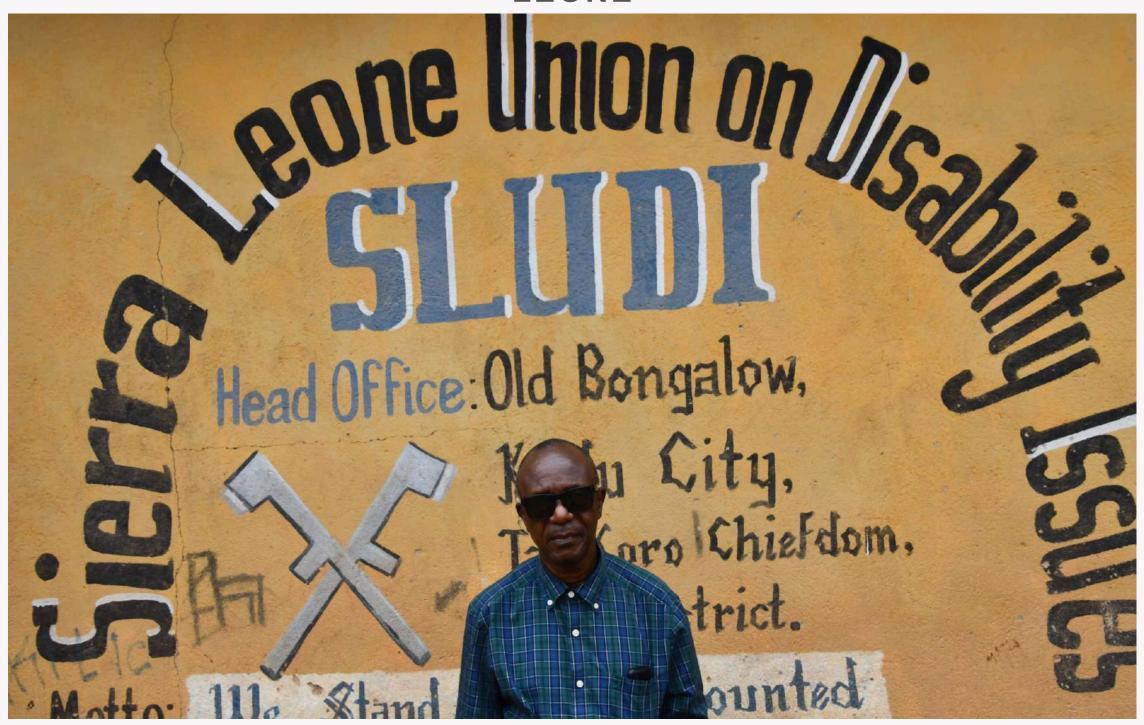


The impact of these interventions is evident in Margaret's life. The VSLA has provided her with a safety net, allowing her to navigate economic hardships and unexpected expenses. The literacy classes have boosted her confidence and enabled her to contribute more effectively to the VSLA.

ActionAid's interventions have not only provided immediate financial relief but have also empowered Margaret with the skills and confidence to build a more secure future for herself and her family.

### ACTIONAID FOSTERS INCLUSIVITY IN GOVERNANCE THROUGH THE

"ENHANCING CSOS' PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNANCE AND NATIONAL LEVEL POLICY PROCESSES" PROJECT IN SIERRA LEONE



Disability is one of the many issues that affect Sierra Leone's progress as Persons living with disabilities face economic barriers, health and educational disparities, and social exclusion. According to the World Health Organization, an estimated 15% of the world's population experience some form of disability or impairment.

For Sierra Leone, which endured a horrific eleven years of civil war that saw the amputation of limbs of civilians, the figures are staggering, with an approximation of 450,000 persons living with disability. The disability issues do not only stop at the war amputees; persons with visual, hearing and speech impairments are included in this glaring reality.

Despite the formation of policies and legal frameworks such as section 8(3) of the 1991 constitution that requires the state to care for and safeguard persons with disabilities as well as the Persons with Disability Act of 2011, which provides for the rights of PWDs, they continue to face daily struggles including lack of access to basic amenities, discrimination, and stigmatization. There's also limited space for them to lobby, influence, and engage duty bearers on key public policy issues affecting PWDs. For those living in the rural areas, the issues are twice as difficult.

To contribute to addressing these challenges, ActionAid through the Enhancing CSOs' Participation in Governance and National Level Policy Processes in Sierra Leone, funded by the EU, has supported the Sierra Leone Union on Disability Issues (SLUDI) in Kono district with grant to effectively engage in governance processes, policy advocacy, and promote transparency and accountability at the local and national levels. The overall objective is to strengthen collaboration with partner CSOs to drive democratic processes. SLUDI now has the opportunity and space for a dialogue with chiefdom committees, partners, and national stakeholders, ultimately bringing issues affecting people living with disabilities to the attention of stakeholders.

"The Sierra Leone Union on Disability Issues is the umbrella organization for Persons living with disabilities, charged with the responsibility of advocating and sensitizing the public on disability issues. The project is implemented in 2 out of the 14 chiefdoms SLUDI operates, in Kono. There are 27 Disabled People's organizations (DPOs) registered with SLUDI in Kono, and the project caters to 9 of them".

Reflecting on the daily ordeals they encounter, Charles Kapuwa - Chairperson of SLUDI in Kono district expressed immense gratitude for the support given by ActionAid through the EU funds.

"Before now, it was impossible for SLUDI to interface with duty-bearers and like-minded organizations, we were just working in a small corner but now our story has changed. The project is timely as our work is now considered and recognized"

The members of the Union who are not direct participants of the project voiced their belief that if there's more funding, they will be a part of the project. However, the Disability Desk at the District council, which was acquired via the dialogues facilitated through the project, will address their urgent needs and create an inclusive environment where their voices will be heard and acknowledged.



#### ACTIONAID SIERRA LEONE IN PARTNERSHIP WITH IMAGINE WORLDWIDE HAS LAUNCHED A DIGITAL LEARNING PROJECT IN KARENE DISTRICT

This initiative aims to address literacy and numeracy challenges and provide a child-directed, tech-enabled learning that is accessible, effective, and affordable to thousands of children in the district and eventually across the entire country, by using tablets for learning. Currently, the project is active in 19 schools across five chiefdoms.

The launch of the tablet session marks the first day pupils began using tablets as learning tools. Community members and teachers are thrilled with this new approach, as it provides children from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds unprecedented access to digital resources.

Pupils are eager and motivated to learn with the tablets, with the hope of improving educational outcomes in their schools and beyond.



## ACTIONAID SIERRA LEONE HOLDS ITS ANNUAL COMMUNITY-DRIVEN PARTICIPATORY REVIEW AND REFLECTION PROCESS (PRRP)



Every year, ActionAid holds a dialogue with the people of the communities we work alongside, to assess the relationship between them and the organisation, to know what has changed since the last review period, and the way forward on how AASL can continue to diligently intervene in communities as needed. The process is one of the essential schemes of AASL's accountability, learning, and planning approach.

"Our goal with the PRRP is to ensure that we are continuously learning and improving based on the feedback we receive from those we serve," said Mohamed Fofana, Head of Programs and Policy AASL. "This is not just a review process—it's an open dialogue with our communities to ensure their voices are heard and reflected in our planning."

This exercise enabled both AASL staff, partners and community members to reflect on the past year's interventions, assess their impact, and develop community action plans for the upcoming year. The feedback gathered from this process plays a critical role in informing AASL's plans for 2025, ensuring that programs remain relevant to the context and needs of the people.

Community stakeholders expressed their appreciation for the participatory nature of the engagement. "It's empowering to know that our feedback informs the organization's plans. We feel like true partners in the development process," said Agnes Bangay, Councilor of Mogbogesei community in Timdale Chiefdom.



Following the community engagement phase, a district-level stakeholder and community interface meeting was held to present prevailing issues and action plan, then dialogue on how various groups—government, civil society, and the communities, can work together to address the challenges raised. The dialogue brought together local government officials, community leaders, and other key district stakeholders.

Key issues raised during the community engagement, such as access to clean water, the effects of climate change, the deplorable state of healthcare facilities, and education, were presented and discussed.

"Development is a shared responsibility. We need to unite our efforts and ensure we address these challenges faced by our people," said Deputy Director of Education in Moyamba District, Kai Wuseni.

Community members echoed the need for stronger collaboration between district authorities and their people. "We're not just asking for support; we want to be part of the solution. This dialogue shows that we're all in this together," remarked Sheku Koroma, teacher from Mosanda community.

The insights gathered from the PRRP is instrumental in informing AASL's upcoming plans and budgets, ensuring that future interventions are effective, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of the people.

"With the continued collaboration of district authorities, community leaders, and other stakeholders, we believe we can create long-lasting, positive change in the communities we work alongside." said Gibril Kargbo, Business and Partnership Development Specialist AASL.









## CELEBRATION OF INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE GIRL CHILD

ActionAid Sierra Leone joined the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs and other NGOs to commemorate the International Day of the Girl Child.

The event brought together hundreds of girls from across the country to discuss their experiences and how they envision a brighter future.

One of the highlights of the event was the presentation of findings from ActionAid's Girl-Led Research Project.

The research which was done by girls themselves, provide invaluable insights into the experiences of their peers in five communities in Western Area and delved deep into the plights of teenage pregnancy, drug abuse, and societal pressure faced by adolescent girls.

The event was a reminder of the importance of empowering girls and providing them with the resources and support they need to achieve their full potential. By giving girls a platform to share their experiences and advocate for change, we contribute to creating a more equitable and inclusive society.



## Life skills training of Adolescent girls: A Path to Self-Reliance in Sierra Leone



At just 16 years old, Adamsay Kamara is determined to shape her future. "I opted to learn Gara tie dyeing because I see it as a profitable business that will help me be self-reliant," she says. Adamsay is one of the 25 girls from four communities—Rokonta, Rosint, Manonkoh, and Makump Bana—who participated in an eight-week skills training program implemented by ActionAid in partnership with the Women's Forum for Human Rights and Democracy (WOFHRAD).

According to the 2019 Sierra Leone Demographic Health Survey, 60.7% of women and adolescent girls aged 15-49 have experienced physical violence, and 7.4% have faced sexual violence since the age of 15. Poverty and illiteracy are significant contributors to these issues, highlighting the urgent need for education and skills training. Equipping girls with the necessary skills to gain economic independence is at the heart of ActionAid's mission. The training program entailed life skills development through Gara tie dyeing, bead making, and Ankara designing. The girls underwent an orientation to identify their interests before engaging into practical sessions. In addition to the skills training, each girl received sanitary kits, ensuring we not only support their education but menstrual hygiene as well, which is important for every adolescent girl. Since 2012, Women's Forum for Human Right and Democracy (WOFHRAD) has collaborated with ActionAid to promote community engagement, women-led initiatives, and educational programs. One notable project prior to the skills training was the Karakura project, which facilitated weekly discussions on critical issues like "My Body, My Right" that taught girls about their bodily autonomy. This initiative empowered girls to become peer mentors, fostering a culture of support and education within their communities. Eleven girls were selected for a school club focused on safeguarding, learning how to identify and report issues affecting adolescent girls. "ActionAid has had a positive influence on me and other girls in my community," Adamsay shares. "They have taught us about our rights and how to understand and advocate against abuse. Now, I am empowered to stand up for myself and other girls.

Post-training, the girls meet weekly to discuss what they've learned and share their daily challenges and successes. "I regularly engage with the girls and their teachers to ensure they apply the skills they've learned," says Manty Koroma, a staff of WOFHRAD working. "We encourage them to share their knowledge with peers who are not part of the training."

This initiative represents more than just skill development; it is a transformative movement toward self-reliance, resilience, and community empowerment for girls in Sierra Leone.



#### **Photo Gallery from the Skills Training of Adolescent Girls**



## AMPLIFYING VOICES FOR THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS LIVING WITH DISABILITIES THE JOURNEY OF 'POPDA'



The Polio People's Development Association has long been committed to raising awareness about the rights of persons living with disabilities. Their journey took a significant leap forward when they successfully secured a grant through a European Union-funded project, "Enhancing CSOs participation in Governance and National Level Policy processes", implemented by ActionAid and partners.

According to the Director of POPDA, Matthew Tolley:

"Winning the grant was more than just financial support; it was the key to unlocking new opportunities for POPDA. The funding enabled us to engage with duty bearers—those responsible for upholding and enforcing laws and policies—ensuring that the voices of persons with disabilities are finally being heard at critical levels of governance."

With this platform, POPDA has been able to implement several advocacy programs aimed at highlighting disability issues. "These programs are not only a voice for the community of persons living with disabilities but also a vehicle for change, pushing for policies and practices that would improve the lives of those living with disabilities."

The organization's capacity was further enhanced through the support of ActionAid and partners making their efforts more inclusive and far-reaching. This skill development led to an increased visibility of their cause, with posters, signages, and various visibility materials about disability issues becoming prominent fixtures across the Makeni city. "These materials not only raise awareness but also spark conversations, bringing disability issues into the public eye like never before."

One of the most significant milestones achieved through the project is POPDA's interaction with district stakeholders. These interactions resulted in the organization being granted a Disability Desk within the district council- a step that brought them closer to the heart of governance. "Having a presence within the council legitimized our efforts and also ensure that disability rights would be considered in district-level decisions."

"Through this project, POPDA transitioned from being a voice among many to becoming a recognized advocate for disability rights within the governance structure. Major changes have been seen through the support of ActionAid and partners, now the rights of persons living with disabilities are recognized, respected, and upheld."





## ACTIONAID INTERNATIONAL SIERRA LEONE AND PARTNERS JOIN THE CALL TO STOP PUBLIC FINANCE FUELLING THE CLIMATE CRISIS

On September 20, 2024, ActionAid International launched a groundbreaking report highlighting the impact of public financing of fossil fuels and industrial agriculture in the Global South.

The report uncovers that, between 2016 (post-Paris Agreement) and 2023, the fossil fuel sector in the Global South has received an average of US\$438.6 billion per year in publicly financed subsidies. Additionally, between 2016 and 2021, the industrial agriculture sector was granted an annual average of US\$238 billion in subsidies. These vast amounts of public funds are being funneled into industries that are significantly contributing to the climate crisis.

In response to these findings, ActionAid Sierra Leone organised a "Post Week of Action Climate Mobilisation Awareness and Advocacy". It commenced with a convergence of participants at ActionAid Sierra Leone's office, followed by a walk to the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, culminating in advocacy at the Environmental Protection Agency - EPA Office. The mobilization sought to raise awareness and advocate for an end to public finance of climate-harming industries, urging for resources to be directed towards sustainable and climate-resilient solutions instead.



## ACTIONAID STRENGTHENS THE SKILLS OF WOMEN FARMERS IN ROKONTA COMMUNITY ON SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES



ActionAid Sierra Leone organized a training for 15 women farmers in Rokonta Community on sustainable Agricultural practices. The training, which focused on ploughing, sowing, and harvesting, equipped participants with essential skills to enhance their agricultural productivity.

The initiative aimed to advance farmers' skills, to adopt more efficient farming methods. The training provided hands-on experience in operating ploughing machines, ensuring proper soil preparation for cultivation. Additionally, farmers received high-quality rice and groundnut seeds.

Prior to the training, ActionAid provided farmers with essential resources, enabling them to grow crops and sell them in the local market. This has been a crucial source of income for many families in the community; that is reliant on agriculture.

To further strengthen the farmer's financial capabilities, ActionAid introduced the Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) to them. The initiative encouraged farmers to save a portion of their earnings, which can be used to purchase essential goods like palm oil and also cover their children's schooling expenses. The success of the VSLA has led to its multiplication within the community, with eight groups of 25 members each now in operation.

Fatu Sesay, chairlady of the community and a participant of the training, expressed gratitude for ActionAid's support. "ActionAid has not only helped us improve our farming practices but has also played a vital role in our children's education," she said. "They also provide our children with school materials, ensuring that they have the opportunity to a brighter future."

Despite the progress made, the farmers in Rokonta still face challenges in accessing essential resources. A rice mill, for example, remains out of reach for many. This obliges them to journey long distances to process their harvested rice. Additionally, access to microfinance remains a hurdle for some farmers, hindering their ability to expand their agricultural work.

ActionAid's ongoing efforts to empower farmers in Bombali District are making a significant impact. By providing training, resources, and financial support, the organization is helping to improve livelihoods and create a more sustainable future for the community.



### ACTIONAID SUPPORTS FAMILY SUPPORT UNIT IN MOTEMA POLICE STATION

ActionAid has been actively collaborating with the Family Support Unit (FSU) in Motema Police Station, Kono District. The FSU wing of the security force plays a vital role in investigating cases of sexual assault and gender-based violence, and its work in deprived communities is crucial. However, the unit is often strained to access necessary resources to carry out their activities effectively.

To contribute to tackling these issues, ActionAid has been providing support to the FSU, including fuel and stationery for tracking and recording cases of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV). This support aims to enhance the eradication of these issues.

The FSU division at Motema offers counseling services through their social workers and conducts community outreach to raise awareness about SGBV. The unit has maintained a strong partnership with ActionAid, providing valuable information on issues affecting women and girls, as it relates to our work.

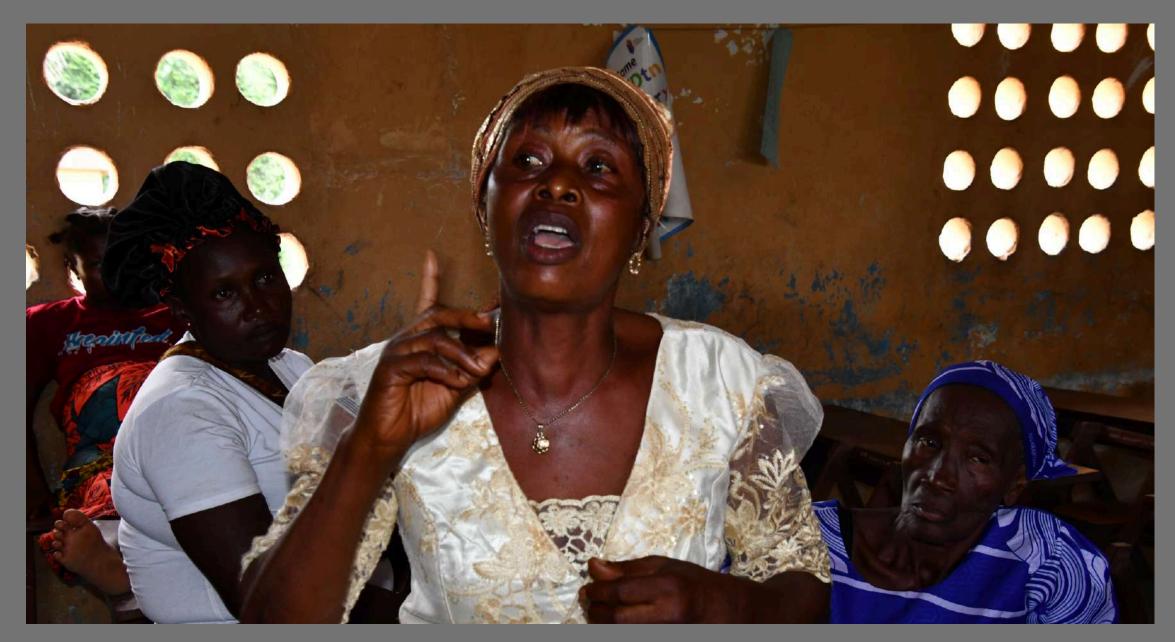
Expressing gratitude to ActionAid for their continued support, Detective Sergeant Patrick Sandi, Acting Line Manager of the FSU, noted that ActionAid has always been proactive in providing the necessary assistance. "Many of the people who come to the FSU are vulnerable and living in poverty, so they need all the support possible to ensure they receive justice. ActionAid's support is invaluable in this regard," he said.



AASL RECIEVES TWO AWARDS FROM THE GOVERNMENT OF SIERRA LEONE FOR ITS CONTRIBUTION TO THE GOVERNANCE, ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE, ENERGY, AND NATURAL RESOURCE SECTORS



#### "MY ODYSSEY FROM SILENCE TO EMPOWERMENT"



Agnes Bangay is a women's leader and councilor in a constituency in Moyamba District, who have served her people for three terms. She's also a farmer and member of the VSLA initiated by ActionAid in her community, Mogbogesei, in Timdale chiefdom."Before I became a councilor, I was a women's leader who was unaware of my rights," recalls Agnes.

Growing up in a society where women's voices were often muted, Agnes saw her mother stripped off her inheritance after her father's passing. "His family members took everything from us, leaving us to suffer," she says. This experience set Agnes on a path she, too, seemed destined to follow- until the intervention of ActionAid and NeSPE in her community.

"It began with a women's engagement held by ActionAid and partner, a platform that started my odyssey from silence to empowerment. That very first meeting I attended was a place to establish interactions" she says. But it was more than just conversations, it was the beginning of a transformation. Agnes participated in various trainings organized by ActionAid and partner on women's rights, unpaid care work, land rights, and gender-based violence. Each session peeled back layers of ignorance and fear, replacing them with knowledge and strength.

"After participating in these trainings, I began to reflect on my mother's predicament," Agnes declares. Her mother's inability to inherit her late husband's property wasn't just a personal tragedy; it was a result of systemic oppression that Agnes was now equipped to fight against. "I decided that now that I know my rights, I will not allow anyone to trample on them."

This newfound confidence soon proved vital in Agnes' own life. Upon marrying, she noticed discrepancies in her wedding certificate, details that did not reflect her say. "I brought it up with my husband, and we eventually changed the document to something I was comfortable with," she explains. Had she remained unaware of her rights, Agnes believes she would have suffered the same fate as her mother.

Today, Agnes is not only a councilor but a pacesetter in her community. Serving in the local council for three consecutive terms, she proudly shares that she has shattered the belief that one cannot hold such office more than twice. "I thank ActionAid and their partner for the trainings," she says, "They are the reason I'm an influential person in my community today."

"Now, even if I aspire for higher positions, I will get the support of the women and the community," she says confidently. "They know I am an empowered woman, and I can represent them well."

### "I NO LONGER LIVE IN FEAR BECAUSE ACTIONAID HAS STRENGTHENED REFERRAL PATHWAYS IN MY COMMUNITY"



Kadiatu Ansumana, a farmer and petty trader in Mobambie Community has seen significant improvement in her life and livelihood since meeting ActionAid.

"My husband used to beat me at every given opportunity," recalls Kadiatu, her voice tinged with the echoes of past trauma. For years, she lived in fear, enduring violence at the hands of her husband. "It was difficult for me to cope with his violence, but I didn't know I had the power to change that."

Kadiatu's story is marked with chapters of abuse and disempowerment; until she encountered ActionAid's campaigns and trainings. It was through ActionAid's support that she gained awareness of her rights, and for the first time, she felt empowered to act. "Upon getting in contact with ActionAid, I became aware of my rights and decided to take action," she shares.

One day, after a particularly violent incident, Kadiatu was contemplating the next line of actions to take. Knowing the referral pathways, she set out to report the abuse to key community stakeholders, individuals who work with ActionAid to act on such cases. They took immediate action. "They told my husband that they would personally hand him over to the police if he ever laid a hand on me again," Kadiatu says.

That moment became a turning point in her life. Since that intervention, her husband has not raised a hand against her. "He's scared now," she put in, her voice steady and filled with quiet pride. "He says I have godparents like ActionAid and the people they work with to report issues of GBV, and he doesn't want to face the penalties of the law."

The fear once felt by Kadiatu has shifted to her abuser, not because of retaliation, but because of the power of awareness and community support. "I no longer live in fear because ActionAid has strengthened referral pathways in my community", she concluded.

# Coming up In the next issue

Update on the "Expanding cross sectoral opportunities for the empowerment of adolescent girls and reduction of teenage pregnancy and child marriage through gender-transformative engagements and social protection (Cash+) programmes" project funded by UNICEF

#### implemented in:

- Koinadugu
- Kambia
- Bombali
- Tonkolili and
- Pujehun

Update on "Strengthening the Role of CSOs and Local Actors in Climate Governance, Accountability and Civic Space" project funded by Irish Aid

#### implemented in:

- Tonkolili and
- Kailahun

Update on the "Imagine Worldwide Tablet Learning" project

implemented in: Karene

Update on the "Enhancing CSOs'
Participation in Governance and
National Level Policy Processes"
project funded by EU

implemented in:

Bombali

Во

Kono

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