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Strengthening Social Capital
The GoBifo Approach in Rural Sierra Leone

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Abbreviations

AFRC	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
CBO	Community-based organisation
CDA	Community development account
CDD	Community-driven development
CM&E	Community monitoring and evaluation
DDP	District Development Plan
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Programme
DecSec	Decentralisation Secretariat
FOC	Field Office Coordinator
EU	European Union
GoSL	Government of Sierra Leone
IDP	Internally displaced people
IRCBP	Institutional Reform and Capacity Building Project
LGA	Local Government Act
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MIA, LG&RD	Ministry of Internal Affairs, Local Government and Rural Development
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NSAP	National Social Action Project
PMC	Project management committee
PMT	Project management team
PRA	Participatory rural appraisal
TBA	Traditional birth attendant
VDC	Village Development Committee
VDP	Village Development Plan
VFT	Village Facilitation Team
WDC	Ward Development Committee
WDP	Ward Development Plan
WF	Ward Facilitators

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Foreword

This publication tells the story of the GoBifo project, a project that is addressing development challenges in two Districts in Sierra Leone: Bombali and Bonthe, in the Northern and Southern provinces respectively. The project was set up to support the decentralisation process which had been stalled for 32 years in Sierra Leone and to strengthen social capital in both districts, emphasising basic proxies of trust, social and gender inclusion, information sharing and communication, local networks and groups, and collective action. It aims to strengthen social capital by enhancing the capacity of deprived communities and local governments to design and implement strategic plans at village and ward levels, and to enhance accountability of decision-makers through mechanisms that foster open and transparent governance.

The project is working with local councils in 84 villages and 19 wards in Bombali District and 40 villages and 8 wards in Bonthe District. It gives communities the chance to open a community development account, manage their own development funds, and make independent contributions towards current and future village and ward development projects. In order to help implement community-driven development projects in its deprived communities, GoBifo disburses block grants directly into community development accounts to support health, education, agriculture, infrastructure and income-generation projects. It helps villages and local councils to both use participatory tools and approaches to increase community-level social capital and enhance community-driven monitoring and evaluation.

Through working with the project some of the most deprived communities in the Northern and Southern provinces of Sierra Leone have decreased their dependence on outside donors and begun to develop according to their own needs and priorities. Their increased social capital results in more inclusive and effective development, and enhanced linkages between government and communities strengthen Sierra Leone's nascent democracy and promote more sustainable development.

There have been great achievements so far. Communities now guide their own development process and have the skills and organisational structure with which to promote more sustainable development. Development is more inclusive and cost-effective, with stronger links between communities and local government. People are no longer passive observers of development, but active participants.

Finally, I invite readers to make the most of this publication. I believe the GoBifo principles and approaches outlined in this publication are worth learning from, and if

replicated in other deprived communities will facilitate the process of strengthening social capital in other communities in Sierra Leone and elsewhere.

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We are grateful to Dr Morie Manyeh of Njala University (Bo campus) and Gerard Baltissen of the Royal Tropical Institute for accompanying and supporting the authors in their writing and for editing the draft versions of the book, and also to Kimberly Clarke who did an excellent job in the final English editing of the book.

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1 Introduction

More than a decade of armed conflict in Sierra Leone ended in January 2002 with accords signed by the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) and the anti-government forces, including the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels. Since then Sierra Leone has made remarkable progress towards stability through the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programme for ex-combatants.

Despite impressive post-conflict improvements, however, the country still faces many challenges, and people are still extremely poor. A 2004 household survey showed that 70% of people live below the poverty line of Le2000 (US$1) per day, with 26% live in extreme poverty. Poverty manifests itself in many ways: there is general hunger, life expectancy is 42 years (the second lowest in the world), the adult illiteracy rate is 79% (among the highest in Africa), infant mortality is among the highest in the world, and more. Although the GoSL is committed to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), there has been very little progress. The country took a positive step forward in 2005, however, when GoSL began to implement its Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP).

The inability of rural communities to control their own development process without outside interference has been studied from many different angles. Generally communities cannot analyse effectively their own development needs and they don't know how to harness the resources to meet these needs. Their knowledge is limited to their immediate environs, resulting in general indifference to development and the entrenchment of those traditional beliefs and practices that perpetuate underdevelopment. Rural people in Sierra Leone are generally fatalistic and quite often do not recognise that they can control their own destiny. Traditionally, the chief and his immediate advisers take decisions that do not necessarily reflect the needs of marginalised members of the community such as women, children, youths, and people with physical or mental disabilities. This makes them even more vulnerable to the inequities of underdevelopment. Rural communities are not a development priority for government and there is generally a dearth of development agencies to provide basic services.

Sierra Leone is divided into three provinces, Northern, Southern and Eastern, and one area, Western. A new system of local government was introduced following local elections in May 2004. There are now 5 city councils in the urban areas, and 13 district councils in the predominantly rural areas. The new Local Government Act of 2004 is the main legislation governing local government. It re-established the local councils

that had existed in 1972 and created a new council for the capital, Freetown. Local government operates in a single tier, with all nineteen councils governed by the Act. Councils' responsibilities vary, and depend on their location and urban or rural character. The democratic system is uniform across the country, with local council elections using the first-past-the-post system on a ward basis. There are between 18 and 48 wards in each of the 13 district councils, each returning one councillor. In local councils where there is a paramount chieftaincy system, the paramount chiefs select between one and three of their numbers to represent their interests on the local council. The term of office for elected local councillors is four years and no local councillor is elected more than twice. Paramount chiefs serve for life, no fixed terms, unless they become incapacitated. When a paramount chief tried to resign his chieftaincy recently the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Local Government and Internal Affairs (MIA, LG & RD) reminded him that he holds an eternal traditional position. Councillors are entitled to quarterly allowances, with the amount determined by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development in consultation with the MIA, LG & RD.

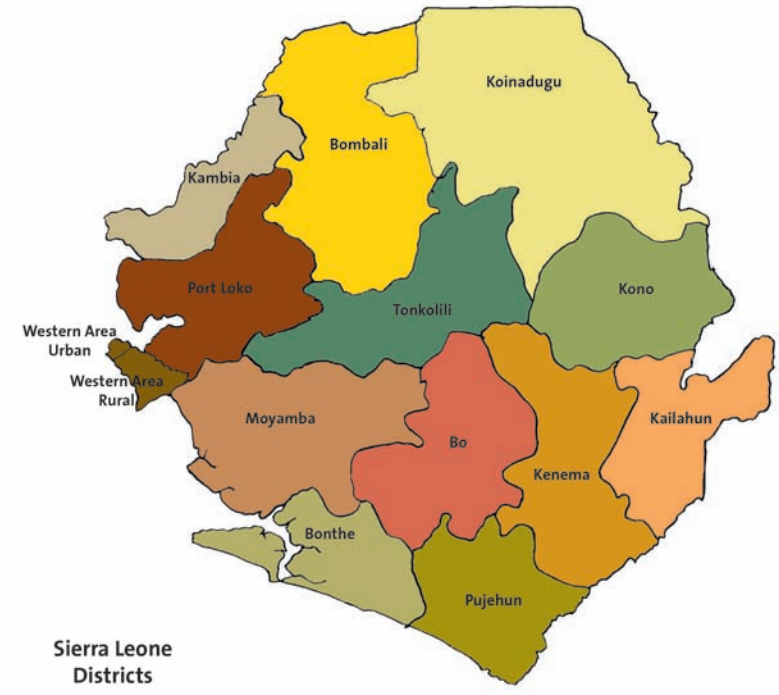
A social assessment financed by the National Social Action Project (NSAP) identified inadequate community social capital as the main challenge for implementing community-driven development in Sierra Leone. The study showed that ex-combatants, internally displaced people (IDPs), and in particular women, youths, children, the aged, and the physically and mentally challenged were all marginalised and unable to participate in development activities and decision-making processes at community level. The study also highlighted a low level of participation by the poorest people, caused mainly by elitist and top-down decision-making processes. Based on these findings, the NSAP project managers asked for help to develop innovative approaches that would enable communities, and in particular the vulnerable groups identified, to both tackle the challenges they face and strengthen the links between their communities and local governments. Later there were significant opportunities to complement the Institutional Reform and Capacity Building Project (IRCBP), in particular to create links between villages and their local government units at ward and district levels.

In 2005, the GoSL secured a grant from the Japan Social Development Fund (administered by the World Bank) to undertake a pilot project focusing on 'capacity development to strengthen social capital'. The funds have been used to implement community-driven development (CDD) projects in the Bombali and Bonthe Districts. The project is being implemented by the Decentralization Secretariat of the MIA, LG&RD and is called the 'GoBifo Project'. 'GoBifo' is a Krio (lingua franca in Sierra Leone) word meaning 'move forward' or 'forward march'. In 2009 the GoSL secured another grant, from the Italian Trust Fund, to promote youth initiatives. GoSL has been supporting the project with quarterly subventions since 2009.

GoBifo operates only in the Bombali and Bonthe Districts, in the Northern and Southern Provinces of Sierra Leone respectively (see Figure 1.1). In Bombali it works

in 84 villages and 19 wards, and in Bonthe 40 villages and 8 wards. The project has field offices in both districts, and each one has a Field Office Coordinator (FOC). In 2006 there were 17 Ward Facilitators (WFs) in Bombali and 9 in Bonthe, but by 2009 the number has reduced to 9 in Bombali and 4 in Bonthe because of limited operational funds.

Figure 1.1 Map of Sierra Leone showing Bombali and Bonthe Districts



To document lessons learned from the project, GoBifo staff attended a write shop from 21–26 March, 2010 in Bo, facilitated by the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT) from the Netherlands. A participatory writing methodology used successfully in other settings was used to explore, develop and document important case studies based on experiences during the past four years. A write shop is an intense, participative way of writing a document that is easy for practitioners to understand and use. The programme is flexible and the repeated presentations, comments and revisions enable drafts to be reviewed and revised thoroughly. A team of facilitators and editors guided and assisted the participants in the writing process.

This book is the result of the write shop. It explains how project activities work for an audience of development workers, local and international non-government organisations (NGOs), community-based organisations (CBOs), local councils, line ministries, CDD project facilitators worldwide, funding agencies, researchers and universities.

BOMBALI
DISTRICT COUNCIL
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE

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2 GoBifo: Goals, principles and approaches

2.1 Goals

GoBifo has many goals, including to:

- increase the participation of women, youths and marginalised groups in village and ward development planning and implementation;
- build community capacity to plan and implement projects that meet village development needs;
- increase communities' capacities to advocate for their priorities in the ward and district development planning process;
- build the skills of community members to implement projects and improve livelihoods;a nd
- improve the transparency and accountability of decision-making at village and ward levels.

2.2 A multi-stakeholder approach

The whole community needs to be involved in establishing a multi-stakeholder planning process. They need to be involved from the start so that they can build a vision, make a commitment to a lot of work, feel they own the results, and trust the process. This type of approach effectively promotes transparency and accountability. It recognises that communities have formal and informal authorities, (such as section and village chiefs, mammy queens, and social leaders), while also recognising that some vulnerable and marginalised groups are often left out, including youths, women, older people, and people with disabilities. Multi-stakeholder approaches take all these issues into account, and by doing so the process has a more accurate picture of what resources and knowledge each group in the community holds and can offer. Community-based structures like the Village Development Committees (VDCs) and Ward Development Committees (WDCs) usually already exist and may only need training on their roles and responsibilities to play a more effective role. Communities that did not have VDCs and WDCs now have them and the members have been trained on their roles and responsibilities in promoting community-driven development (CDD) in their communities.

Multi-stakeholder approaches encourage different perspectives to be presented and debated, scenarios and options to be evaluated, decisions to be taken jointly, and actions to be implemented collectively. Specific and considerable attention is paid to the role of traditional opinion leaders, including elected councillors, to avoid any power struggle between the 'new' and the 'old' leadership, as this can easily frustrate the process.

2.3 Strengthening social capital

Sierra Leone is a post–conflict country. The GoBifo Project needed to be designed with this in mind if it was to succeed. To enhance the chances of strengthening social capital the project had to pay attention to proxies like trust, collective action, gender and social inclusion, local groups and networks, and information and communication.

Community-driven development projects can increase the importance of poor communities and enhance their ability to negotiate with development partners, the private sector and civil society. Existing Village and Ward Plans are used as part of the process, but marginalised groups contribute their priorities too, proving that disability and illiteracy are not barriers to community or self development.

Communities are never homogeneous, so gender and social inclusion should be one of the social capital proxies. Marginalised groups such as women, youths, religious and cultural minorities, and indigenous and other ethnic groups need both a voice and decision-making roles and responsibilities. Most communities now have women (literate and illiterate) as treasurers of their Village and Ward Development Committees; this demonstrates trust in women and ensures that communities fully include women in community development processes.

Creating Village Plans through consultation – and not just with village chiefs – has increased collective decision-making tremendously and raised the self-esteem of marginalised people in the communities. Communities proved their strong desire to participate by contributing unskilled and skilled labour (where available) and local materials for construction projects, funding some projects on their own, sharing other project costs with development partners, and supporting software development activities and efforts. Communities now know that they can make development happen by themselves, with little or no outside help. By participating, they realised the extent of their own high-value, untapped resources, and learned how to harness them.

Including traditional opinion leaders is crucial because they wield great influence when it comes to implementing community development projects. Emphasising the importance of the ordinary membership also means working with the executives to ensure that they take decisions only after consulting with members, for example by voting or simple majority. Local groups and networks facilitate the flow of communication about development within and between communities, and play important roles in managing and resolving conflict and working with the groups.

Roles and responsibilities are delegated to local groups and networks to avoid duplication and as an entry point into communities. These local groups and networks are instrumental in mobilising resources to carry out projects, and their involvement is immensely important in both influencing long-term planning for community development and implementing less expensive projects by giving marginalised groups assignments and responsibilities.

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Good information sharing and communication within and between communities has helped CDD projects succeed. Other nearby non-GoBifo communities now help implement project activities too. They are in the information loop, and because the projects benefit them too, they are happy to pitch in. Full transparency and accountability can also limit rumours and misinformation too, so communication has been improved by using letters, town criers and FM radio stations, among other techniques.

Village leaders have designated 'town criers' who broadcast information the length and breadth of the various communities using drums and trumpets. Every means used has its own meaning. In some communities, information is shared as an early warning sign; this was particularly true during the 11-year civil conflict in Sierra Leone. If all stakeholders in the development process are kept informed they are more likely to participate, and the trust necessary for the development process to be effective will be built. The district and city councils all provide relevant information for stakeholders and communicate freely on the final versions of village diagnoses and plans, which are then validated by communities before project implementation progresses.

2.4 Community participation and empowerment

Community participation helps people to understand better how to manage projects, and has increased and improved recognition of beneficiaries' needs, priorities, roles, and responsibilities in community development. People know better what resources they have to contribute to project activities, which are then more transparent and accountable. Through helping to carry out projects communities have built up their self-confidence and understand better why they should contribute to their CDD projects. They now feel part of the implementation process. In fact CDD projects are only sustainable when communities do help plan and implement them. Contributing money, time, resources and labour makes the community feel they own the project – now and forever.

Because communities contribute local materials and labour, CDD projects can be done at a fraction of the colossal cost of government projects. Importantly, it also means communities organise themselves and maintain their investment. For example, communities have created project management teams who maintain facilities and initiate campaigns, for example to persuade their peers not to throw garbage into the drainage area of the bridges they have built. Community members say that this transparent approach to development has enhanced their ability to act collectively on development projects.

In addition to better governance, GoBifo communities have learned to design, implement and manage development activities, and community grants support the building of low-cost, productive infrastructure such as roads, bridges, clinics and schools, etc.

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3 Supporting decentralisation through multi-level planning and governance

'GoBifo biznes na all man biznes'

The Krio expression above means 'GoBifo matters are everyone's concern'. This was said by a school teacher, Hannah Moiforay, in a village planning session at Moyowa village in the Jong chiefdom, Bonthe District.
This chapter describes the levels of the GoBifo planning processes, the key stakeholders and their responsibilities, and the main outcomes of planning activities at each level. Governance in the planning and project implementation processes revolves around the relationships between the various actors in the process, and touches on accountability, transparency, information and communication, and equity/inclusion. The multi-level planning methodology is based on a bottom-up and participatory approach. This approach enables different interests to be presented and discussed at community and ward levels, and the multi-level planning involves a joint decision-making process which enhances collective action.

3.1 Transparency in the selection of communities

A lottery system was used to select the GoBifo communities, starting with a list from the Central Statistics Office of all the villages in the Bombali and Bonthe Districts. This ensured an unbiased selection of communities and avoided politicising the selection process. Some local actors thought it inappropriate because it did not involve traditional opinion leaders, communities, ward stakeholders or local council authorities. It has indeed led to cracks in relationships between paramount chiefs and section chiefs in adjacent chiefdoms and with other traditional authorities whose villages were left out. These authorities all feel that they know about living conditions in the communities, while the lottery is random. They feel that traditional opinion leaders should be consulted before any communities are chosen, rather than imposing a 'foreign' lottery selection system on them.

Some of the selected villages have been privileged by the system; they had already received more attention from development partners in the past, and/or are receiving more attention from the government because of their assumed political inclinations. Some communities are neither 'villages' by GoBifo standards nor are they deprived communities. Some are considered towns by Sierra Leonean standards; for example Rokullan in Bombali District is a large town with a big secondary school with staff quarters, a big health facility, and a generator supplying the whole town with electricity. The community of Timbo, near Makeni City, selected by the lottery system could be labelled as a big peri-urban community benefitting from nearby amenities, services and facilities whereas nearby much more deprived communities were left out and continue to ask for community development support.

Had the project tried to apply any criteria to the list before the lottery took place there would have been a risk of politicising the process. At least the lottery method was transparent and saved staff from blame and suspicion from the local authorities and other stakeholders.

3.2 Top-down or bottom-up planning?

The government's re-introduction of the decentralisation process in 2004 was in direct response to the need for people at the community level to be involved in the administration of the state. It aimed to transfer some state functions to the local councils as a way of bringing the government closer to the people.

It is a challenge to develop systems for village and ward planning that can be applied countrywide with guidance from district and town councils. Village planning must empower communities, but must also lead to improved plans and services from local authorities and other agencies. Bottom-up planning has its limitations. While local planning is important to express local priorities and needs and it can be based on good knowledge and understanding of local resources and potentials, inefficiencies and contradictions between different local plans become apparent at a higher planning level. A ward plan will not be the sum of all the village plans, because the responsibilities and scope for planning at ward level are different.

Top-down planning has its limitations as well. National or sectoral plans will not be appropriate everywhere, and local communities will feel bypassed when their specific problems or priorities are not taken into account. Therefore in planning it is important to create mechanisms where the 'stream' of top-down planning can be harmonised with the 'stream' of bottom-up planning, thus assuring subsidiarity in decision-making. There should be a common understanding about what should and should not be included in the different levels of a development plan.[1] Basic issues include:

- A Village Plan is about common issues that cannot be dealt with or resolved individually, and it creates an enabling environment to deal with 'individual issues'. The plan also makes clear which issues will be dealt with at higher levels. A Village Plan is for all the members of the village.
- A Ward Plan deals with issues such as roads, bridges and watershed management that cannot be resolved by individual communities and it creates an enabling environment to deal with 'village issues'. The plan also makes clear which issues will be dealt with at district level. A Ward Plan is for all the communities and villagers.
- A District Plan deals with ward issues that cannot be dealt with or resolved by individual wards, such as secondary schools, major roads, and hospitals, and creates an enabling environment to deal with 'ward issues'. The plan also makes clear which issues will be dealt with at national level. A District Plan is for all the wards, communities and villages.

[1] Experience shows that this common understanding is often lacking. For example the Bombali District Council Development Plan says: 'rehabilitate village stores', 'rehabilitate village tree nursery sites', 'provide farm inputs'. These issues should really be consider in Village or perhaps Ward Plans.

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Complicating factors are sector-wide plans (for example for agriculture, health, education) that are not well integrated into either area-based plans (village, ward, and district) or plans to reach specific target groups. When GoBifo began in 2006 the District Plans had already been created, but community participation had been limited and so they focused merely on infrastructure. Village and Ward Plans were checked to ensure that they did not contradict existing District Plans.

3.3 Multi-level planning

Getting a multi-level planning process off the ground means creating co-ordinating structures such as VDCs and WDCs. Committee members receive training to help them plan, implement, monitor and evaluate, with a view to involving people from the beginning. This enables them to assume a sense of ownership and responsibility, and to gain trust in the process. Specific attention is paid to the role of the communities' traditional opinion leaders and elected councillors, as they will provide oversight at community and local council levels. The multi-level planning process emphasises participatory decision-making and effective collaboration, but could undermine the practices of the traditional elite and chiefs.

To maximise participation in the planning process, it is a good idea to form separate groups for women and youth, give them special training and attention to ensure that they participate in wider discussions, and ensure that all groups are represented in the VDCs. In essence, similar planning processes are carried out at village, ward and local council levels – they just involve different stakeholders.

3.3.1 Pre-planning level

Before planning begins information is collected about the village, including reports on existing and previous interventions, special regulations, development plans, statistics, entitlements to basic services, and any other information that might be useful for the diagnosis and planning phases. A current household survey is carried out with the agreement and participation of the facilitation team, so that there is a baseline.

The whole project is based on building social capital at community level. This is a very demanding process and therefore it is important that right from the beginning local leaders are informed and agree on their roles and the commitment necessary for success, and that they are given a chance to discuss the different steps in the process, the timeline, and community participation and empowerment. This is also an opportunity to discuss openly and honestly what to expect from each other, and to avoid raising expectations that cannot be fulfilled by the project. Community-based and district-level meetings are held to brief traditional leaders and other key stakeholders on the project and the principles and approaches, planning methodology, and implementation and financing arrangements. In order to ensure that a trusting relationship develops between the village and the project actors, community members are constantly reminded of the steps that will be followed during this initial phase. Where

appropriate, notices of meetings are posted where they will be widely seen to ensure that the preparation phase is transparent and open.

Frontline staff members facilitate the formation of VDCs in communities where they do not already exist, and train them on their roles and responsibilities. They also strengthen existing VDCs, emphasising that the committees should include women and young people.

The VDC leads development efforts, co-ordinates and evaluates planned activities, and communicates with external partners (including GoBifo). The VDC:

- represents GoBifo at village level;
- leverages the resources needed to undertake project activities, including mobilising and raising awareness with the community's traditional leadership, community-based organisations and other donors;
- facilitates the compilation of all Village Plans;
- ensures that the VDC Secretary presents the Village Development Plan (VDP) to the WDC so that they can endorse it;
- works closely with project staff and supports the Village Facilitators;
- co-ordinates both implementation of the action plan and the development efforts of local organisations;
- manages soundly, on behalf of the village, the funds made available to the project;
- keeps community members informed about all activities, ensuring public transparency and accountability;
- evaluates the action plan implementation; and
- co-ordinates and supervises monitoring and evaluation, and learning activities within and across teams, including the submission of timely reports to the Ward Facilitator.

The community facilitator plays a crucial and central role in the process. He or she will be trained on a variety of issues and act as a focal point for project activities. The facilitator is answerable to the VDC or local leadership, who will in turn monitor their performance. During the planning process in particular, a community facilitation team is needed to guide work in parallel sub-groups and support the ward and community facilitator during plenary meetings and reporting.

The selection of a community facilitator is announced during the meeting with community leaders and the community information and awareness-raising meetings, and tasks and responsibilities are discussed. The ward facilitator and community leaders will discuss joint incentives for the community facilitators, and his or her role and responsibilities. It will not be a full-time, year-round job, but during some periods will take all of the candidate's time.

3.3.2 Village diagnosis and planning

Communities can best identify their development priorities and locations for other development projects if they are given their community's existing development statistics compared to other communities. Participatory rural appraisal (PRA) tools were used to train communities on social mapping, Venn diagrams, semi-structured interviews, listing problems and opportunities, identifying ten- to one-year goals, and picking one-year goals for implementation. The one-year goals are then translated into community plans that will be implemented with funding support from the project.

The village planning process is spearheaded by the VDC, and embraces other key community players such as the traditional heads, opinion leaders, youths, women, children and representatives from existing community groups and structures such as the Village Facilitation Teams (VFTs) and Project Management Teams (PMTs). During this phase the community embarks on a process of self-learning and decision-making. This process enables community members to better understand their existing potential and constraints and the village's assets, coping strategies, problems and potential, which will ensure a quality planning process. This diagnosis is also essential because it enhances ownership, aids sustainability, and promotes community empowerment. The ward facilitator and VFT take the lead in supporting villages in this process by providing technical development services.

The process starts with a village information meeting to provide information about the planning process, discuss roles and responsibilities, and commit villagers to the full cycle. The village diagnosis is done using some of the PRA tools described earlier. Different groups based on age, gender or economic activity take part to guarantee inclusiveness and a true representation of all community members. The village first-year plan is completed, with a budget that includes village co-funding, GoBifo funding, and funding from other sources. Budgeting can be a delicate process as people try to impose their own priorities, but decisions should be in line with the needs expressed in the first-year plan. It is important to remember that GoBifo is not an infrastructure project, but a capacity-development project. The block grants are small and one building could consume the whole block grant for that year, while the project wants to promote a wide variety of activities with a special focus on capacity building and activities for groups like women, youths and people with disabilities.

When the village diagnosis and planning phase begins, frontline staff uses 'pilot communities' to demonstrate the planning skills and processes which will then be replicated in other communities. This provides practical learning opportunities for both ward members and project staff. At the training sessions the groups discuss the roles and responsibilities of community members with respect to the opening of village bank accounts, the use of block grants, and the mobilisation of local materials.

Young people were vital in the planning process because of their positive influence and contribution to planning and implementation. Youth groups and their leaders played a key role in mobilising and encouraging their peers to co-operate with the facilitators in the diagnosis and planning stages. Youths serving as peer educators are encouraged to form youth groups, and training on project implementation specifically designed for them is given.

The key elements that enhance an effective planning process include collective action, not only during the multi-stakeholder consultations to prepare the plan, but also during implementation of selected projects. To reinforce further the idea of collective action and the broad involvement of village members, priority setting and project selection should aim for a fair distribution of the financial resources over as many interest groups as possible.

3.3.3 Endorsement of Village Development Plans

The endorsement of VDPs is a critical stage in the planning process (see also Figure 3.1). VDPs are presented to the WDCs to verify that the plans are in line with the District Development Plans (DDPs). VDC members present their village plans for discussion and ratification. Once ratified, the WDC members endorse their VDPs and send them on to be approved by the District Councils. But this is not automatic. Approval is secured only after the District Councils have studied the VDPs alongside the DDPs and are satisfied that the VDPs complement the DDPs.

It is the responsibility of the WDC to scrutinise the plans thoroughly using parameters such as feasibility, relevance to the community, and linkage with the District Development Plans. Once the WDC has analysed and appraised the VDPs they recommend them for approval by the council, or ask the villages to correct any non-compliant aspects. The criteria for WDC analysis for endorsement of the VDPs include:

- coherence of the VDPs with DDPs;
- reflection of village development priorities;
- conformity with GoBifo funding criteria;
- assurance that any infrastructure project is not to be more than 50% of the total block grant; and
- inclusion of specific activities for women and youths.

The Ward Councillor on behalf of the WDC submits the VDP to the Local Council to consider approving funding to implement the one-year activity plan. They either endorse and approve it, in which case the VDC will be informed by a Village Endorsement Letter, or do not, in which case the VDC will be asked, through an explanatory letter, to modify the non-compliant aspects. In this case the VDP has to be re-examined. The WDC assessment capacities are built through training, and it meets monthly to consider submissions. In order to support the process and ensure transparency and consistency, a Field Guide provides all WDCs with consistent endorsement forms.

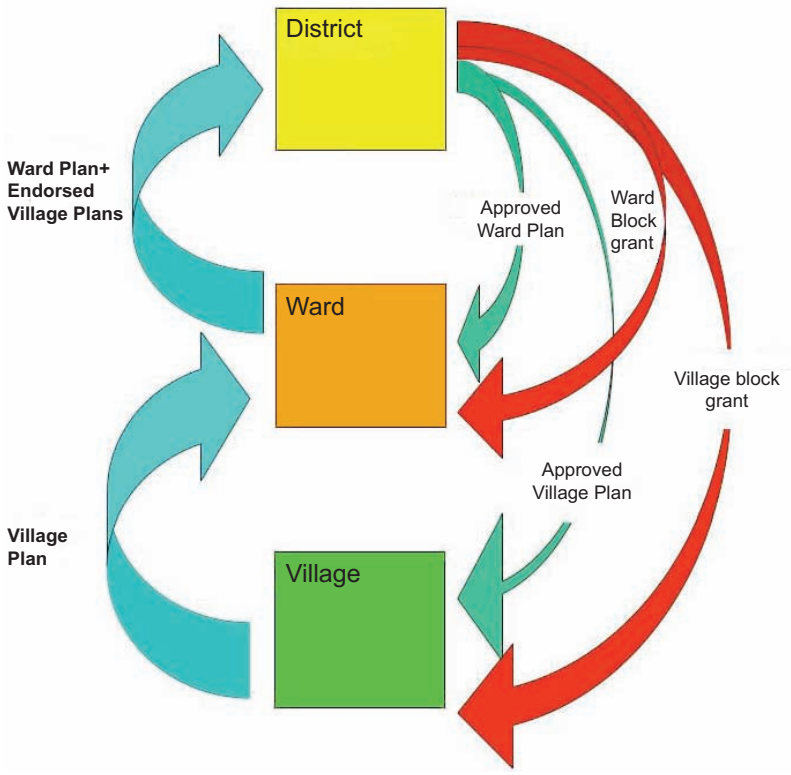
The endorsement process needs to be kept simple, although it will improve over time as committees gain experience.

During one VDP endorsement session at Logbana village in Bonthe District a local project called 'Farming for Children' was rejected by the WDC, who felt it was inappropriate because it gave the impression of using child labour. Community members were asked to review the project title and come up with an appropriate activity for children. The project was later changed to 'School Garden Project', which was approved because 'learning gardening skills' is part of the school curriculum. Ideally the Local Council meets bi-monthly to approve VDPs and uses the following criteria:

- conformity with government standards, policies and priorities;
- conformity with the DDP;
- participatory approach; and
- relevance of the project to targeted communities.

If the project meets all these criteria it will be endorsed and submitted to the District Council for approval. The approval team at that level includes the council chairman, sectoral heads, and line ministries.

Figure 3.1: Planning levels, endorsement and approval of plans



Although eligibility criteria dictate that in a VDP a maximum of 50% of the budget can be used for infrastructural development, in some communities first-year activity plans included quite a lot of infrastructural projects (see example in Table 3.1). The WDC can accept this scenario only if the community is able to defend its choice for infrastructure projects based on specific urgent needs (which can be shown to be supported by all village groups, including the marginalised) or if the infrastructure projects included a replicable capacity development component such as 'building local skills for toilet construction'.

Table 3.1: Extract from the Year 1 Activity Plan (2007) – Baoma Gbenge

Chiefdom and Ward	Name of Ward Facilitator	Village	Project title	GoBifo Block Grant (Leones)	Community contribution (Leones)	Total project Cost (Leones)
Nongoba Bullom Ward 1	Augustine Moriba	Baoma Kpengeh	Training in record-keeping and small business management	391,000	65,000	456,000
			Construction of six pit latrines	2,192,000	990,000	3,182,000
			Women's vegetable gardening and training	120,000	120,000	240,000
			Construction of a community market	1,707,000	575,000	2,282,000
			Construction of a drying floor	590,000	235,000	825,000
TOTAL COST				**5,000,000**	**1,985,000**	**6,985,000**

Village – Bonthe District

3.3.4 Ward development planning

As established by the Local Government Act (LGA), WDC members include elected councillors, Paramount Chiefs and other ward residents (see Box 3.1). The Ward Development Plans (WDPs) are generated by the WDCs using participatory tools, in the same way as the village planning process. Although they are mentioned in the LGA, WDCs do not get a lot of support from the District Council. In 2006, when the GoBifo project started, they were mostly inactive and had no funding for meetings or development activities. Now committee members are mobilised from every corner of the ward to a central location for planning meetings.

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Box 3.1: Roles and responsibilities of Ward Development Committees

General roles and responsibilities of a WDC

- Mobilise ward residents to implement self-help and development projects.
- Provide a focal point to discuss local problems and needs and take remedial actions or make recommendations to the local council accordingly.
- Organise communal and voluntary work, especially with respect to sanitation.
- Make proposals to the local councils for levying and collecting rates for special projects and programmes.
- Educate residents on their rights and obligations in relation to local government and decentralisation, for example paying tax.

Specific roles and responsibilities of the WDC

A. Voice of the people

- Collate the views, opinions and proposals of ward residents (women and men) and present them to the District Council.
- Report back to residents the general decisions of the District Council and the actions being taken to solve problems raised by residents.
- Maintain close contact with residents and consult them on issues to be discussed in the District Council.
- Provide both technical support and information to their ward residents to enable them to take informed decisions in local-level development planning processes.

B. Revenue mobilisation

- Collate the views, opinions and proposals of residents and present them to the District Council.
- Educate residents about paying taxes, in collaboration with chiefdom administration.
- Liaise frequently with organised, productive economic groups and other people in the ward.
- Ensure transparency and the effective use of mobilised resources.

C. Oversight of development activities

- Collate the views, opinions and proposals of residents and present them to the District Council.
- Monitor all development activities in the ward.
- Link various project activities with appropriate line ministries.
- Ensure efficient use of inputs received from development partners.

D. Community mobilisation

- Collate the views, opinions and proposals of residents and present them to the District Council.
- Mobilise residents to participate actively in development activities.
- Raise awareness in wards.
- Ensure sustainability of projects.
- Take part in communal and development activities.
- Promote community ownership.

The WDCs also have specific GoBifo responsibilities:

- Analyse and appraise VDPs before they are submitted.
- Endorse VDPs or to request modifications.
- Forward endorsed VDP to the Local Council with a recommendation for approval and funding.
- Identify shared concerns and priorities from the VDPs, and capture those activities proposed by villages that should be promoted to ward level because they will have broad coverage and impact.
- Prepare the WDPs for submission to the Local Council.
- Use the same participatory tools as the village-level planning process.
- Ensure that WDPs complement DDP.
- Ensure that WDPs are submitted to the council for endorsement and approval.

VDPs sometimes include activities that are beyond the village's capacity to implement. The VDC planning table has a specific column for these, so villages can indicate where activities need ward-level planning. The WDC reviews the VDPs to identify these shared priorities and concerns. Subsequently, these needs are prioritised by the WDC with the support of the Local Council and included in the Ward Development Plan (see example below).

Table 3.2: Extract from the 2007 Ward Plan of Ward II – Safroko Limba Chiefdom – Bombali District

Chiefdom and Ward	Name of Ward Facilitator	Project title	GoBifo Block Grant (Leones)	Community contribution (Leones)	Toproject Cost (Leones)
Safroko Limba Ward II	Cassius Mansaray	Feeder road rehabilitation (11.2km) and construction of one box culvert	9,500,000	3,376,000	12,867,000
		Capacity-building training:			
		▪ Monitoring and evaluation	1,554,000	200,000	1,754,000
		▪ Conflict resolution and management	1,046,000	200,000	1,246,000
		Construction of one health post and furniture	7,900,000	6,400,000	14,300,000
TOTAL COST			**20,000,000**	**10,176,000**	**30,176,000**

3.4 Financial governance

Once the VDPs are endorsed by the WDC and approved by the District or Local Council, GoBifo funds the VDP Year 1 activities with up to Le14 million (approximately US$3,646 in 2010) and approved WDP Year 1 activities with up to Le 20 million (approximately US$5,208 in 2010). Communities and wards do not automatically

qualify for block grants, so to ensure that they are awarded only when truly useful some eligibility criteria were set up to ensure the transparent use of funds (see Box 3.2).

Box 3.2: Eligibility criteria for GoBifo block grants

- Block grants will not be used for activities that proselytise or evangelise and these include the construction, renovation or refurbishing of mosques, churches or other religious facilities.
- No project activities aimed at satisfying individual or sub-group interests – be they economic, social or political – will use block grants.
- Block grants will not fund land purchases or leases.
- Block grants will not offset debts or pay taxes.
- Individual houses or buildings will not be built, renovated or refurbished using block grants.
- Block grants will not be used to build, renovate or refurbish headquarters or premises for the use of political parties, trade unions, or other constituencies.
- Projects with negative environmental impact, in particular those that trigger the World Bank safeguards, will not be considered for block grants.
- Block grants will not support any activity that is prohibited by Sierra Leonean or international laws.
- Block grants will not be used to purchase equipment or materials funded by (included in the budgets of) other organisations, such as government agencies, NGOs, or other donor-funded programmes.
- Block grants will not be used to buy weapons, including but not limited to mines, guns and ammunition.
- Chainsaws cannot be purchased by block grants. The cutting down of trees contributes to desertification.
- Block grants will not be used to buy pesticides, herbicides or other chemicals.
- Block grants will not be used to pay salaries to government servants or the staff of government-subsidised organisations.
- Block grants will not be used to pay salaries to VDC or WDC members.

Financial agreement is a crucial component in the planning process, and it involves all key stakeholders. Once the Local Council approves a VDP, the village signs a financial agreement with the project and the Local Council. These agreements specify the amount to be granted, how much will be paid and when, the use of funds for the different activities contained in the VDP, the responsibilities of each party, the timing and methods of payments, and the audit and reporting procedures. This financial agreement is signed:

- on behalf of the community: the VDC Chairman, the Secretary and the Treasurer;
- on behalf of the government: the Local Council Chief Administrator and the Chairman; and
- on behalf of the GoBifo project: the Field Office Coordinator.

The process of depositing funds into community development accounts (CDAs) starts with the Local Council authority and the GoBifo Field Office Co-ordinator in each district co-signing a cheque. The community signatories receive the cheque and deposit it in a commercial bank. The community Procurement Officer then request payments to buy specific, agreed project materials. When the money is disbursed, the materials are bought, transported to the community, and displayed publicly before storage and use on the project site.

3.5 Monitoring and evaluation

Project activity progress is measured by two monitoring and evaluation systems. The first, a community monitoring and evaluation system, is more qualitative. It includes the views of the community, helps the community to learn about managing a project or carrying it out, and is adapted to local strategies and approaches. The second system, which meets the monitoring needs of the GoSL and World Bank, is a results monitoring framework which uses quantitative analysis indicators.

3.5.1 Community monitoring and evaluation

The planning cycle becomes a real learning cycle for everybody involved, from the moment stakeholders begin their training and start to measure and analyse progress towards goals and objectives. Community monitoring and evaluation (CM&E) not only lets local actors get involved, but also steers their learning process, and thus contributes to social capital building. CM&E involves local people (as users, clients or citizens) in designing and implementing the system, including selecting information needs, collecting and analysing data, and making decisions to change strategies and approaches. This, in turn, requires a process of negotiation and shared understanding with local people about what might be critical to know and how to ensure that corrective action is taken.

GoBifo developed a CM&E system in 2008 to ensure that communities were able to monitor and evaluate their development activities. The CM&E tool increases the community's understanding of their involvement in development activities, and could be used with any development partner. It permits local actors to give their opinions make complaints and suggestions for improving the project activities and results. It also allows them to fully participate in the implementation process as active and meaningful participants, thus helping build social capital. Some basic assumptions should be considered when developing the CM&E plan:

- Participation and inclusiveness in the design of the M&E system: involve stakeholders in developing objectives and identifying targets and indicators, data collection mechanisms, and methods to analyse information.
- Flexibility: there is room for variations between villages and project.
- Information should be collected according to the capacities and rhythm of the villages.
- The overall indicators of success should be based on the indicators selected by the villages.

The CM&E system was used in all villages in 2008, and techniques used included individual semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The C&ME questionnaire is presented in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3: CM&E Questionnaire

Appropriateness	Adequacy	Effectiveness	Building social capital
▪ What problem was this project supposed to address? ▪ What was the strategy used by the GoBifo project to implement this project? ▪ How appropriate was the strategy used? ▪ Given the size of the problem, did the strategy make enough of a difference to make it worth doing? ▪ Did the expected level of change occur? If not, why not?	▪ Were the activities adequate to accomplish the objectives? ▪ What was the expected level of change? If any change occurred, why and how did it take place? ▪ Did the project remain within the allotted budget? ▪ Did the necessary resources materialise?	▪ How effective was this strategy in reaching target groups in your community? ▪ How many people in the target group in this community are involved in the activity? ▪ How is the community as a whole benefiting from this project? ▪ How effective were services from service providers? ▪ Did the target group take part in the activity? ▪ Is this community embarking on its own development efforts within the community and without outside assistance?	▪ How has the implementation of capacity-building projects (training) in the community contributed to strengthening social capital? Comment specifically on how trust, gender and social inclusion, collective decision-making and action, information and communications and the use of local networks in implementing capacity-building projects (training) contributed to strengthening social capital in this community.

3.5.2 Results monitoring framework

The results monitoring framework was developed at the start of the project in 2006. Data are collected and summarised by the ward facilitators (see Table 3.4). The framework enables project staff to monitor the progress of the project. (Chapters 4-7 will go into more detail.)

Table 3.4: Results monitoring framework

GoBifo GOALS	Targets for end of project	What to monitor (indicators)?
1. Increase the participation of women, youth and marginalised groups in village and ward development planning and implementation	▪ In all six villages in your ward, the participation of women, youth and marginalised groups has increased. ▪ New women's and youths' groups have been formed in all six villages in your ward, and have implemented the projects identified in their development plans. ▪ The number of women and youths attending and speaking publicly in general village meetings in all six villages in your ward has increased. ▪ Decision-making is community based and not left in the hands of traditional opinion leaders in GoBifo communities. ▪ For youth initiatives, youths take the lead in decision-making and identifying opportunities for improving their livelihoods.	▪ Number of new women's and youths' groups that have been formed. ▪ Number of activities implemented by specific women, youth and marginalised groups. ▪ Percentage attendance of women, youths and marginalised groups in community general meetings. ▪ Number of times women and youths speak publicly in meetings. ▪ Proportion of GoBifo block grants channelled to women's, youths' and marginalised groups' projects. ▪ Opinion leaders speak on behalf of their communities.
2. Build community capacity to plan and implement projects that meet village development needs	▪ In all six villages in your ward, VDCs are capable of planning and monitoring the village development activities. ▪ Village groups in all six villages in your ward are capable of elaborating specific development activities based on their needs. ▪ The VDCs and groups in all six villages in your ward have implemented the projects they identified in their development plans. ▪ In all six villages in your ward, village members are contributing the agreed amount of money, labour, materials, etc. ▪ By the end of the project, the skills of community members in all six villages in your ward have increased. ▪ In all six villages, the VDC and group members who identified training needs have received training.	▪ Number of VDC monitoring meetings. ▪ Number of village groups that elaborated a specific plan identifying their needs and projects. ▪ Number of project activities implemented per VDC or village group (or percentage of planned activities). Percentage of community co-funding (money, labour, materials) of village activities. ▪ Percentage of GoBifo funds (compared to the total amount budgeted in the plan) used to implement projects identified in the plan. ▪ Village Development Committee and groups have been formed.

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GoBifo GOALS	Targets for end of project	What to monitor (indicators)?
3. Increase communities' capacity to advocate for their priorities in the ward and district development planning process.	▪ By the end of the project, all six villages in your ward are actively approaching districts, wards and NGOs for support for their development projects.	▪ Number of VDCs capable of successfully defending their development plans in a Ward Development Committee meeting (i.e. getting them approved). ▪ Number of village activity proposals (from the general village action plan) that are taken by the VDC to non-public organisations (NGO or other agencies). ▪ Number of times the village successfully requested and received support from WDC, District, or public sector staff.
4. Build the skills of community members to implement projects and improve livelihoods.	▪ By the end of the project, the skills of community members in all six villages in your ward have increased. ▪ In all six villages, the VDC and group members who identified training needs have received training.	▪ Number of trainings for VDC. ▪ Number of trainings for specific village groups. ▪ Total number of villagers trained. ▪ Number of activities implemented by each group following training. ▪ Number of community members engaged in planned activities (income generating, farming, marketing, etc.)
5. Improve the transparency and accountability of decision-making at village and ward level.	▪ The VDCs in all six villages in your ward are keeping account of their financial transactions for income-generation projects. ▪ All six VDCs are publicising information about their financial transactions to community members ▪ All six VDCs are submitting monthly progress reports on the physical and financial progress of their projects. ▪ VDC members give regular feedback to the groups they are representing in all six villages in your ward.	▪ Number of VDC regular paper accounts that record their financial transactions – e.g. how much money they receive, how much they spend, what they spend it on. ▪ Number of feedback meetings on financial transactions from VDC members to their own groups. ▪ Number of public information activities from the VDC on decision-making. ▪ Number of monthly progress reports on the physical and financial progress of their projects submitted by VDC based on information from the village groups.

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4 Strengthening collective decision-making and action

'Muhu galei mia amu voningiisia'

The phrase above means 'Youths are the backbone of our development' in the *Mende* local dialect. This was said by Pa Samu in Bendu 1 & 2 villages during a community meeting, when the villages' young people agreed to use money they had made from their fishing project to buy zinc sheets as co-funding to help build a large high-quality multi-purpose village centre.

Any multi-stakeholder process will include people and groups with a diversity of aspirations. In order to work collectively on what is effectively a series of joint projects aimed at achieving a shared vision, then understanding and accepting what drives people and what colours and informs their judgements and their thinking is crucial. A shared understanding also renders the tough decisions that have to be made far less threatening, and helps build trust for collective action among participants.

Community mobilisation involves planned actions and processes to reach, influence, and involve all relevant segments and stakeholders at the community level, in order to create an enabling environment and effect positive behaviour and social change. GoBifo methodologies and tools have enhanced participatory processes and led community members to organise for collective action towards a common purpose. To reinforce this idea further, setting priorities and selecting projects should lead to a fair distribution of the financial resources over as many interest groups as possible.

Although a village in Sierra Leone is a geographic and administrative unit, it is not homogenous. People or groups sometimes have conflicting interests or perceptions. Inclusive approaches give all socio-economic groups (including the poor, vulnerable and marginalised) equal weight in decision-making on collective action. For socio-cultural or historical reasons, it may be a challenge for women, youths, poorer people and others to speak out in community meetings. Facilitators should make sure that people from disadvantaged groups are able to express their opinions and participate actively in decision-making for collective action.

In a normal, traditional community setting in Sierra Leone the traditional rulers and influential people are the architects in decision-making and development initiatives. They authorise and control every aspect of development in the community. Because of the immense powers they enjoy, community members are usually afraid of them, and often just accept every decision made on their behalf without question. It is the same with outsiders bringing development to the community. They are not questioned. This practice was a major cause of the 10-year civil war in Sierra Leone.

The rulers marginalised the majority of their communities and excluded them from decision-making. GoBifo approaches to development in these communities were designed to reverse an ugly situation that people had lived with for decades.

The village diagnosis and planning process presented in Section 3.3.2 clearly shows that discrimination on the basis of gender, age, disability or any other reason harms community-driven projects. It does not promote the multi-stakeholder approach that is a project principle. All community-driven project activities should be planned with everyone involved and without excluding marginalised groups. No longer will these groups have their interests and development priorities articulated by traditional opinion leaders. That process disadvantaged marginalised groups and has been rejected in favour of new, inclusive principles and approaches.

Capable communities know that with or without a development partner they can come together and take decisions to address their own development challenges. When projects are being implemented all sections of the community are involved not only because the process has deadlines that need to be met, but also to promote community interaction, trust and understanding. Action plans are agreed in community meetings, and to ensure that everyone is on board, work committees are established. Once decisions are taken collectively, some communities set aside special days for collective work. This has enhanced the chances of successful project implementation, opening of community development accounts, monitoring of project materials procurement, transportation and storage of project materials, and the evaluation of the projects upon completion.

To this end communities are encouraged to help identify, plan, implement, monitor and evaluate projects they consider directly relevant and necessary for increasing their choices in life. They are encouraged to be masters of their own destinies. Traditional authorities are discouraged from taking decisions unilaterally. Achieving this transition is not going to be easy. Old habits die hard. It is going to take a lot of awareness raising, new practices and organised structures to succeed.

The formation of VDCs is considered a step in the right direction of the change process. Everybody helps select the members of their VDC, whose members will make valuable contributions to the village decision-making. Holding meetings that involve the whole community and encourage the participation of marginalised groups such as women, children, youth and people with disabilities is a good strategy to empower people.

Communities opened their own community development accounts by contributing their own money and appointing signatories. Activity requests, payment vouchers and cheques are prepared by the local people themselves. All expenditure is accounted for by the presentation of receipts and registration of materials bought, thus building trust in the communities.

Collective action (part of social capital) has strengthened communities during project implementation. The community members were trained in their roles and responsibilities, which led to the timely completion of their projects. Collective action triggers a great deal of discussion, which leads to better decision-making. Again, work is accomplished more quickly when all the members pitch in.

Community members are trained in leadership for good governance and simple financial record keeping. This has helped build trust and confidence and promoted collective participation. Women, youths and children convene and attend meetings, and speak publicly. People work collectively and there is transparency and accountability of community resources. The leaders' authoritative pronouncements are questioned, and alternative suggestions are made and considered. People commit themselves to projects that they themselves identify and which represent felt needs rather than imposed ideas.

A good example of the power of collective decision-making and action happened in Sawulia, Bombali District. The village chief wanted the GoBifo-funded multipurpose centre to be built very close to his house. The youths and women wanted it built somewhere else where the whole community would have equal access to it. They felt the chief would personalise ownership of the centre if it were built next to his house. The chief chose to assert his authority and this brought the project to a standstill for a while. Not wanting to be defiant and disrespectful to traditions and authority, the youths summoned the Ward Councillor to mediate. After discussions at a general meeting, the chief agreed that the centre should be built in the centre of the village. The example in Box 4.1 comes from Magbithngor village, where collective action raised awareness about how the community is responsible for its own development efforts.

Box 4.1: Community responsibility in Magbithnor Village

Magbithngor village is in the Kafalah Section, Bombali Shebora Chiefdom, Ward 94, of Bombali District. The village is about 14km from the provincial headquarters of Makeni. After the 11- year civil war that ended eight years ago, this community had a lot of challenges. Sanitation was poor, with only about 10% of the population having access to VIP latrines and safe drinking water. It was difficult to access health facilities such as traditional birth attendant (TBA) clinics, and as a result there was a high rate of infant mortality in the village. There was also a lack of agricultural extension services. The community lacked public infrastructure such as good roads, bridges, grain stores, drying floors, a multipurpose centre, a hand pump water well and community school. The road linking Magbithngor and Makeni, which is the marketing centre for their agricultural produce, was not open to vehicles because the bridge linking Magbithngor to Makeni was made of sticks and palm logs.

With all of the above challenges, the community of Magbithngor adopted traditional approaches such as getting their drinking water from streams (which carried a high health risk), using the nearby bush to give birth, and organising self-help labour groups for communal work.
Magbithngor village had never received development support from a non-governmental organisation or community-based organisation. GoBifo was the first organisation to work in Magbithngor, building a community primary school, providing school furniture and a cassava-processing scheme, and building a bridge linking Magbithngor and Makeni. Community meetings are now held to discuss and address community issues, and resolve and manage conflict at the village level. The establishment of a community seed bank and low-interest loans help farmers to access seeds at the right time and also helps community members to send their children to school.
Community members now prefer the VDC to handle any project in the village. Funds and project materials are held by the Treasurer, who has been trained to use public funds. At one point the community halted the construction of a drying floor because another development partner did not declare how much of their donation was meant for the construction. The community also asked the development partner to transfer the funds into the community bank account so that they could lead project implementation.

In Bonthe District, Molaoma village community members now feel confident about managing their own funds and holding leaders accountable for the transparent management and use of these funds, as described in Box 4.2.

Box 4.2: Ownership in Molaoma Village

Molaoma village is situated along the Bauya–Bendu Cha Road in Nongoba Bullom Chiefdom, Bonthe District. It is a small village with a population of 133 people.
The people of Molaoma are all farmers. Although a few of them do other jobs too, they still have small farms to provide food for their household. Most people are subsistence farmers practising mixed farming, growing one main crop and planting many other crops among it. The major crops produced in Molaoma are rice, cassava, groundnuts and beans. Some people harvest palm fruits and process them to produce palm oil for sale and domestic use. The women also grow vegetables for home use. The people also do some communal farming, which is a way of cementing the unity that exists within the community.
'When we put our own money into any project activity, we will be in charge and manage the project, protect it and take good care of it upon completion. As we were given a chance to come together and plan and come up with our own priority needs, the project that comes out of the process is our own initiative, the product of our own thinking, so we are bound to give full support for its implementation. When we implement project work,

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we learn in the process. When we hire our own contractors, we go for local artisans who we have command over. It will cost us less and since our hands are on the job, we go in for the best materials to be put into the project. The local artisans will always be around to do repairs when the need arises in the future. GoBifo is the first organisation that has shown us the actual amount due for the implementation of our community projects.'
(Village Head, Molaoma village)
The Village Head confessed that this was the first time this community had operated a bank account and been allowed to spend the project money themselves. The community considered this a very good approach that would be considered in future implementation of other projects.

In the past, communities only came together to support each other during the initiation of young men and women into secret societies. At such times all the members in the secret societies contribute resources to ensure the success of their activities. They never tried to pool resources for development activities for the whole community. Using participatory and inclusive methodologies to inspire collective action, the youths, women and men have realised what they can do for their communities. For example, several communities decided to cultivate cassava as one of their activities. The whole community goes to the farm on an agreed day and divides the labour amongst them. The men do the brushing, the youths clear up the bush after brushing, while the women fetch water and prepare food. This continues until harvest time. The proceeds are then reported to the community in a general meeting presided over by the VDC chairperson. They decide together what to do with the proceeds, which are handed over to either the treasurer or the storekeeper. Money raised from these activities is sometimes loaned to individuals who are in desperate need of money for issues like medical treatment. Such loans are repaid within a reasonable period of time. Sometimes the money is used for other development activities identified by the community, including rehabilitating handpumps or building traditional birth attendant houses or drying floors without waiting for outside or donor help. Most communities now take the lead in implementing self-help activities like improving their roads to improve access to bigger towns, etc. These communities tend to make use of every opportunity they have to improve their social setting and their livelihoods.
Sustaining collective action needs good leadership and a legitimate village co-ordinating body, supported by the local chiefs and councillors accountable to community members through adequate information sharing. Only in this way can collective action be maintained.

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5 Investments for sustainable development

'Mu yenge maa haa va keh sina mulengaa va'

The saying above in the Mende dialect means *'We are working today for ourselves and tomorrow for our children'*, and was said by Yema Beah, an elderly woman in Molaoma village, during the construction of the traditional birth attendant house for the women.

Development has to be sustainable, or it is not development. Most rural communities in Sierra Leone view development as ideas imported by agencies and organisations and feel that they can only be beneficiaries. This mentality makes communities look for handouts and often wait for development organisations to provide whatever they need. Development projects need to influence this mentality positively and encourage people to identify their own development problems and manage their own development activities. People not only benefit from the project in the short term but also continue to derive benefits even in the long term.

The problems that all the implementing communities had in common centred on agriculture, health, education, infrastructure, and income generation. Any development that took place in these communities had to target one or more of these problems. To be sure that what communities plan to undertake is sustainable, they create ten-year development plans, with interim three-year and one-year action plans. GoBifo communities have already invested a lot in sustainable development in these areas (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1: Pilot project results in GoBifo villages 2007–09

Sector projects	Project activities	Bombali District		Bonthe District	
		Number of projects	Number of villages	Number of projects	Number of villages
Health	Pit latrines	33	10	27	27
	Potable water/water well	3	3	3	3
	Construction of TBA houses	12	12	16	16
Education	School construction (classrooms)	8	8	5	5
	School rehabilitation	9	9	1	1
	School furniture	9	9	2	2
	School toilets	3	3	-	-
	School soccer field rehabilitation	-	-	1	1
	Adult literacy	9	9	-	-

Sector projects	Project activities	Bombali District		Bonthe District	
		Number of projects	Number of villages	Number of projects	Number of villages
Agriculture	Rice cultivation	9	9	4	4
	Mechanical rice cultivation	-	-	2	2
	Groundnut cultivation	6	6	13	13
	Seed multiplication (rice)	23	23	-	-
	Seed multiplication (groundnuts)	22	22	-	-
	Animal husbandry	69	69	2	2
	Livestock rearing	-	-	4	4
	Backyard/vegetable gardening	3	3	7	7
	Cassava cultivation	2	2	1	1
Skills training/ capacity development	Oil palm cultivation	3	3	-	-
	Soap making	44	44	8	8
	'Garra' tie-dying	3	3	8	8
	Carpentry	10	10	-	-
	Blacksmithing	11	11	-	-
	Tailoring	4	4	-	-
	Weaving	2	2	-	-
	Leadership skills and project proposal writing	2	2	1	1
	HIV/AIDS	3	3	-	-
	Microfinance	6	6	-	-
	Record-keeping, marketing and financial management	-	-	19	19
	Hand-pump repairing	-	-	2	2
	Veterinary services	2	2	-	-
Infrastructure	Construction of culverts	-	-	14	6
	Construction of drainage systems	-	-	2	1
	Multi-purpose centres: construction	16	16	29	29
	Multi-purpose centres: rehabilitation	3	3	-	-
	Road construction	-	-	1	1
	Road maintenance	-	-	1	1
	Construction of community stores	-	-	2	2
	Construction of community markets	-	-	1	1
	Drying floors: construction	12	12	11	11
	Drying floors: rehabilitation	3	3	-	-
	Grain stores: construction	14	14	-	-
Income generation	Cassava processing	5	5	-	-
	Garri processing	-	-	13	13
	Soap making	-	-	5	5
	Fishing	-	-	5	5
	Bread baking	2	2	-	-
Recreation	Male youth soccer	2	2	5	5
	Female youth soccer			1	1

Ward projects (see Table 5.2) should only include activities that are beyond the community's ability to carry out alone (see also Chapter 3). Most ward projects are in line with this, but some came about as compensation to councillors in whose villages no projects were to be implemented. This is a difficult dilemma for any development project in Sierra Leone: getting councillors to co-operate if their native villages do not benefit from the project.

Table 5.2: Pilot project results in Wards 2007–09

Sector projects	Project activities	Bombali		Bonthe	
		Number of projects	Number of wards	Number of projects	Number of wards
Infrastructure	Construction of culverts	19	18	6	5
	Construction of bridges			3	3
	Feeder roads	2	2	- 2	-
	Grain store	1	1	-	-
Education	School construction	4	4	1	1
	School rehabilitation	2	2	1	1
	School furniture	3	3	1	2
Agriculture	Cattle rearing	-	-	1	1
	Groundnut cultivation	-	-	1	1
	Rice cultivation	4 farms	4 farms	-	-
	Rice seed multiplication	3 farms	3 farms	-	-
Capacity building of WDC members	Project proposal writing and leadership skills	2 training sessions in clustered villages *	2	2	3
	Training in record-keeping and reporting	-	-	1	1
	HIV/AIDS training and sensitisation	2 training sessions in clustered villages *	2	-	-
	Leadership skills	1 training session in clustered villages *	1	-	-
	Microfinance training	1training session in clustered villages *	1	-	-

* One village in each ward is selected as a central location for the WDC training sessions.

Sector projects	Project activities	Bombali		Bonthe	
		Number of projects	Number of wards	Number of projects	Number of wards
Income generation	Construction of restaurant	-	-	1	1
Health	Construction of toilets	-	-	2	2
	Provision of drugs and health centre	-	-	0	1
	Construction of health centre	2	2	1	1
	Rehabilitation of health post	2	2	-	-
	Construction of TBA houses	1	1	-	-
	Furniture and bedding	7	7	-	-
Public outreach	Radio sensitisation sessions	-	-	1	1
Recreation	Youth soccer	-	-	2	2

Rice and groundnut cultivation take place in fields owned by the wards. (Wards own vast expanses of land for such cultivation projects.) Some ward boundaries were affected by the July 2008 Local Council Elections and this brought some non-GoBifo villages into participating wards and some GoBifo villages lost some land to new wards.

5.1 Agriculture

Most community members are farmers, which is why agricultural projects are so important in their development plans. Past agricultural projects have included drying floors, groundnut farming, rice farming, animal husbandry, vegetable gardening, grain stores and garri processing. The Mamukay community in Bombali District, with technical support from the district agronomist, developed rice and groundnut cultivation projects and now have enough groundnut and rice seeds to create a seed bank to serve the community. Gendema in Bonthe District cultivated cassava that is processed into bags of garri for sale on market days. The community members plan to meet and decide how to re-invest the proceeds in other community development activities.

These agricultural activities have provided many benefits. Drying floors are used for drying the seeds appropriately and many people can be served in one day; so people no longer have to spend their meagre savings on drying mats, which do not last for long. The use of drying floors also minimises high post-harvest losses. The drying floors produce high-quality seeds with little or no contamination from stones or sand. Vegetable gardening and rice and groundnut farming have also increased seed bank facilities in many communities and improved food supply, widening the communities' economic base. Grain stores have been built in many communities too, which has improved food security and, through the minimal fees charged, raised income for the communities. Garri processing has also made communities more economically secure.

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5.2 Health

Many communities are implementing health projects such as building toilets and traditional birth attendant houses, rehabilitating and building water wells, training residents in water-pump repair, building health posts and health centres, etc. Community members not only contribute local materials and labour, they also co-fund the implementation of these projects. Examples of such projects include the health centre at Masongbo–Limba in Bombali District that is now serving the Masongbo–Limba community and other nearby communities, the rehabilitation of a hand-pump in Mabureh in Bombali District, and the construction of a health centre at Mania and four pit toilets at Molaoma in Bonthe District. For the traditional birth attendant delivery houses, pregnant women now deliver their babies in more sanitary environments. Births and deaths are recorded in the TBA houses to make the preparation of birth certificates easier.

The new toilets bring a lot of benefits. It is environmentally healthier than defecating in bushes and along the roads, and brings prestige to the community. There is now less diarrhoea and dysentery, and less risk of injury from snakes, thorns, and broken bottles in the bushes. Food contamination by flies has also been reduced.

The construction and rehabilitation of water wells has given communities a regular supply of safe drinking water. Those communities that have training in water- pump repair now have trainees doing minor repairs on their water pumps, saving the community a great deal of money. These trainees are also repairing pumps in neighbouring communities.

All these projects are promoting better health practices in their community.

5.3 Income generation

Some communities included income-generating activities in their village plans to create revolving community funds. This enhances sustainability by supporting future development activities. Communities with fishing projects use the proceeds to finance other community development activities.

Others opted for skills-training projects like soap making, carpentry, and tailoring that ended up as income-generating projects for their communities. In Bendu village (Bonthe District), training in soap making as an income-generation project was often passed on to bring more women on board. Women in this community now produce enough soap to sell not only in Bendu but also in the surrounding communities. The proceeds from soap making are used to support the multipurpose centre, pay their children's school fees and provide soft loans to members. Similar projects are also being implemented in Kayelen, in the Biriwa-limba Chiefdom, Bombali District. These projects have increased women's economic security, and some of them are also being trained to manage small businesses.

5.4 Education

Education is the backbone of development. Communities not only identify educational projects for men, women, and youths, they also include projects that satisfy the needs of schoolchildren and adult learners. Schoolchildren who participated in the planning process also came up with their own needs for the community plans. This resulted into schools being built and rehabilitated. Parents who used to fear sending their children to far-off villages are now comfortable and willing to send their children to a school in their village. Enrolment in schools has also increased because of the availability of primary schools nearby.
The rehabilitation of the Kagberay Community Primary School, Gbendembun' Gowahun Chiefdom, in Bombali District is a typical example. Mamongor Village in the Jong Chiefdom, Bonthe District, built a community school which pupils from all the surrounding villages now attend, instead of travelling four or five miles to Segbwema and Gambia.

5.5 Infrastructure

Infrastructural development is one of the main areas that most communities invested in after the war. Any development organisation that shied away from this would be cold-shouldered by many communities. They view improved infrastructure as something akin to a community facelift. When communities were given the chance to plan for themselves and define their own needs and aspirations, many infrastructural projects came up, and remained community priorities. Not surprisingly, a lot of multipurpose centres, culverts, and bridges were built. Block grants covered some of these costs, and the communities provided local materials and labour, convened community meetings, and organised social and recreational activities, mobile clinics, and rest periods.

In the Kabombeh community in the Safroko Limba Chiefdom, Bombali District, and Foya community in the Nongoba Bullom Chiefdom in Bonthe District, pit latrines have been built to improve community sanitation. The women in these communities are running animal husbandry projects to earn income. Water-well and hand-pump repair projects have been completed in the communities to increase access to potable water. The well project in Kabombeh is particularly notable because the community used its new proposal-writing skills to obtain the pump from UNICEF.

Communities in the Nongoba Bullom Chiefdom were instrumental in identifying skilled labourers who were brought into the Foya community to train community members in hand-pump repairs. Today these communities have better access to potable water. Decision-making in these communities is now a general concern for women, youths, and older and disabled members of the community. This has contributed to greater social cohesion and trust, in contrast to previous years when community interests, needs and priorities were voiced only by traditional leaders.
In the Bonthe Island community, culvert/bridge construction projects have yielded important improvements in the community's quality of life. This is true of the

Domboko, Kombihun, and Central 1 & 2 sections of Bonthe Island. The same is true of the Ropolon GoBifo community on the outskirts of Makeni in Bombali District. These communities used to be cut off during the rainy season because of flooding, but with the new culvert and bridges accessibility to welfare facilities has improved. In Bonthe Island palm-log bridges which had been washed way by torrential rains have been replaced by newly constructed culverts/bridges. Cases of schoolchildren drowning on their way to school or losing school books in the flooding are now unheard of.

The communities contributed local materials and labour to complete the construction of bridges and culverts at a fraction of the cost of similar government projects. The communities created project management teams that worked with GoBifo on project care and maintenance strategies. Community members report that transparent approaches to development increased participation and enhanced the community's ability to act collectively to carry out development projects and maintain new infrastructure. Campaigns were run to persuade beneficiaries not to throw garbage in the drainage section of the bridge and the culverts/bridges were cleaned more often. Project care and maintenance strategies were compiled in staff workshops and replicated in other communities (see Table 5.3). Communities are encouraged to compile by-laws that guarantee project care and maintenance, to enforce those by-laws and apply sanctions to those who breach them.

Table 5.3: Maintenance strategies for infrastructure projects

Facilities	Maintenance strategies
Multipurpose centre	▪ Multipurpose centres are cleaned regularly/weekly. ▪ Those who use the facility for commercial purposes like staging dances, screening videos and films, etc. must pay small fees. This is deposited in the CDAs in commercial banks and is used for future maintenance and other development purposes. ▪ Wherever community carpenters are available they must be involved in doing repairs as requested by the communities. They were the local artisans during the implementation stage. Where local artisans are not available, the VDCs/WDCs/PMTs and local councils can work together to bring in skilled artisans.
Drying floor	▪ Residents are not allowed to break open anything (e.g. coconuts, palm nuts) on the drying room floor. ▪ The facility should be cleaned at regular/weekly intervals. ▪ Village masons should be involved in doing repairs at the request of the communities. ▪ The facilities should be used on a 'first come, first served' basis or apportioned to families /households /surnames in order to avoid conflicts during specific periods. ▪ The community shall not use the drying floor as a dance floor.
Toilets	▪ Households/communities clean the facility at regular/weekly intervals. ▪ Local artisans (carpenters and masons) do repairs at the request of the community. ▪ Garbage such as tins, tattered clothes, etc. should not be deposited in the pit latrines.

Facilities	Maintenance strategies
Water wells	▪ Under-age children should not be allowed to collect water from water wells or hand pumps. ▪ Women must cover their heads before collecting water at the pump. ▪ Large containers such as bowls or 44-gallon containers should not be used to collect water from water wells or hand pumps. ▪ The containers must be clean and if ropes have been dragged on the ground they must not be dumped into the water wells along with the container. ▪ The facility should be cleaned at regular/weekly intervals. ▪ The communities must contribute money to the Community Development Fund for care and maintenance.
TBA house	▪ Women are responsible for cleaning the inside of TBA houses. ▪ Men are responsible for cleaning around the TBA houses. ▪ Community carpenters/masons will do repairs at the request of the community.
Schools	▪ Parents and schoolchildren will sweep and clean around the facilities. ▪ VDCs/WDCs/PMTs will put in place by-laws that commit communities to cleaning around community schools.
	▪ Community carpenters and masons who took part in the construction and who live in the communities will do repairs at the request of the community. ▪ The government will help carry out repairs through the use of subsidies by school heads.

One important aspect of investing in building projects like TBA houses, multipurpose centres, schools and toilets is that the construction work fosters community participation. Land agreements have to be signed between the landowners and the community representatives, mostly executive members of VDCs. The landowners demonstrate their willingness to give a piece of land for public use by signing the land agreement document. This will enhance community ownership of the facility, and no landowning family member will in future claim personal ownership of the community structures. These land agreement documents are kept by the VDCs on behalf of the communities. Taking as an example Rosint in the Makarie Gbanti Chiefdom, Bombali District, the land agreement document that covers a new community primary school has the following signatories: three landowning family members, the VDC Chairman, Village Chief, Ward Councillors, Section Chiefs and the Paramount Chief.

Some projects provided benefits to neighbouring non-GoBifo communities too. These communities participated in the planning processes as co-beneficiaries, and once the block grants were awarded they too helped provide materials and participated in the implementation of the CDD projects. Projects like building or renovating culverts will benefit all nearby communities by increasing accessibility between them. For example, building a new health centre in one community will also benefit neighbouring communities.

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On the whole, working with the GoBifo project has proven that communities are able to champion their own development. They learn quickly, copy, and build on their initiatives with little outside influence. They will quickly apply what they learn from other organisations when they face new challenges. Communities have a wealth of knowledge and experience that should be used alongside with new information, and any development worker should recognise this knowledge base. Imposing projects or development activities on communities discourages sustainability and deprives such communities of their ability to identify their own development priorities and use their own resources and intelligence. A successful development activity in one community will create the desire for similar development in nearby communities. This should be managed with extreme caution, as there is a balance to be struck between replicating a good idea and simply copying something new that is not necessarily adapted to and the right solution for the other community. The principles and approaches of the project are in place for a good reason, and community development projects should emerge as the result of a planning process that first identifies widely held community needs and priorities and then searches for the appropriate solution.

KABOMBEH – WOMEN - TEN (10) YEAR
10

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6 Empowering women and youths

'Pepi en marr ε wonibom kohmoh or kokidin, en poh marr kor, aen bonsho, ye kapet'

This quotation in the local Temne dialect means 'If you help a woman to develop, you have not only helped her, but also helped her children and the community as a whole'. This was said by Isatu Sesay, the VDC Treasurer and Women's leader of Mamoru village, during a community meeting.

There is a great need to address the plight of women and youths in post-war communities in Sierra Leone. The long civil war and numerous complex political and socio-economic factors forced a large number of them onto the streets with very minimal support. They have been exposed to trauma, and their problems are compounded from not engaging in meaningful activities to improve their livelihoods.

In Sierra Leone the number of children who drop out of school (especially girls) continues to increase even after the war. Some dropped out because their parents could not afford to pay the school fees and other related expenses. Teenage girls are often forced into early marriages because these expenses are a burden on their parents. Those without employment are especially vulnerable; some have resorted to becoming sex workers not only to earn money for themselves, but also to support their families. Women are still much more likely than men to be poor and illiterate. They usually have less access than men to land, credit, training and employment. They are far less likely than men to be politically active and far more likely to be victims of domestic violence. The ability to control their own fertility is absolutely fundamental to women's empowerment.

When a woman plans her family, she can plan the rest of her life. Unplanned family life is sometimes a result of the high illiteracy rate in rural communities in Sierra Leone. This situation reduces most women's potential to engage in gainful community development activities. Religion is another factor that affects poor family planning. Women who have had the freedom to plan their family are able to participate more fully and equally in society. Empowering women and youths to realise their development potential increases the social capital of a community.

Programmes for women and youths are a crucial and integral component of the GoBifo project. The feasibility and sustainability of these programmes depend on how the community has supported them, and the extent to which they are integrated into the overall project.

Community meetings ensure that everyone understands the project principles and approaches. Project staff facilitates the formation of community-based structures where they do not already exist, and strengthen existing structures by helping them to understand their potential and roles and responsibilities in facing development challenges. Collective farming brings all sectors of the community together. This strategy has helped build unity of purpose in the communities, and created an enabling environment for equity. Traditional leaders are no longer the sole spokespersons for the interests of their people. It is clear that when they spoke on behalf of their people in the past, many of the communities' interests were ignored. Community members now know that they can speak up for themselves, and they will be listened to. Community participation enhances project ownership and management.

Now that women have their own projects and income-generating activities, the women's leaders, or 'Mammy Queens', and other women leaders are recognised and have the self-confidence to represent women at all levels of governance. Most VDC treasurers are women and this not only empowers women, but also shows that the communities trust women more than men when it comes to protecting the community funds.

After three years of a seed bank project in Mamoru, the women can now boast of having groundnut seeds readily available in the community before the start of the farming season. They earn a good income, and women from neighbouring villages have also benefited. Women's groups in the neighbouring villages of Robat and Mabarie in Bombali Shebora Chiefdom have replicated this seed credit scheme in their communities with help from the women of Mamoru.

Before the GoBifo project started in Bendu 1 & 2 communities, Bonthe District, there was very little that women could do to improve their livelihoods. Large families made it difficult for families to thrive. After some awareness-raising, women were encouraged to team up with men as partners in development. These women identified training in soap making as a way of building their skills and capacity. The women took the lead in planning, budgeting for, identifying and hiring appropriate trainers. The training was successful and women who were trained in the first session then trained other women in the community. Post-training activities have had a positive impact on the Bendu community as women use the proceeds from this business to undertake their own development projects. School fees and expenses are now paid, the groups give loans to members at low interest rates, and neighbouring communities are able to buy and sell soap bars. The spill-over effect was appreciated by the other community, who were easily able to hire the same trainer. Based on the empowerment and benefits they had gained, they met in early 2010 and agreed jointly to help one neighbouring village. They gave a 'soft' loan to Moyendeh village.

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It used to be that young people were not treated fairly in their communities, or allowed to participate in community development, and as a result many of them left for the city. They had their own development priorities, but as they were 'seen and not heard', these challenges were never addressed. Now youths play a key role in the planning process, and their positive influence on and contribution to the planning and implementation process is recognised. Youth groups and their leaders, who have higher levels of literacy and have received training in conflict resolution and dispute management, help mobilise and encourage their peers to co-operate with the chiefs, village and ward facilitators, and government field officers. Youth groups promote peace and calm in their communities through traditional and newly learned conflict resolution and dispute management methodologies.

VDPs now accomodate skills training in carpentry, masonry, and tailoring, and it is hoped that when skills are acquired and job placements are commonplace, youths and children will have better livelihood opportunities. The provision of school uniforms and training in tailoring are identified in some VDPs as project activities. Payment for tailoring school uniforms is the responsibility of the schoolchildren's parents and not the community.

Bendu is a lakeside community and fishing is one its main occupations. Youths in this community chose to focus on a fishing project in the VDP and they also provide the necessary labour for development challenges. The fishing project was planned and budgeted for. To start 1,000 yards of fishing net was bought with part of the community block grant. The youths co-funded the project by providing two fishing boats. They divided themselves into two fishing groups, each with 500 yards of the fishing net. Catches are sold by the young women, sometimes to neighbouring communities. Some of the income is deposited into the community development account, with the rest used to cover household expenses such as school fees and uniforms.

The VDCs, WDCs, Project Management Committees (PMCs) and community members maintain that if youths are excluded from any development activity this will be recipe for conflict, disputes, mistrust, failure, misconception, misunderstanding and disrespect for community elders. The youths sometimes feel slighted because their suggestions for recreation project activities are not given the attention they feel they deserve, and this has created tension in some communities. To avert tension and in consultation with elders and traditional opinion leaders, the youths are encouraged to participate in both development activities and community-based structures like the VDCs, WDCs, and PMCs, or to take up volunteer roles as Village Facilitators. Their presence in meetings is now commonplace. They now help provide labour, mobilise resources (including local materials), help implement infrastructure projects, and contribute to improving chiefdom administrative governance. In addition to paying local taxes, they participate actively in local politics and development activities (see Box 6.1). They respect community elders, provide unskilled and skilled

labour (where available) for all development projects, and participate in community decision-making. They accept leadership directives, participate in resolving peer group conflicts, and occasionally put their resources at the disposal of their communities for development purposes. They are part of both formal and informal structures promoting development in their communities. They are also part of the chiefdom administrative governance structures mainly because of their literacy levels, however low. They participate in environmental sanitation activities, and in some cases provide financial assistance for development activities in their communities**.**

Box 6.1: Youth activities in Mamoru village

Mamoru is a village in the Bombali Shebora Chiefdom, Bombali District.
During the community planning process the women identified projects such as creating a groundnut seed bank and training in both gari processing and marketing. The youths identified the construction of a multipurpose centre for community meetings and other social activities, whilst the men identified livestock rearing. Women and youths are visibly represented in all the established village structures. The VDC treasurer and community signatories are mainly women and youths.
After prioritising the projects that they had identified the Mamoru community, the VDC and procurement officer bought groundnut seeds and a cassava-grater with their first tranche of block grant funding. The seeds were distributed to women in different households on a credit scheme with minimal interest rates. Men and male youths helped the women during the groundnut farming season.
As a community contribution towards cassava processing, the youths cultivated 3 hectares of cassava. Ten youths attended and participated in training on how to use the cassava-grater, do minor repairs, and produce quality gari. Once the youths had processed the cassava into gari, the women took it to the nearby market and sold it. When the youths first started the gari production the proceeds were used to buy materials to build the community's multipurpose centre. Now that the centre is complete, proceeds from the gari sales are used as a micro-finance scheme that supports women's groups in petty trading. The Mamoru youths also take the cassava-grater to neighbouring communities and let them process their cassava in situ, since they lack transportation.

Women and young people have clearly become empowered, as both groups are now integrated into the decision-making bodies or community structures. They present and defend their CDD challenges and priorities in community meetings and their views are respected.

The women's and youths' groups now work together, and discuss and jointly agree to implement development projects. This unity is evident not only in these examples but also in the other 124 communities and 27 wards in Bombali and Bonthe Districts. On their own and without outside help they have identified and successfully imple-

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mented projects such as garbage collection, clothes lines, plate racks, and road maintenance work.

Trust is also evident. Both women and youths collectively identify their treasurers (usually women) and entrust them with the safe keeping of proceeds. The groups have appointed procurement officers to buy project materials, and the officers buy the items, keep the receipts, and hand the materials to community storekeepers for storage.

Sustaining the empowerment of women and youth is an important issue. They have for a long time been considered one of the marginalised groups in deprived communities (the others being people with disabilities and older people). If community-driven development projects are to be sustained, all sectors of every community must be involved in the development process, from pre-planning to implementation.

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7 Resolving conflict through building trust

'Usay wan wod en kol at de na de tin de go bifo'

The saying above, which is in the local Krio dialect, means *'Development succeeds where there is unity and peace'*, said an elderly woman in Sawulia village in the Makari Gbanti Chiefdom, Bombali District, in the Northern Province of Sierra Leone.

7.1 Conflict-resolution strategies

Peace will enhance collective inclusion, collective participation and information flow. This will help to build trust in the community, leading to sustainable development. Conflicts, misunderstandings and tensions are normal occurrences during the implementation of development projects, but if they remain unresolved projects will struggle to succeed. To prevent this, each community has its own dispute-resolution channels, and these normally include village authorities such as the Village Chief and the Mammy Queen (depending on the village). If conflicts cannot be resolved locally they might be forwarded to the Paramount Chiefs. If the traditional system fails, people can always appeal to the police, courts and magistrates.

The people of Mamukay village in the Gbendembu N'Gowahun Chiefdom, Bombali District, say that their traditional leaders resolve conflicts among youths and women. If the youth leader suspects conflict, the first measure is to call an emergency meeting of the youths and try to solve the problem themselves. This is also true for the women; their conflicts are usually referred to the 'Mammy Queens' for resolution. Some conflicts are resolved by society members and are not referred to the traditional leaders. These are of a special nature and may concern violation of societal rites.

Where there are problems, the council of elders will arbitrate (without payment) using traditional conflict resolution methodologies. It is only when the case is very serious and the parties concerned are not ready to compromise that conflicts reach the Village Chief. Some criminal cases (such as wounding another person) could be resolved by the Village Chief, in which case he is the final arbiter. Other minor cases, for example flogging a child, are resolved by the VDCs or school authorities. Conflicts not resolved through these mechanisms are referred to other authorities such as the Section Chief, Paramount Chief, Native Administrative Court, the police, and the Magistrate's or High Court. But when this happens the community loses face for being incapable of dealing with the conflict themselves.

Community-based structures like the VDCs, WDCs and PMCs not only manage project implementation but are also instrumental in conflict resolution and dispute management (see Box 7.1). These structures have become so effective that almost all

disputes are referred to them rather than to chiefs. This sometimes upsets traditional leaders, and some chiefs consider this an affront to their traditional authority and therefore question the authority of these structures. The consolation is that traditional leaders are advisers and still have influence on the final say in conflict resolution.

Box 7.1: Inviting the Ward Councillor to solve problems

In Moyatima Village, Bonthe District, in the Southern Province of Sierra Leone, the community chose to focus on animal restocking. The project was successful as the animals multiplied to the satisfaction of the community. At one point, however, some members of the community thought that the animals should be shared out to individual households. Most community members disagreed. The animals were community property and should remain as such, and the proceeds from the sale of the animals should be used for development initiatives emanating from the community plan. The divided opinions became sharper, so the Ward Councillor was invited to resolve the problem. At a general meeting it was resolved that the animals were part of a community project and could not be shared per household. This was accepted by all.

Some GoBifo communities have resolved all their own conflicts and have not had to refer any matters to higher courts. Others transfer matters only to the local native court, but not to the native administrative court. All of these measures have been immensely useful in different communities and have contributed to peace and tranquillity. Conflicts are now resolved and managed internally. Only rarely do conflicts go beyond this level, in particular when a criminal offence has been committed, such as burglary, manslaughter or murder.

Communities appreciate this conflict-resolution strategy because it saves money and protects them from further and deeper conflicts. Before, any conflict arbitrated by Village Elders, Section Chiefs or Paramount Chiefs exposed the complainant and defendant to spending lots and lots of money, enriching the village elders and chiefs to the detriment of their subjects (see box 7.2). In cases where the defendant is unable to pay any fine he or she would have been be sent to the native courts for imprisonment without any other alternative.

Box 7.2: Local ways of fining people

At a meeting in Kathala Village, in Safroko Limba Chiefdom, Bombali District, and in the presence of the then Councillor and Ward Facilitator, it was resolved that each household was to contribute a drum of sand to support the construction of the community primary school, co-funded by GoBifo. Those who did not comply were fined the equivalent of the drum of sand in cups of rice as ‘food for work’ for the contractors.

They complied because they knew that the decision had been unanimously taken by all of them. If this failed, they would have been exposed to more punitive measures. If such matters had to be reported to the Section Chief or Paramount Chief, it would have cost them gallons of palm oil, chickens and transport fare for the Chiefdom Police (messenger) in addition to the cups of rice.

The communities have by-laws, but they do not cover all the issues around project implementation. Communities are encouraged to review these by-laws at a general meeting, and to update them to include project activities and penalties for defaulters. Cases having to do with land, adultery, society, chieftaincy, etc. are beyond the arbitration of community structures. These are cases that are purely traditional and sacred, and therefore community members normally have their own ways of handling such cases. Even in the arbitration of such cases, only select community members are involved. This is known, recognised and respected by all community members. It is considered taboo even to discuss such cases in the open.

Box 7.3: Conflict resolution between two villages through joint activities

Sendugu and Manaipeh are two very close villages in the Sanda Tendaren Chiefdom, Bombali District. The villages are separated by a stream. The founder of Manaipeh village, who was the village Imam, originally lived in Sendugu Village. He left Sendugu because of a conflict between him and the then village chief. He believed that there had been a miscarriage of justice by the chief and village elders who had presided over a case involving the Imam's legal wife. He and his followers therefore left the village and settled in the bush, creating the village that is now Manaipeh. This grudge was still alive until GoBifo started development work in the village.
Sendugu and Manaipeh identified similar projects and wanted the projects to be implemented in both of their villages. The WF saw this as unrealistic, especially building a school and multipurpose centre in each. The WF was unable to mediate and invited the Ward Councillor to try. Both villages were summoned to a big meeting and it was finally agreed by both to have the school at Sendugu and the multipurpose centre at Manaipeh, with both communities combining their block grants and participating fully in mobilising local materials. The conflict that had existed for a long time is now a thing of the past.

7.2 Building trust

In the pilot districts, there is clear evidence of increased trust among community members. Women serve their communities as treasurers and storekeepers because they are more trusted than men. In the process of strengthening trust, the communities are entrusted with the responsibility of opening their community accounts and buying

and transporting project materials to construction sites. Withdrawals from community accounts are sanctioned by the VDCs in consultation with the wider community. When project materials are bought they are displayed in full view of the community before work begins, and receipts are handed over to the treasurer for reconciliation. This is a true demonstration of increased transparency and accountability, and is also a manifestation of good governance. Trust is further manifested in the delegation of responsibilities among community members, especially during project implementation. In the interest of absolute trust, marginalised groups identify their leaders and are entrusted with responsibilities which they perform admirably.

Raising expectations can be a major pitfall for development projects like GoBifo. For a long time, especially during the delay in the disbursement of block grants, trust broke down to the extent that the project was called 'GoBien', a Krio word meaning 'backward march'. In Bonthe District the project was also called 'very soon', because that was always the reply when staff was asked when the block grants would arrive. When the grants were finally disbursed into community accounts, trust in the project was restored, and from then on trust was further solidified through continuous work with the communities in implementing projects.

Non-GoBifo communities helped to implement projects from which they stood to benefit, for example the construction of culverts, bridges and schools. When recreational facilities such as soccer balls and pitches are available friendly soccer matches are played between GoBifo and non-GoBifo communities to enhance trust and unity of purpose.

Generally, there is much trust in traditional leaders in GoBifo communities. Where community stores are not available to store project materials, traditional leaders give up space in their homes to keep the materials safe.

The appointment of members to positions of trust is done in general meetings. Everyone is given a chance to select or to be selected. Women and youths are represented in all structures, and all of these groups and individuals are then trained on their roles and responsibilities. Running these training courses alongside project implementation helps communities to overcome challenges as they appear. It also helps keep communities focused during implementation for future development activities.

Communities are encouraged to document project activities in a transparent and accountable manner. Budgeting to buy materials is done in a public meeting, and once bought the materials are presented to the communities. Photocopies of budgets and receipts are kept in the communities, along with ledgers. This is evidence that the communities value their work and the facilitation and training received.

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8 Lessons learned and the way forward

The traditional authorities and development agents should see themselves as partners in development, and not as rivals. Conflicts and tensions should be defused, ensuring that all hands are on deck to address development challenges, not only in GoBifo communities but in rural Sierra Leone as a whole. Mutual respect and understanding among members of the community, especially stakeholders, increases the chances of development because community participation is vital to GoBifo's development approaches and principles. Traditional village leaders must be recognised and their position should not be annulled by any of the new development structures. Community-based structures are established for specific purposes, and their usefulness should be demonstrated by their members. Information and communication should be a two-way process with communities and structures.

Roles and responsibilities must be clearly defined for all stakeholders to avoid overlap. They should complement each other, and be prepared to work together when called upon, as they are all working towards the same goal of developing their communities. Marginalised community members must be listened to and allowed to identify their development challenges. They have been voiceless for a long time but for CDD projects to be successful they must be heard and encouraged to be part of the process. Training in conflict resolution and management at community level must be promoted because where there is no peace, there will be no development.

There is no definitive blueprint for development. Definitions abound and are used in diverse situations, showing how various interests, pressure groups and ideologies – both local and international – are involved. Some development partners say that 'development is a process by which man assumes the responsibility of developing communities within which man lives, with adequate food, shelter, clothing, in a calm and peaceful atmosphere enabling man to express himself and manifest the ability to assume responsibilities through participation in development'.

This establishes the unchallengeable notion of man being at the centre of development. Others equate development projects to development, which some consider erroneous. If development researchers and practitioners accept this, then 'development' becomes attached to 'implemented development project' – but projects are only indicators of development.

If development is to be achieved, man in his infinite capacity should be involved and be able to control all the processes, leading to the achievement of any society's

development goals and objectives. Man should assume responsibility for his personal wellbeing, as well as participate in the collective life of any society to which s/he belongs. He/she should be able to express his /her culture, and participate fully and meaningfully in the universal human family.

Much emphasis should be put on the Presidential call for attitudinal change in Sierra Leone. This call should not be interpreted to cover only infrastructure development, but extended to other areas where bad practice and attitudes exist, including corruption, time management in offices, favouritism, nepotism, tribalism and all other negative 'isms' that do not promote equitable development. GoBifo is working with communities in Bombali and Bonthe Districts to create progressive and positive influences on rural development, including attitudinal change.

Man is at the centre of all development efforts and this warrants a heavy investment in people, not projects. Some so-called development projects are implemented for the sake of it, and not for the right reasons. They turn out to be unnecessary show pieces and white elephants. This is because such projects are implemented without community involvement from beginning to end. This is why GoBifo targets capacity development to strengthen social capital in communities.

Rural development efforts are translated into meaningful development when communities drive the development process and development partners merely facilitate. Rural development efforts should use CDD models to empower communities, increase social capital, advance decentralisation efforts and improve the sustainability of development projects. GoBifo interventions in rural development emphasise the involvement of community residents in the process, and there is a rationale behind this approach.

First, the project works with deprived communities to build their skills to a level at which they can decrease their dependence on outside donors to solve their development challenges. This can only be achieved if development partners empower communities to manage their development process according to their own needs and priorities. Whereas in the past many donor projects were initiated without communities' input, rural development practitioners should adopt and use participatory approaches to promote community involvement in all phases of the development process, from the identification and prioritisation of projects to the selection of contractors and implementation, including community monitoring and evaluation.

This GoBifo strategy increases the chances of achieving self-sufficiency by encouraging communities to devise ways and means of independently initiating their own development projects. Community involvement in all phases of the development process will enhance the chances of transferring the necessary skills to pursue development in their communities even after donor funds have been depleted.

Empowering communities to promote long-term development in rural and deprived communities will provide community members with the skills they need to continue developing their communities even after donor funding runs out. Communities will be encouraged to learn the long-term development planning, budgeting, proposal writing, management, project design and organisational skills necessary to implement projects in their communities. Accordingly, whereas in the past many development organisations have imposed projects on communities regardless of their most pressing needs, community empowerment will catalyse people to take charge of the development process.

Second, the GoBifo approach is designed to increase social capital in communities in post-conflict Sierra Leone. By using a participatory and transparent approach to development, GoBifo augments and strengthens collective decision-making, trust, gender and social cohesion and inclusiveness, and information and communication. These proxies are the direct results of human interaction in communities and they are vital to rural development. They are features of social organisation that can improve the efficiency of communities by facilitating co-ordination. They can shape the quality and quantity of community interactions.

For example, all communities are required to open a bank account with their own funds, and this is where block grants are being deposited. Prior to the implementation of the development projects in their village or ward plans , the V/WDCs are required to publicly disclose exactly how the funds will be spent. The transparent nature of this process improves trust within the community while encouraging people to participate in the development process. The project also provides traditionally marginalised groups such as women, youths and the elderly with a voice in the development process and ensures that they more equitably benefit from development initiatives. By harnessing the transformative potential of social capital, the project draws upon communities' social assets to promote more inclusive and effective development.

The communities of Massamatu in Safroko Limba Chiefdom, Bombali District and Moyowa in the Jong Chiefdom, Bonthe District identified 'providing opportunities for marginalised groups' as their most pressing need. To accomplish this goal the communities used the first tranches of their block grant to support women's soap making groups, blacksmithing projects run by youths and the disabled, and animal husbandry projects managed by women and elderly members of the community. By ensuring that marginalised people were able to benefit from and contribute to guiding the development process, the communities hope to develop the level of cohesion and culture of volunteerism necessary to pursue development objectives in the future. For example, community members comment that with the intervention of the GoBifo project, men and women are now working together more closely and with better co-ordination than they ever had. In other words, jointly identifying, designing and implementing community development activities has brought the community mem-

bers closer together (the communities typically meet every week to co-ordinate project implementation). As the communities pursue development plans to construct grain stores, drying floors and health centres with the next tranche of their block grant, the social capital generated will continue to propel the community forward.

Third, GoBifo strengthens the linkages between government and communities to strengthen Sierra Leone's nascent democracy and decentralisation process. Prior to the project, many communities had never interacted with their local government. This is no longer the case. This has been brought about by compiling Ward and Village Development Plans within the context of the District's overall development plans. Members of the local government and communities are now working together to advance the development process. Moreover, the principles of accountability and transparency inherent in the GoBifo approach provide communities with the knowledge and familiarity of the development process necessary to hold leaders accountable for delivering results.

Prior to the GoBifo project, many members of the Sawulia community had little interaction with their local councillor. After the project was initiated, members of the community noted that they had developed close relations with members of the local government because the local council must approve the village development plans. Moreover, community members now have the opportunity to petition their WDC to support more extensive projects within their community. This interaction has simultaneously increased citizens' participation in local governance while improving the government's capacity to respond to their constituents' requests. As the community moves ahead with its development initiatives, the linkages created between citizens and the government will continue to enhance co-ordination between different levels of government in Sierra Leone's decentralised system.

Fourth, the GoBifo approach promotes more sustainable development outcomes. Communities are required to contribute to every project, whether it is money, skilled or unskilled labour, and/or local materials. Since the community has contributed their own time and resources, they feel an ownership over the project and are more likely to maintain their investments in the long term. It is also important to note that using community contributions saves a lot of money. Some projects have been carried out at half the cost of projects implemented by some local or international development partners. Moreover, the model is self sustaining, in that profits from income-generating projects implemented by the community are deposited in the community's bank account to fund future development endeavours.

Finally, the governance structures created in GoBifo communities, such as WDCs, VDCs, and PMTs, ensure that stakeholders have the capacity to organise themselves to create long-term development plans.

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Effective communication and information-sharing in communities results in a better and a shared understanding of CDD principles and approaches. Better communication also encourages community participation and increases understanding of the roles and responsibilities of development partners, including community-based structures. It has led to successful planning and implementation, and enhanced effective monitoring and evaluation, transparency, and accountability during project implementation, while improving community ownership and promoting effective linkages.

Women and youths need to be involved in addressing community development challenges, from planning right through to implementation. It follows that they should be part of community monitoring and evaluation too, and it is good for GoBifo to learn from the women and youths about the processes involved in implementing their projects.

The representation of women and youths on decision-making bodies and community-based structures should be increased at rural and national levels. This is currently recognised at the community level. Women and youths are represented in every community-based structure and they not only positively influence decision-making, they are also part of it. At the national level, however, there are cries for 50–50 representation and indeed in some cases women now hold responsible political positions and formal offices. In some cases however, women themselves underestimate their abilities to hold certain positions.

GoBifo recommends improved accessibility to property ownership for disadvantaged women and youths. Women and children born out of wedlock are recognised as vulnerable people. They should participate fully in implementing CDD projects, and it is recommended that they should express their feelings and be given fair treatment over property ownership.

Academic education is not the only key to accessing opportunities for improved livelihood futures for women and youths. Vocational skills training must also be encouraged and supported to make sure there are a range of accessible and affordable skills in the community and the country. Consideration must be given to internships to ensure an uninterrupted transfer from skills training. This is evident in GoBifo communities in both pilot districts.

GoBifo recommends increasing education for girls, who are deprived of a sound education for diverse reasons, including parents' inability to pay school fees for their girls, early marriages and pre-marital pregnancies. Sound educational policies must be enacted in consultation with development partners. Human rights must be fully recognised, particularly the need to reduce domestic violence against women and youths, which will empower them and ensure they are properly recognised in GoBifo communities.

Many women and youths are illiterate, which harms their empowerment chances. It is recommended that the government and other development partners support adult literacy education programmes. In one community in Bonthe District not a single person in the community is literate to any extent.

To all development partners, be they NGOs or government development agencies, it is clear that the strengthening of social capital puts addressing social change on track. It is also clear that this makes CDD projects more sustainable. Given the operational two-year timeframe and limited funding from the Japan Social Development Fund, GoBifo cannot achieve this overnight. The Government of Sierra Leone has established a meaningful Attitudinal Change Secretariat, but it will take decades for their labour to bear fruit. In the meantime GoBifo has strengthened social capital in communities, including trust, and social, gender and generational inclusion in the implementation of its projects, communication, and use of community-based structures. Development partners should endeavour to collaborate with others, especially if their terms of reference are similar. This will prevent duplication and help to foster the sharing of ideas and even co-funding, especially for costly and technical projects. The choice between CDD and district-driven development projects should be addressed in inter-agency meetings to emphasise the importance of communities identifying their development priorities instead of outsiders doing it for them. Clearly having development projects chosen by the deprived communities themselves will enhance the chances of community participation.

The inflationary tendencies in post–conflict Sierra Leone means that GoBifo block grants need to be increased. This will help the GoBifo communities cope with unexpected expenses in the implementation of their CDD projects. More funding will make addressing the development needs of deprived communities a lot more meaningful, even where the same communities make handsome contributions to the implementation of their projects. It is also necessary to match block grants with the nature and size of the projects identified by the communities, for example soap-making projects cost less than projects like multipurpose centres or schools. The establishment of community accounts is one strategy by which trust can be strengthened in deprived communities. The other advantage is that the communities with accounts will have started the development of Community Development Funds which they can continue to contribute to and use for their future development activities. Since GoBifo is a community-driven development project where the community takes the lead in their own development efforts, block grants should be disbursed within the implementation timeframe set out in the community planning process. Some projects, like agricultural projects, are seasonal and time bound, and block grant disbursement must take into consideration such important issues.

GoSL is contributing to the implementation of the GoBifo project with quarterly subventions. These should be increased to enable GoBifo to scale up from two dis-

tricts to more. From experience, it is recommended that the GoSL includes CDD-type of projects in the plans of the MIA, LG & RD. This will ensure that what is meant for the development of deprived communities in Sierra Leone will be used by those communities to address their development needs. GoSL could study the GoBifo approaches and principles and further improve on them. All other government development agencies must be encouraged by the government to study and use these approaches and principles to promote development in deprived communities nationwide, with GoBifo in the lead. More effort should be expended to promote and equip technical/vocational institutions in as many centres as possible so that rural communities in particular can benefit from enhanced skills training. The current relationship between GoBifo and the local councils is healthy, but needs a lot of improvement. GoBifo wants to interact with councillors at community level, and enhance and support the decentralisation process. The project also wants to increase collaboration with local councils in workshops, community meetings, open days, etc. This will not be achieved without a review of the Local Government Act to give local councillors allowances to travel to and from meetings and workshop venues.

GoBifo needs to strengthen its collaboration with line ministries. These ministries possess the technical and professional skills to successfully implement infrastructure projects, with dimensions or technical advice determined by the line ministries. Line ministries can also provide meaningful support to communities through training, monitoring and directing activities that concern their ministries for national development.

Local councillors need to provide updates for district council chairmen and mayors of city councils and other district stakeholders about the implementation of GoBifo projects in their wards. This will help ensure that VDPs and WDPs are in line with the DDPs, and will share information about development activities across the District.

WDCs should be trained on their roles and responsibilities. It is their responsibility to be totally involved in all development activities in their wards, and they need to understand that they were not voted in for the sake of it but that their positions involve serious work. This is the rationale behind the recommendation that the Local Government Act should be amended to accommodate some incentives for the councillors to encourage them to meet more frequently and participate in meetings or workshops on issues affecting their wards. They live in different sections of their wards, which can make it difficult for them to meet. Such arrangements could help wards get better organised and functional, taking into consideration boundary limitations.

GoBifo recognises the importance of youths in the implementation of CDD project activities. From experience working with 124 GoBifo villages and 27 wards, it is clear that sustainable community development can only be achieved if youths are included in the legitimate leadership structures. Their involvement means that they

play key roles in all stages of implementation, from the identification of CDD projects (pre–planning) to planning, monitoring and evaluation during the implementation of CDD projects. Youths can be meaningfully involved right from the discussion of the proposed objectives, especially when the discussions focus on youth. In Sierra Leone there is a well-known saying, that youths are the leaders of tomorrow, so it is important that youths are trained in leadership skills, practical skills, and decision-making. This involvement strategy will increase youth's sense of ownership, their involvement in managing CDD projects, and hence their empowerment.

The importance of women in the implementation of CDD projects cannot be over-emphasised. Women are Treasurers in about 90% of the GoBifo VDCs, meaning that they are recognised and therefore playing an important role in decision-making. Women have projects in all VDPs, such as soap making, vegetable gardening, tailoring, weaving, etc., and the implementation of these projects contributes to their empowerment. Women in GoBifo communities take the lead in training programmes that are geared towards building their self-esteem and confidence. GoBifo maintains that as long as women maintain the trustworthiness they have demonstrated during the last two years, they will be involved in community activities and given more responsibility, especially in positions that demand trust, skills training, etc.

CDD projects cannot be fully implemented without the involvement of communities. Raising awareness in the communities about how to identify development projects should precede any other development stage. Using PRA techniques to involve communities in the identification stage helps them understand how projects are identified and how they can be implemented. Normally deprived and poverty-stricken communities lack services such as potable water, education, information, communication, infrastructure, transportation and marketing of agricultural produce. Communities should be accessible; otherwise development services will not reach truly deprived communities.

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