

SIERRA LEONE

Remote Education Infrastructure through Subsidiarity “All Pikin For Learn”



PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Country: Sierra Leone

Project location: Koinadugu, Northern Region

Disaster / Conflict: Complex protracted crisis resulting from civil war and Ebola outbreak

Project Duration: 3 years (December 2015 to March 2019)

Target Population: 32, 000 School Age Children in Vulnerable and Hard to Reach Communities

Project Budget (in USD): \$1.265 million

Donors: USDA, local community

Partners: McGovern-Dole International, communities



What did CRS do?

Over an implementation period of nearly three years, CRS and its partners have **upgraded 151 school facilities** with the completion of **62 latrines, 37 food stores and 52 classroom blocks**. The work was undertaken in partnership with local communities and school management committees, who contributed significantly through labor, transportation, logistics and in-kind inputs of sand, stone and timber, **valued at around \$139,751**, through the principle of subsidiarity. This principle states that any function or duty that can be handled effectively at a community level by people who are closer to the problem and have a better understanding of the issue.

CRS provided industrial materials such as cement, CI sheets, paint, nails and other materials unavailable in these local communities. In pursuit of this objective of subsidiarity, the project engaged and trained local technicians from within the district to undertake the construction activity under the supervision of a CRS construction team. This approach proved to be a double edged sword, with an outpouring of community engagement - producing community-driven results and ownership through the process - but also suffering challenges such as low quality of local materials, delivery of poor-quality structures due to limited technical capacity, and poor accountability of resources in some cases.

Background

Sierra Leone is one of the poorest and most underdeveloped countries in the world. It ranks 179 out of 188 in the UNDP Human Development Index (2016). It is also one of the most food insecure countries in the world, ranking 109 out of 113 countries in the Global Food Security Index published by the Economic Intelligence Unit (2017). Decades of corruption, especially related to the extractive resource industries, instability in Liberia, and the internal divisions with Sierra Leone led to the destructive civil war from 1991-2002. The civil war caused the destruction of approximately 70% of the power grid in the country and created large numbers of IDPs who fled to Guinea. In 2014, Sierra Leone was hit by the Ebola Virus, the intensity and spread of which was increased due to the numbers living in Guinea at that time.

Problem Statement, including core questions

Education performance in Sierra Leone has historically been very low, particularly outside of Freetown. Moreover, while significant progress has been made in

enrolments at the primary level, the 2015 Population and Housing Census showed that 35% of children of primary school age were not attending school (Statistics Sierra Leone, 2016).

During the civil war, the UN estimates that nearly 2,000 primary schools were destroyed. An additional 2,000 were used by the various rebel factions as barracks, torture/rape centers and left in a terrible state. The Government of Sierra Leone has stated that the construction and repair/rehabilitation of the schools, food storage, latrines and water boreholes is an important part of the country's development process.

Why CRS?

Since 1963, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) has been an integral development partner in Sierra Leone, and addressed national needs in Health, Agriculture and Education. During the civil war, CRS played a key role in providing emergency relief, which led to conflict rehabilitation support in 2002. Now that Sierra Leone is moving from post-conflict to longer term development, CRS has adjusted its programming strategy to support and implement programs that facilitate growth in line with the country's strategic direction. This has led to a focus on comprehensive support for primary education.

The program is a continuation of programming started in 2012 in the Koinadugu District. This area was targeted by CRS due to the compounding issues of food insecurity, extremely high malnutrition rates among children under 5, and below-average education performance.



VIP Latrine after completion.
Photo: CRS



Community Engagement Meeting.
Photo: CRS

Project Process

The McGovern Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program (FFE3) was a program undertaken by CRS in partnership with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST), which focused on improving the quality of literacy instruction to primary school children along with their health and dietary practices. This would have the added effect of improving attentiveness and attendance rates of students and teachers. CRS took an integrated approach that involved the provision of school meals for students and staff, as well as improvements to education infrastructure across five chiefdoms of Koinadugu District: Neini, Neya, Dembelia Sinkunia, Sulima, and Mongo.

CRS also partnered with the Northern Polytechnic College, Caritas Makeni, and local partners International Literacy Association and the Association of Literacy and Language Educators. MEST assisted CRS to identify sites and mobilize community resources. Communities were selected using indicators from MEST and the Vulnerability Assessment Map developed by the World Food Program. The program benefited 71,000 students, teachers and community members, and 192 schools.

This project provided the following:

- Training for literacy coaches and teachers in Effective Literacy Teaching Techniques, classroom management and learner-centered methodology.
- Daily meals for students, teachers and cooks; training for cooks on hygiene, sanitation, food preparation and proper storage techniques.
- School furniture, teaching and learning materials;
- Improved school infrastructure such as classrooms, latrines, wells and food stores.
- Training for 1,728 members of school management committees in school and food management, along with advocacy on the importance of education.
- Engagement of community members in Savings and Internal Lending Communities (SILC) to promote savings to support children's education.
- Direct support for the School Feeding Directorate.

The Government of Sierra Leone supported CRS in the advocacy and literacy components of the program, while the communities and school management committees were involved in all phases of the project, and were critical to the success of the construction. Through MoUs, the project established roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders, particularly for CRS and community members, around the infrastructure programming. These MoUs were discussed at public forums, signed by the paramount chief, and witnessed by section chiefs and the local ministry of education representative. CRS provided industrial materials through contracted vendors from the national capital, while local communities contributed the sand, stone and timber. Even though communities embraced their contribution to the welfare and education of their children through the construction activities, several of them faced challenges of resources, access to quality local materials and timely delivery.

“The overall construction process has empowered communities, engaging them to take an active role, emphasizing their value and creating a lasting impact.”

– Ronald Desmond O’Neill, CRS Construction Specialist

However, the greater setback was the capacity of local technicians. CRS engaged the Shelter and Settlements team from the Humanitarian Response Department to offer a rapid, basic training to these technicians. Unfortunately, those trained were the ‘masters technicians’ who subsequently subcontracted other workers to the sites without adequate training. As a result, old local construction techniques were employed, and they failed to raise concerns about the quality of local materials provided by communities.

The engagement of communities, their commitment and willingness to improve school infrastructure was a key success factor. Indeed, the principle of subsidiarity has promoted the project’s focus of sustainability, demonstrating that communities have the power to construct their own future. However, the level and extent of this subsidiary, in some instances, was an obstacle to the overall success. This engagement has highlighted the importance of quality and capacity in conjunction with subsidiarity. CRS has re-invested in retrofitting the facilities as part of a no-cost extension to achieve the desired quality standards. **Not only was the financial input from these vulnerable communities impressive, but the time commitment to break large stone boulders into granite pieces with hammers – as well as to collect thousands of buckets of sand from distant locations and transport materials on their heads for miles – highlights the parents’ and community members’ dedication to improve their children’s standard of education.**

Inputs	Cost (USD) for 51 classrooms	Cost (USD) for 62 VIP latrines	Cost (USD) for 36 food stores
Materials	\$263,118	\$81,920	\$31,801
Transportation	\$78,935	\$24,576	\$9,540
Labor	\$94,319	\$63,494	\$24,940
Timber	\$34,308	\$10,674	\$3,693
Total	\$470,680	\$180,664	\$69,973



Completed school block.
Photo: CRS

Results

An evaluation conducted in August 2018 found that the project had achieved significant success in terms of improving literacy, with at least 56% of girls and up to 79% of boys able to read grade-level texts with understanding at the end of the project. This exceeded the 25% target and showed massive improvement from the start of the project, when rates were as low as 8% amongst class 2 students (boys & girls).

Participant Selection

CRS/partners selected the five chiefdoms through guidance from MEST and based on World Food Program vulnerability assessments and mapping of food insecure communities. All 192 schools in the communities were covered by the project through the literacy and food interventions. Infrastructure projects were undertaken in locations where facilities were evaluated to be sub-standard, including damaged or inadequate provision of classroom buildings, and non-availability of water points and sanitation facilities. The criteria used for the selection of schools were primarily:

- Overcrowding in classrooms
- Community willingness to support the project through land allocation for infrastructure construction
- Availability of local construction materials gathered on site to kick-start construction after a successful sensitization process.

The demand for construction/ rehabilitation was higher than the budget would allow. However, CRS prioritized schools based on their vulnerability and school enrolment data.

Learnings & Recommendations

- Early community engagement with key stakeholders, like Paramount Chiefs, for the gathering of local construction materials and site availability helped to enhance timely implementation.
- Developing and signing Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs) with communities helps to clarify and distinguish key CRS and community responsibilities.
- Community accountability for the use of the items they received from CRS - including industrial materials like cement, zinc and oil paint - helped to discourage fraud and corruption.
- Communities demonstrated their willingness, commitment and support to provide all local materials and unskilled labor for the construction of infrastructure.

CRS will continue the robust community engagement sessions, signing of MoUs and day-to-day management of materials for sustained ownership and increased accountability.

“We now have a conducive learning environment for our pupils and have reduced overcrowding in our classrooms. Our community can boast about our immense contribution to improve the quality of education.”

- Mammy Queen, Mongo Kridu

Acknowledgements

Ronald Desmond O'Neill, CRS/Sierra Leone/Kabala/
FFE Construction Specialist
Anisha Vasutavan, CRS/HoP Sierra Leone/Freetown
Santigie Kabia, CRS Sierra Leone/Freetown/
FFE Coordinator
Paul Butler, CRS Sierra Leone