



Girls in school, Makeni, Sierra Leone. Photo: Rikke Bruntse Dahl

## SIERRA LEONE CASE STUDY

### COMMUNITIES CHALLENGE WORLD BANK AND SIERRA LEONE GOVERNMENT'S GIRLS' EDUCATION PROGRAMME

The "Girls Education Support fund" was created to provide free education for girls in Sierra Leone. This case describes the influencing work of Oxfam of bringing together multiple stakeholders at the community level to resolve a problem arising from this national World Bank and Ministry of Education programme.

# 1 CONTEXT

Many years of political instability, military coups, economic downturns and corruption send Sierra Leone straight into a brutal civil war that started in 1991 and lasted for 10 years. It left the West African country as one of the poorest countries in the world. More than half of the population is under 18 and most have not had the opportunity to get an education due to the war, poverty and a lack of schools. Most of the children who are out of school are girls. The “Girls Education Support fund” was created to provide free education for girls in Sierra Leone.

The education support was meant for two regions in the country (East and the North) because education of girls in these two regions was not commensurate to the south and western parts of Sierra Leone. It was meant for all girls that transited into Junior Secondary, meaning that all girls that pass National Primary School Examination (NPSE), who scored 230 marks upwards were meant to benefit from the scheme. The scheme would enable them to complete junior secondary education by offering free schooling, uniforms and text books via direct transfers to the schools. However in practice, due to poor information provision and bureaucratic delays on the redistribution of these funds from national to local level, parents had to pre-pay the school fees to the secondary school. They would later be reimbursed when disbursement from central level to the school had taken place, but these reimbursements did not happen.

# 2 EDUCATION INTERVENTIONS

Through the Community Development Agreement (CDA) process, Oxfam IBIS heard of the situation facing numerous families and opened space for dialogue in local civil society. This triggered a district-wide survey to find out how the funds had been used. School committees were mobilized and parents and local civil society networks presented their concerns and explored different ways to get the pre-paid school fees back. A total of 18 secondary schools, entitled to receive extra funds from the junior secondary school girls’ scheme checked their budgets using surveys. These surveys showed that some principals had received the money, whereas others had not.

The goal of the work was: to identify the number of schools that were benefiting from the support; understand the procedures involved in accessing the funds; learn how funds are transferred to schools; ascertain whether the Local Councils were involved in the disbursement of girls education support funds so as to monitor the correct use of those funds and to what extent were they managing the process; learn whether schools were collecting fees from parents and if refunds were made after receiving the transfers from central level. Tracking the disbursement from the central to

the district level revealed that some schools had received the funds, some had received none, and some funds were directed to the “wrong” local bank accounts and also to the wrong junior secondary schools.

This research was used at the national level and the Sierra Leone Education for All Coalition engaged relevant stakeholders and duty bearers in Freetown. This included working with Ministry of Education, UNICEF, the Anti-Corruption commission and World Bank. This process influenced the government to put measures in place for the management of girls’ education support funds.

Within six to seven months changes took place. The World Bank required that the money from this support was allocated to separate budget line and transferred through the Kono and Koidu district and city councils to each of the secondary schools. District Education Office decided that School Inspectors should be given the task of monitoring the special account on disbursement and implementation. An awareness raising campaign was launched on the local radio for parents to pull out from the demand of pre-paying the fees.

Later these changes were implemented nationwide in all other districts with schools entitled to receive the girls free secondary school fund. The changes happened from one year to another. The World Bank also ensured that CSOs should serve as third party monitors and validation of the funds as a condition for the Bank to release these said funds to the government.

### 3 LESSONS LEARNED AND FUTURE CHALLENGES

- ✓ **Information is power when you want to work at scale:** A small limited budget tracking connected to 18 secondary schools had a national impact.
- ✓ **Data disaggregated by gender is essential** to saying anything robust on women’s and girls’ access to essential services.
- ✓ **Strong power analysis to inform strategies:** Understand your blockers and how to help them not feel under attack. Principals of schools were unwilling to provide information as they feared reprisals.
- ✓ **Multi-stakeholder approaches:** Bringing a wide range of stakeholders together is hard but necessary: The parents, the school committees, the CSO platform, the DEO (district education office) and the Ministry of Education, the local councils (district and city), the Anti-

corruption Committees at local and national level, the local radio stations, an international NGO (Oxfam IBIS) and the World Bank in Sierra Leone.

- ✓ **Case study approaches:** Use pilots and examples to scale the issue up and use them in influencing power holders.

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