



Volunteer network leaders meeting to discuss their activities working with girls and women in communities.

STRENGTHENING FEMINIST ACTION IN SIERRA LEONE TO ADDRESS SEXUALISED AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (SGBV) AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

This three-year project aimed to address sexualised and gender-based violence (SGBV) against women and girls in Sierra Leone. Funded by Comic Relief, the project was implemented between 2021 and 2023 by *medica mondiale* and three partner organisations in Sierra Leone: Girl2Girl Empowerment Movement (G2G), Choices and Voices Foundation for Women and Girls (CVF), and Women Against Violence and Exploitation in Society (WAVES). The final evaluation of the project engaged project stakeholders in a participatory learning process, providing information about the performance of the project, lessons learned, and practical recommendations for follow-up actions and future projects. The evaluation found the project to be highly relevant with a strong impact at the micro- and meso-levels of intervention.

Facts and figures

- **Type of evaluation:** final evaluation
- **Evaluation period:** 08/2023 - 01/2024
- **Project duration:** 01/2021 - 12/2023 (3 years) with extension until 02/2024
- **Funded by:** Comic Relief
- **Project budget:** 558,775 Euro
- **Evaluation team:** Christine Rosenbrock (lead) and Marian Pleasant Kargbo



PROJECT CONTEXT

In Sierra Leone, SGBV remains at alarming levels. Sixty-one per cent of girls and women aged 15-49 have experienced physical violence, according to the country's most recent Demographic and Health Survey.¹ Furthermore, the country has one of the highest rates of teenage pregnancy in the world, and 83 per cent of girls and women have undergone female genital mutilation (Ibid). SGBV against women and girls is strongly rooted in society, culture, and traditions in Sierra Leone. The Government of Sierra Leone has demonstrated increased concern about SGBV and in 2019 declared rape and sexual violence a national emergency.

PROJECT GOALS

medica mondiale cooperated with three national organisations to address the challenge of SGBV in Sierra Leone. Under the overarching vision of establishing a culture of zero tolerance for violence against women and girls in the country, the project had **three major goals**:

1. To expand the **prevention of SGBV** through improving community awareness and mechanisms to prevent SGBV and to protect women and girls (Outcome 1)
2. To strengthen the **response to SGBV** through improving response mechanisms and approaches to adequately respond to incidents of SGBV and provide justice to survivors (Outcome 2)
3. And to amplify **feminist action** such that feminist actors have strengthened organisational capacities to amplify women's voices, to transform public opinion and social practice (Outcome 3)

Project implementation took place in Benduma and Ngalu in Bo district (WAVES), in Kissi and Betfarm in the Western Area (G2G), and in Tokeh, York, Grafton, and Jui, also in the Western Area (CVF). The project targeted adolescent girls and women, including a group who had directly experienced SGBV. The local partner organisations provided girls and women with information on their rights and sought to empower them to stand for these rights. They created safe spaces for exchange and peer support and informed survivors of SGBV about processes of seeking assistance and justice. The organisations also engaged in empowering women, mothers and girls, including survivors of SGBV, through village savings and loans associations. The direct work with survivors of SGBV was complemented by advocacy and sensitisation of community stakeholders and institutional actors including, for example, the Family Support Unit of the Sierra Leonean police.

To amplify feminist action, the partner organisations were trained on *medica mondiale's* Stress- and Trauma-Sensitive Approach (STA) for supporting survivors of SGBV and were provided with organisational development guidance.

EVALUATION SCOPE AND METHODS

The final evaluation of this project relied on document analysis; semi-structured key informant interviews (remote and in person); focus group discussions; observation by the evaluators; a survey among participants of the STA trainings; and triangulation of findings within the evaluation team, with partner organisations (debriefings with mutual feedback) and *medica mondiale*. The evaluation process included the elaboration of an inception report, and an in-country evaluation mission. Standard criteria for the evaluation of development cooperation projects as defined by the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development were used for this evaluation. As such, the project was evaluated on its relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. Evaluators assessed each of these dimensions on a scale from one ("very good") to five ("Inadequate").



The purpose of the final evaluation is to provide decision makers at *medica mondiale*, partner organisations and Comic Relief with sufficient information to make an informed decision about the performance of the project, document lessons learned, and provide practical recommendations for follow-up actions and similar future projects.

KEY FINDINGS

Relevance

The relevance of the project was evaluated as "very good". There is still a great need to strengthen the protection of the rights of women and girls in Sierra Leone as discriminatory customs and traditions including SGBV persist. Whilst the political conditions and legal framework for substantial change exist in Sierra Leone, the implementation of policies and laws to protect girls and women lags behind. The current project was well aligned to international and national frameworks and policies to protect the rights of girls and women. It was based on various policies and protocols which have been enacted in Sierra Leone, and effectively worked to extend these to the people and realities on the ground.



¹ Ministry of Health and Sanitation (2020): Sierra Leone: Demographic and Health Survey 2019. With Statistics Sierra Leone/The DHS Program, Rockville, Maryland, USA, October 2020. <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR365/FR365.pdf>



Employees of G2G, WAVES, CVF and trainers from *medica Liberia* at a training on the Stress- and Trauma-sensitive Approach.

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Coherence

The coherence of the project was evaluated as “good”. Although not strongly anchored in the project, networking, and liaison with other stakeholders in the thematic area did take place and ensured coherence with other projects and programmes. Closer liaison and cooperation with other projects implementing activities in the same communities is however recommended. Internal coherence of the project was evaluated as “very high”, while external coherence was “satisfactory”.



pacitated some women as “pioneers” or mentors in their communities which not only involved lower costs but strengthened women’s skills through trainings and the experience. Additionally, village savings and loans associations created by two of the partner organisations were very efficient in terms of value for money. The approach not only supports the economic empowerment of women, but the associations also serve as platforms for sensitisation and members in these groups can be role models for other women and girls.

The efficiency of the project was limited by the constrained outreach of interventions.

Effectiveness

The effectiveness of the project was evaluated as “very good”. All indicators to measure progress toward the project goals were fulfilled, and targets (as much as targets had been set) were met. There were some indicators that were not measurable, however. Actions under Outcome 1 to expand the prevention of SGBV effectively responded to the needs of the women and girls in the programme and, together with the STA competencies gained under Outcome 2 (to strengthen the response to SGBV), led to impressive changes for those at the target group level.



Impact

The impact of the project was evaluated as “good”. Interview partners and representatives of direct target groups unanimously confirmed that the project has helped to reduce or stop tolerance for SGBV and said that SGBV had significantly reduced or stopped in areas where the project has been implemented (Outcome 1 on prevention of SGBV). The project has greatly impacted the lives of girls, young women, their mothers, and communities. The combined work with individuals, groups (including networks, participants in safe spaces, village savings and loans associations, and so on), community representatives, communities in a broader sense (community dialogues and the like), and representatives of selected governmental structures (Family Support Unit of the Police, Health Posts) as part of *medica mondiale*’s multi-level approach was an asset. Stakeholders confirmed this finding and linked it to the interventions of the project, whilst also highlighting the effects of governmental and legal action to combat SGBV.



Efficiency

The efficiency of the project was evaluated as “good”. Overall, the invested resources were deemed appropriate, and a random assessment of spendings on staff and various activities showed moderate costs. Several initiatives under the project were both empowering for target populations and cost effective. For instance, the project ca-





A meeting of the protection network or “Girls Club”, one of several protection networks set up in communities. Women from communities received trainings as network leaders and led sensitisation work in communities including through house-to-house visits and workshops.

The impact of Outcome 2 (to strengthen response to SGBV) is also plausible, though more indirect. Neither monitoring nor the evaluation provided data on the impacts at the target group level (survivors of SGBV and other women and adolescent girls). But effects of the STA trainings on participants were strong, and learnings were translated into practice for the benefit of the direct target groups.

“ I now listen more and talk less. ”

Participant in STA training

With regards to Outcome 3 of the project, to amplify feminist action, the contribution of the project was also deemed plausible although no evidence or indication was found that organisational development activities strengthened the visibility or voice of the partner organisations in the eyes of other relevant stakeholders.

The major factor limiting the impact of the project was its scope in terms of outreach and size of target groups. Also, partner organisations lacked exit strategies which would allow them to shift their work to other communities and thus increase their outreach.

Sustainability

The sustainability of the project was evaluated as “satisfactory”. Project activities under Outcome 1 (to expand prevention of SGBV) substituted public action, but governmental capacities to take over these activities are and will continue to be extremely limited. Although the project relied on external funding, its strong focus on capacity development under all outcomes was a main driver of sustainability. Capacity development at the level of individuals, organisations and communities was at the core of the project and has the potential to lead to lasting changes. Approaches such as village savings and loan associations or the use of mentors/pioneers from the communities strengthen the sustainability of the project.

Satisfactory

“ We now have the understanding and know the procedure. Some of us can hold meetings to sensitise others. ”

Community representative

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Future work should continue to use the **current political window of opportunity in Sierra Leone** and the capacities already strengthened by this project to expand the work being carried out.
- 2. There is a need to more carefully **analyse synergies and complementarities with other programmes** being implemented in the same communities.
- 3. Future work should consider **addressing men and boys more systematically** as an important target group for sensitisation and behavioural change and as agents of change in society.
- 4. Village savings and loan associations and similar **economic empowerment** activities should be integrated in future project proposals.
- 5. **Capacity development should be continued at different levels:**
 - Future work should respond to capacity building needs of partner organisations in the area of monitoring and reporting and strive to build capacities of social workers at different levels, both within and outside partner organisations.
 - Expanding the STA training to other participants through the Training of Trainers model as planned is strongly recommended. Ideally, a transitional phase could allow *medica mondiale* or *medica Liberia* to assist in the initial trainings as observers and provide feedback to facilitators from the partner organisations.

- Supervision and capacity building for women acting as mentors or pioneers in their communities should be continued, as should efforts to empower staff at partner organisations to take care of themselves (self-care within the STA approach) and to prevent burnout.

- 6. The term “survivor” should be used more carefully as it might hide differences between women and girls who have survived SGBV and women and girls who are, for example, beneficiaries of preventive activities. The same is true for the term “safe spaces”, which is not always used consistently. When used in indicators, terms such as “survivors” need to be further defined to ensure a clear and shared understanding.
- 7. *medica mondiale* and partner organisations should reflect further on how to **increase the outreach of the project** and link it to reflections on exit strategies that would allow partner organisations to reach out to new communities. Exit strategies could be gradual and allow for continuous monitoring and supervision of “old” beneficiaries or communities.
- 8. Beneficiaries and community representatives recommended to engage in **needs assessments with communities** prior to or as part of project planning for potential future projects.

CONCLUSIONS

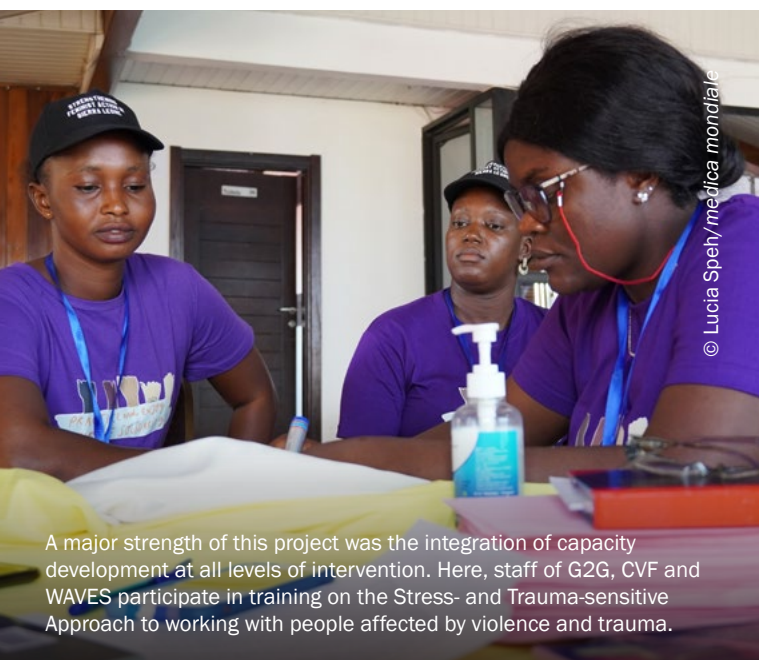
There is a strong need to address SGBV in Sierra Leone and bring promising policy and legal frameworks into practice in the country. This project worked effectively toward this aim, leading to impressive changes at the target group level. Feedback from project target groups and other stakeholders indicated that the project had a high impact and helped to establish a culture of zero tolerance for SGBV. The major impact-limiting factor of the project was its relatively confined scope which constrained its wider effects. Although neither governmental nor non-governmental stakeholders such as the partner organisations have the financial resources to sustain project activities as of now, many elements of the project enhance its sustainability. The strong focus of the project on capacity development under all outcomes is a main driver of sustainability.

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A major strength of this project was the integration of capacity development at all levels of intervention. Here, staff of G2G, CVF and WAVES participate in training on the Stress- and Trauma-sensitive Approach to working with people affected by violence and trauma.