



Integrated Resilience Programme Narrative Report

Year 1

January 2023 – March 2024

With the support of:



HIGHLIGHTS OF THE REPORT

The Integrated Resilience Programme (IRP) is aligned to both the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Sierra Leone National Medium Term Development Plan (MTNDP) with specific focus on four key themes namely Food Security and Livelihoods (FSL), Gender Based Violence (GBV), Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and Financial Inclusion (FI). With the 2030 deadline looming for achievement of set targets on the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals covering these key focus areas, the world including Sierra Leone is not on track. The intersecting crises of COVID-19, the climate emergency, and rising economic and political insecurity now worsened by the Ukraine War, has negatively impacted the progress on all four focus areas mentioned in Sierra Leone and other countries which are now starting to reverse. The country remains as one of the world's poorest and ranked 182 out of 189 countries in 2019 (HDI 2019) as there are substantial inequality and social protection challenges that still exists. Women continue to suffer from significant inequalities in terms of literacy rates, access to land, legal protection, gender-based inequalities especially with reference to their reproductive health and rights, social, financial, and economic empowerment.

The food insecurity situation, which is affecting the region, has not spared Sierra Leone as the food insecure population has been increasing at an alarming rate annually. According to the current results (FSMS February 2022), 73% percent of Sierra Leone's population is food insecure, a 10% increase since the last report in February 2021. The IRP operational area has been cited as one of the districts with highest food insecure populations amongst the top 4 districts (Western Area Urban - 528,394) in the WFP FSMS February 2022 report. The Bank of Sierra Leone (BSL) launched its National Financial Inclusion Strategy (NFIS) 2022-2026 which aims to specially target women, youth, rural population, and medium, small, and micro enterprises (MSMEs) also key target populations for the IRP. The IRP has succeeded in collaborating and linking 1,450 direct beneficiaries who are vulnerable and poor women and adolescent girls, to pro-poor financial services (mainly use of mobile money), financial literacy training, and provided micro-grants for improved livelihoods aimed at addressing their socio-economic needs. The NFIS three objectives are linked and aligned to the programmes key outcomes.

The current climatic and weather variation patterns in Sierra Leone have been unpredictable and the effects mainly emanating from challenges such as unsafe construction practices, rapid urbanization, lack of local preparedness planning, and the lack of awareness. The vulnerability and capacity to cope with these has a multifaceted interface of social, cultural, and economic factors that compound these vulnerabilities. Their impacts result in the loss of lives and livelihoods, destruction of homes, damage to productive assets and infrastructure, and reduced availability of food and water as recently, experienced in some of the IRP operational communities following the flash flooding and mudslides that occurred on the 28th of August in Sierra Leone. Community Based Disaster Management Committee (CBDMC) members from the IRP operational communities who had received training on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) were able to support the disaster response teams from the SLRCS and other agencies at the onset of the disaster.

The Mamie Queen (Chief) at Fullah town community cited that there was increased knowledge and awareness on Gender Based Violence (GBV) within her community which resulted in lower cases being reported. According to statistics published by Rainbo Initiative our partner who specializes on SGBV survivor services, a 7.2% decrease was reported on sexual abuse cases whilst physical assault cases increased alarmingly by 56% in their 2021 annual report. Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) is still a huge concern amongst other types of SGBV which has resulted in an increase in advocacy towards ending and criminalisation of FGM/C by the Sierra Leone government (https://www.equalitynow.org/press_release/fgm-sierra-leone-130-womens-rights-groups-feb). During community engagements and sensitization, the IRP activities focused on encouraging alternative rites of passage as part of advocacy in addressing FGM/C and the rights-based approach.

This first year of the programme has been implemented through the collaborative efforts of the project team, community stakeholders (including beneficiaries), line ministries and other non-governmental agencies to achieve small gains across the programmes four thematic areas. Additionally, this (multi-sectoral approach in implementation aided in provision of holistic services including leveraging on lessons learned. There were different levels of coordination ranging from technical support from the BRC to consultations with community stakeholders and beneficiaries increasing and improving transparency in information sharing, decision-making, feedback, and meaningful participation of all involved. The SLRCS management and support units also

provided the project team with technical and financial capacity building throughout the implementation period.

In addition, monitoring of activities was carried out on a monthly and quarterly basis which enabled the project team to track activities, make amendments where necessary including informed decision making for effective programme implementation in collaboration with beneficiaries and stakeholders. This also resulted in improved and effective community engagement as we put beneficiaries at the center. The establishment and strengthening of the diverse groups such as the CBDMCs, Men & Boys Groups, and the women groups had little to no barriers and created a pathway for local networks of community members in the operational communities resulting in increased trust and accountability at community level. Targeted beneficiaries were responsive and attended meetings, trainings, social mobilisation campaigns on time as well as participated meaningfully. Thus,

Nonetheless, the project team encountered some challenges during the period under review which they managed to resolve in consultation with beneficiaries, community stakeholders, state and non-state actors supporting programme implementation including support from the BRC and SLRCS management as follow.

- a) **Cultural and social issues:** There are several deeply rooted traditions and cultures around gender equality and GBV (negative cultural and social norms) that impact the IRP program outcome results within communities. During reviews and inter-dialogue sessions between men and women, the staff and volunteers noted that there are still gaps in addressing change of mindsets amongst both groups. However, the engagement of Agents of Change with support from volunteers has been very strategic in engaging the community members and addressing these negative social norms resulting in building positive behavior change within communities.
- b) **Protest Actions:** A three week delay was experienced in programme implementation due to protest actions on the deteriorating standard of living, which affected the whole country on one hand. Whilst on the other, loss of livelihood assets due to violence and looting was experienced by community members in some of the programme operational communities worsening the affected households status. However, the project team was able to combine some of the activities to catch up to meet the expected outputs and also supported some of the women petty traders with the micro-grants to build back their businesses and livelihood activities.
- c) **Livelihood Activities:** At the beginning of implementation, trade days within new communities were not clear thus resulted in beneficiaries abandoning activities especially in fishing communities when boats came back from the sea. The project team had to hold consultation meetings with beneficiaries and community stakeholders to set clear dates and times of when trade days would take place across all communities and if any changes volunteers would communicate to inform the team in advance if there were planned activities prevent low attendance or absence of participants.
- d) **Managing Stakeholders & Beneficiaries Expectations:** Despite inception meetings having been held at all levels from community to national level, it was a challenge in some instances to satisfy the high expectations of beneficiaries and stakeholders due to the high levels of poverty and need within the communities. The project team had to continuously engage beneficiaries and stakeholders to dispel misinformation and rumors especially related to cash support for different beneficiary categories where most issues were centered around.

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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|----------------|--|
| BRC | British Red Cross |
| CBDMC | Community Based Disaster Management Committee |
| CBV | Community Based Volunteer |
| CEA | Community Engagement & Accountability |
| CSA | Climate Smart Agriculture |
| DRR | Disaster Risk Reduction |
| EVA | Easy Volunteer Actions Handbook |
| FAO | Food and Agriculture Organisation |
| FI | Financial Inclusion |
| FSL | Food Security and Livelihoods |
| FSMS | Food Security Monitoring System |
| FSWG | Food Security Working Group |
| GBV | Gender Based Violence |
| HHs | Households |
| IFRC | International Federation of the Red Cross Society |
| MoA | Ministry of Agriculture |
| MoGCA | Ministry of Gender and Childrens' Affairs |
| MoSW | Ministry of Social Welfare |
| NDMA | National Disaster Management Agency |
| PDM | Post Distribution Monitoring |
| PGI | Protection Gender & Inclusion |
| PSEA | Protection Sexual Exploitation & Abuse |
| SGBV | Sexual & Gender Based Violence |
| SIP | Safe & Inclusive Programming |
| SLE | Sierra Leone New Currency |
| SLNMTDP | Sierra Leone National Medium Term Development Plan |
| SLRCS | Sierra Leone Red Cross Society |
| UPA | Urban and Peri-Urban |
| WFP | World Food Program |

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Output Level Reporting

Outcome 1: Communities in rural and urban areas lead safe lives and have increased means and stable access to food to be able meet their nutrition requirements.

To be updated at mid-term (end of year 2) and final year (end of year 3) following the mid-term review and final evaluation

Output 1.1: Target communities take actions in Disaster Risks Reduction (DRR).

Community preparedness practices have been noted as one of the major short falls in disaster and risk management especially with regards to allocation of human, physical, and financial resources to meet urgent human needs when disasters occur. The programme's aim of establishing and strengthening of CBDMCs was to place more emphasis on preparedness initiatives with regards to the timing, effectiveness, efficiency, and reliability of resources to reduce the effect of disasters in the operational communities. The CBDMCs were trained, on DRR, which improved their knowledge and understanding of the various DRR concepts. They were also provided with basic cleaning tools to prepare, prevent, or mitigate the occurrence of disaster within their communities at their request as part of their community-based actions. The CBDMCs developed their own action plans which had a range of activities starting with mapping hazards and risks within their communities; identifying existing early warning systems and gaps within their communities, and actions for preparing and mitigating the hazards and risks to mention a few.

Activity 1.1.1 – 1.1.4/9: Establishment/Strengthening of CBDMCs and supporting them to undertake DRR measures in their communities including climate adaptation and mitigation.



Figure 1: CBDMC training on DRR concepts - Rokel Community

©SLRCS

The training on basic principles of DRR and community-based actions for disaster preparedness, prevention, and mitigation used interactive sessions, role plays, quizzes and sharing of lived experiences to equip and improve the members skills as well as to increase their understanding of disaster risk reduction concepts including steps, they needed to undertake for developing their

community action plans. The session on climate change and its effects was highly rated by all members across the 12 communities as they were facing and experiencing the adverse effects as most of their livelihoods were already being threatened whilst their community resilience to address these effects was very low or nonexistent. Following the training, the CBDMC were mentored and coached on an ongoing basis by the volunteers to enhance community ownership and sustainability which resulted in them developing concise actions plans that they have been implementing such as community clean up campaigns, identification and strengthening of early warning systems at community level using locally available resources. These initiatives are aimed at encouraging communities to understand and appreciate their existing community capabilities and indigenous knowledge which is then anchored upon during trainings and other capacity building initiatives for sustainability purposes as well as for easier social mobilisation/public awareness using appropriate local language and culture approaches.

A key success example of the engagement with CBDMCs was noted during a fire incident that occurred in Goderich Funkia (an operational community of the IRP) in the afternoon hours of Sunday 25th December 2022 where the CBDMCs were proactive in responding to the incident at its onset including informing SLRCS and the NDMA. The members worked with other community members to not only put out the fire but also assisted in safeguarding lives and properties. Also, some of the target communities have been facing frequent hazards over the years due to poor waste management practices such as rubbish dumping



Figure 2 CBDMC and CBVs responding to fire incident at Goderich Funkia

resulting in blocked drainages and water ways. The CBDMC members from Susan’s Bay, Aberdeen, Kroobay and Kaningo were able to influence their communities to practice better garbage disposal including cleaning/clearings of drainages and water ways resulting in low flooding. However, there are still challenges in motivating some of the CBDMCs in other communities as they are constantly demanding financial support, but the team will continue to engage them to use their locally available resources and will also plan learning visits across communities for them to share best practices and learnings as part of year 2 activities.

The chairman for Kaningo CBDMC, Mr. Kanji had this to say about the programmes support: *“Training helped us to identify negative practices we were doing in our community when we did the hazard mapping exercise. We agreed to embark on a community cleaning exercise targeting the areas where water flows, cleaning of the market areas and mass sensitization on proper waste disposal with the support of the community members. We already experienced the positive effects as Kaningo community did not experience any major flooding this year due to these initiatives. We thank the SLRCS for the training and capacity building as well as cleaning materials we received but hope for financial assistance in future to help us in implementing some of the committees’ actions to manage garbage disposal through recycling of materials. This may also help the community to create jobs for our youths who are loitering aimlessly as there are limited to no job opportunities in Sierra Leone”.*

Activity 1.1.5 – 1.1.6: Assessment to determine the needs of households to identify food insecure households and support to affected households with unconditional cash support to meet their immediate needs.

The unconditional cash support to food insecure households (HHs) within the twelve operational communities was to support these HHs to meet their immediate needs and help them cope with the growing food insecurity they experience during lean season. Most of these vulnerable HHs tend to adapt to various negative coping mechanisms such as reducing food/meals coupled with poor dietary consumptions, and sale of productive assets in worst case scenarios. Review of various secondary sources of information were obtained from key documents such as the WFP Food Security Monitoring System (FSMS) report, CH Analysis, Food basket for Sierra Leone, and key information shared by the Min of Agriculture as well as other partners (INGOs, NGOs, Academia etc) involved/undertaking FSL activities, most of whom are members of the wider Food Security Working Group (FSWG) in Sierra Leone. The BRC supported SLRCS in the review of this information which assisted in shaping the design and development of data collection tools for assessing HH needs including the vulnerability tree index, and HH prioritization tool. The SLRCS and BRC held an online meeting to review and validate the tools before they were uploaded onto Kobo Toolbox platform.

Prior to the field assessment, the IRP staff and volunteers (66 people, 43% Females & 56% Males) attended a two day training on the tools for them to understand the questionnaires and half a day was used for a

refresher training on the use of the Kobo Toolbox App. It was difficult for the project team to get accurate statistics of the communities as the last updated were for 2015 thus outdated. It was agreed to then target at most between 250 to 300 HHs for each of the 12 communities for the assessment. However, due to unprecedented rainfall with flash-flooding in some of the planned communities the final number of HHs assessed ranged from 124 to 289 across all areas resulting in a total of 2,599 HHs being assessed, an overall achievement of 86,6% of the lower limit of 250HHs over a 5 day period which increased to 9 days for some of the most affected communities Annex 1 details some of the key findings of the assessment across the 12 communities, with the sample estimates being shown with 95% confidence intervals (vertical lines in bar charts and histograms).

The collected data was analyzed by SLRCS and BRC coupled with an in-person verification exercise referencing the selection criteria to identify the food insecure vulnerable HHs that were supported by a once of cash support of approx. £82 to meet their immediate basic food needs. The cash support was disbursed using a mobile financial service provider (AfriMoney) for the 750 HHs at a central place within each of the 12 communities for easier access (including additional support for those that required it) and to reduce insecurity.



Figure 3 CBVs engaging vulnerable HHs on Food Security ©SLRCS

Subsequently, a Post-distribution Monitoring (PDM) survey was conducted to assess the effectiveness of the cash transfer and quality of the service delivered by SLRCS. Out of the 750 households who benefitted, 470 were available and willing to participate in the survey that was conducted by volunteer enumerators who were not part of the programme implementation process. The Kobo Toolbox application was used to collect the information and questions asked

took into consideration what the expected amount was, whether beneficiaries had been asked to pay favors, appropriateness of the cash support, and accessibility to the distribution point, to mention a few. According to the data collected, 98.5% of the expressed that they were “completely satisfied” with the cash support, with all of them stating that the cash assistance helped them in reducing their vulnerability and food insecurity on one hand. On the other, when asked to state how they had spent the money the following were the top 4 areas, (i) food (32%), (ii) education (22%), (iii) medication (13%), and (iv) maintenance or stock for family business (including tools and supplies). The survey confirms the effectiveness and relevance of the cash transfer to vulnerable HHs and at the same time, points out to specific areas for improvement which SLRCS will be addressing for future cash interventions. **Annex 1 contains the full cash assistance post distribution report.**

Activity 1.1.7 - 1.1.8: Feasibility study/needs assessment to define climate smart agricultural practices and capacity building on climate smart agricultural practices for 50 households.

Urban and peri urban (UPA) agriculture is common and widely practiced within the Western Area Urban and Rural district. However, climate smart agricultural (CSA) practices have not been targeted for urban and peri-urban areas in Sierra Leone but widely being implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) and several development/humanitarian agents in the rural communities. The IRP identified 4 out of the 12 communities where UPA agriculture is practiced more widely, and these were also confirmed by the Min of Agriculture. The SLRCS has been consulting and collaborating with the MoA and FAO for support with the feasibility study to define CSA practices within the target communities. The activity started with a desk review on UPA being implemented in Sierra Leone and other West African countries with particular focus on CSA for the later as no evidence of CSA practices were documented for Sierra Leone. The MoA applauded the SLRCS for initiating this study as most UPA agricultural practices were not climate smart and were to a certain extent contributing negatively to climate mitigation and adaptation.

The activity was not completed fully during the reporting period due to unforeseen circumstances as SLRCS had not taken into account that this would be a new area requiring a lot of coordination and cooperation with the MoA and FAO later recommended by the MoA as it had assumed that the same tools used in the rural

areas where CSA was being implemented could be adopted easily to the urban and peri-urban context. The activity contributed to 3% of the total year 1 budget and will be completed and fully spent by the end of Q1 of year 2.

Output 1.2: Target communities undertake livelihood initiatives.

Globally, Women's economic empowerment has been well document and proven to result in positive impacts for gender equality and further increase women's ability to make their own choices/decisions. However, in Sierra Leone, women who account for 52% of the total population still face a number of challenges that undermine their empowerment. Their voices, visibility, participation and representation remain insignificant as compared to men, implementation of laws and policies that promote and protect their rights is low on one hand, whilst on the other most of the women are not aware of these laws and policies. The same situation is prevalent within the IRP communities, where the majority of women lack economic independence, are highly illiterate, and experience domestic violence which is entrenched in customs and traditions. The programmes initiatives to support women in improving their livelihoods, financial literacy, and basic business management skills including uptake of formal financial services to safeguard their income is timely and aligned to overall women empowerment initiatives being encouraged by the government of Sierra Leone and also in line with sustainable development goals (SDGs).

Activity 1.2.1 - 1.2.4: Assessment to determine viable petty trading business ventures in target communities, selection of 200 petty traders, training of petty traders and provision of seed grants to selected petty traders.

Women in the IRP target communities and across the country are often engaged in petty trading (micro-enterprise) activities as part of their livelihoods to earn income and meet their basic needs. Most of these petty trading activities are part of the informal economy. According to a World Bank press release on June 21, 2022, SMEs (along with micro-enterprises) provide livelihoods to approximately 70 % of the population and most operate in the informal sector, with only ten percent being registered, but still struggle to grow. With the support of the BRC, a secondary data review was carried out to inform primary data collection and to allow for triangulation of information. The information available was limited as many of the available resources focused on small and medium enterprises (SMEs) rather than micro-enterprises/petty trading. Primary data was collected in 4 representative communities through focus group discussions with community members, market observations in the communities including one major market Rural district (Waterloo) and one major market in urban (PZ area) and key informant interviews with petty traders and heads of market. The assessment ascertained that petty trading was the most common method of earning an income for poor and very poor women living in the programme communities, and women were responsible for meeting the economic needs of their household as well as taking care of the family. 73% of the women petty traders interviewed reported that they are the head of their household, and 65% reported that they are the main breadwinner, with a further 15% shared the breadwinner responsibilities. The respondents all mentioned that competition was very high, they acquired their merchandise mainly from wholesalers, producers and middlemen depending on items they were trading. Their challenges ranged from insufficient capital, financial illiteracy and adequate business skills, inability to pay loans, lack of proper storage facilities and places to sell as most sell from the streets, and risk to disasters- such as flooding and fire.



Figure 4 Petty traders assessment ©SLRCS

The data analysis of information collected was presented and critiqued during a debrief meeting with SLRCS and other Red Cross partners for validation. The activity provided a strong basis for determining the viable business ventures in target communities as well as in-depth understanding of the context amongst the SLRCS staff and volunteers including the Red Cross partners. It also resulted in the development of a robust eligibility criteria for the 225 petty traders targeted. A total of 225 petty traders were selected based on meeting the conditions of the eligibility criteria to be supported with a once off micro-business grant to boost their businesses and aimed at improving their livelihoods and income generation.

The selected petty traders were trained on basic financial literacy and small business management using training materials developed by BRC and some components borrowed from the ILO GET Ahead training materials related to the later. One of the outcomes of the assessment was the increasing demand for entrepreneurship skills and the objective of this training was to increase the awareness of petty traders in accessing formal and informal financial services. Following the training, the petty traders received their micro-grants of approx. \$100 (NLe1,360) through mobile money. The petty traders were also encouraged to use this digital financial services as it was cost-effective, simple, safe, and common amongst traders for those who were not using formal financial services which also aligned with the IRP aim of improving financial inclusion for women. The financial service provider, AfriMoney inducted the beneficiaries on how to use mobile money including tips to avoid falling victim to fraud before the beneficiaries received their cash support. The SLRCS, the team reiterated that the aim of cash support is to empower vulnerable women with livelihoods support that will result in providing them with improved and sustainable income to meet their socio-economic needs thereby reducing their vulnerability to SGBV and other socio-economic ills.



Figure 5 Fatmata at her stall ©SLRCS

*One of the beneficiaries Fatmata, a widow whose business was really small and using the income from the business as her sole source to take care of her five children and mother staying with her said made a testimony on how the micro-grant had positively impacted her life, **"I received the micro grant at a critical moment, when my business was almost collapsing. This support helped to buy more stocks and now I am able to save too. When I received the training, I learned more and after getting the cash, I jumped and started to dance because I was joyous and surprised for such support from SLRCS during this difficult economic situation"**.*

Another beneficiary thanked SLRCS for such timely support; she said the money has helped boost her business because she used the cash support to add more to her fish business.

Outcome 2: Vulnerable women and girls in target communities are safe and economically independent and feel more empowered to make their own choices.

To be written after final evaluation is completed and progress against outcome level indicators of logframe is reported in final evaluation report.

Output 2.1: Agents of Change (Men, boys, and male community leaders) are engaged to promote positive gender norms in the targeted communities.

In Sierra Leone, progress has been made in expanding opportunities for women and girls to promote gender equality and empowerment of women. Nevertheless, gender inequality and denial of women's rights is still prevalent at all levels in Sierra Leonean society even though the women account for the majority of the population. Despite the significant strides made, many women continue to suffer marginalisation and discrimination, particularly in the areas of education, employment, access to financial resources, gender based violence, and social justice. Issues of unequal opportunities for boys and girls continue to be exacerbated by factors such as early marriage for girls, teenage pregnancies, and harmful practices such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). In response to these, the IRP engaged 180 men and boys as change agents to take full responsibility, working side by side with women and girls, to redress the dynamics that hinder progress towards attaining positive gender norms which will ultimately contribute to gender equality. Additionally, the agents of change will engage with their peers (men and boys) in promoting positive gender norms by addressing the prevailing negative gender social norms, unequal power relations, and masculinities.

Activity 2.1.1 - 2.1.5: Establishment of Agents of Change group in target communities, training of Agents of change and supporting them to undertake/lead on positive gender norms including SGBV prevention in their communities including self-led initiatives.

Sierra Leone still has patriarchal systems established in its social, legal, political, religious and economic sphere and is deeply entrenched in cultural and religious beliefs. Power, moral authority, social privileges, control over land and property has remained mainly in the hands of men. Across the IRP communities, a total of 15 influential men and adolescent boys were identified and approved by wider community members to form a group as agents of change to foster positive gender sensitive social and cultural norms in their communities. The involvement of men and boys agents of change for the programme aims at not only seeing them as perpetrators of violence but as allies in changing power relations and systems in society that positively influence gender equality and contribute towards ending violence. A total of 180 (15 per community) influential men and adolescent boys were selected.



Figure 6 Engagement of Agents of Change – Kroobay Community ©SLRCS

The agents of change were trained on positive gender norms and SGBV key concepts to improve and build on their knowledge and skills necessary to hold transformational conversations on promoting and advocating for positive gender norms within their communities. At the end of the training participants made positive statements explaining how they had been enlightened especially on negative traditional/cultural norms/customs that worsened gender inequality and violated rights of women and girls such as FGM, prohibiting women to inherit property after their husbands died, and wife/children beating including using them as laborers to mention a few. The Agents of Change pledged their commitment to work with all community members in their work more especially with their peers as positive change at HH level required

their support. The training concluded with the staff and volunteers requesting the Agents of Change to develop self-initiated plans they would implement within their communities for the year to positively transform their communities.



Figure 7 : Volunteers sharing SGBV message with football team @SLRCS

Additionally, the Agents of change were coached and mentored by staff and volunteers throughout the year to encourage and provide more support on areas they requested support on. Across all communities, the Agents of Change expressed concern on the difficulty of addressing negative cultural norms as they were very entrenched. However, they continued to advocate for positive change and held cross dialogue sessions between women and men to understand how the norms affected women and girls if not addressed. These interactions resulted in

more understanding and in some communities, pledges were made including byelaws to deter certain practices such as wife and children beating with a rights based approach basis. Door-to-door sensitization and community football gala matches were held in all the twelve communities as part of the Agents of Change initiatives during the 16 days of activism against gender based violence where messages on the importance and urgency of SGBV prevention, ending negative cultural norms, and promoting positive gender norms were shared. Overall, the agents of change activities directly reached a total of 3,600 men, boys, women, and girls across the 12 operational communities during the reporting period.

Output 2.2: Women’s and girls’ groups demand their rights and access to services.

Gender-based violence, discrimination and genital mutilation are some of the many challenges that women in Sierra Leone face. In comparison to males, a woman’s voice, visibility, participation, and representation in elective and appointment positions from community to national levels is substantially less despite the number of laws, policies, and acts the country has put in place over the past decade plus. Women still face severe marginalization despite their significant “contributions to the economy” and the sustenance of their households. The IRP engaged 1,200 women organised into 48 groups across the operational communities empowering them and improving their knowledge on how to demand their rights and access to services based on approved laws and policies earmarked for women empowerment. Platforms were also created where these groups of women interacted with state and non-state actors to discuss issues they were facing within their communities and how these actors were taking action in addressing these issues as they were not new especially the lack of enforcement of laws which was impeding trust and reliability of gender laws. These platforms also built the women’s confidence in advocating for their rights using information shared during their sessions with volunteers.



Figure 8 Engaging women on their rights and entitlements in Rokel Community

Activity 2.2.1-2; 2.2.4-6 Training of women’s groups in their rights and entitlements as provided by law including lobbying state and non-state actors on their rights and entitlements as well as organizing mass campaigns on their rights and entitlements.

In partnership with the Ministry of Gender and Children’s Affairs, Ministry of Social Welfare, and the Family Support Unit, the project team, delivered trainings on women’s rights and their entitlements provided by law. The training content was gathered from various laws and policies within the country such as the recently passed Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Act of 2021 (passed late 2022) which enshrines improvements to women’s access to finance, employment opportunities, equal pay, maternity leave, and—critically—political representation, and the human right laws that protects the rights of women with dignity and respect. The 48 women group members were actively engaged during these trainings and challenged the facilitators on how reliable these policies and laws to ordinary women like them as they were not seeing many tangible results when women reported cases. The Min of Gender representative agreed with the women but also encouraged them to continue reporting cases, seeking legal advice from the Legal Aid Board, and advocating for effective implementation of laws that protect women and girls as their voices and visibility will be amplified instead of giving up. The activity reached 1,200 women and girls between the ages of 18 to 55 years.

The Min of Social Welfare rep and the Family Support Unit (FSU) arm of the police jointly engaged the women on harmful traditional practices and procedures to follow when one is being abused respectively. The discussions centered on the negative effects of FGM/C, wife inheritance, early child marriage, and violence against women. During the lengthy discussions, the representatives were able to dispel some of the myths and misconceptions raised by women on the reasons why FGM/C was seen as harmful and led to discussions on whether they could be alternative pathways that women could advocate for whilst continuing with the positive aspects that the Bondo society offers women instead of FGM/C. The FSU rep, during the discussions reminded the women of their rights and age limit for FGM/C which has been set by the government of SL to be 18years and above. He also explained further the procedures one had to follow if their rights or those of someone they knew were being abused, emphasizing on the importance of confidentiality throughout the process and consent. Overall, these sessions enlightened the women on their rights, laws that protect them, possibility of them to advocate for better lives within their communities by identifying alternative rites of passage for girls into womanhood. One participant stated that she was happy to continually receive these messages as they strengthened the women to fight for their rights not physically but through dialogue using the right information according to laws and policies as well as challenging negative traditional/cultural norms that undermine their health and safety.

Activity 2.2.3 & 2.2.7 Training of women’s groups on SGBV concepts and link them with relevant state and non-state actors for effective joint actions against SGBV issues in their communities.



Figure 9 Dialogue session with women and agents of change on SGBV in Kissi Town Community

Globally, nearly 1 in 3 women aged 15 or older has experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner or sexual violence from a non-partner in their lifetime according to various sources including the UN Women. In Sierra Leone, violence against women and girls whether physical, sexual, emotional, or economical is a serious and urgent concern as it is widespread across the country. However, the major problem is that most citizens believe that it is a private matter and is associated with stigma and shame for survivors who

report or become known as victims leading to serious emotional and social consequences, including delay or not seeking health care including PSS where needed further contributing to long-term distress, health complications, disability or even death. The staff and volunteers led engagements and trainings with the women groups on SGBV at community level. However, during the meetings with Min of Gender, Min of Social Welfare and FSU SGBV related issues and matters were also discussed.

The IRP team carried out an actor mapping exercise at the beginning of the programme which outlined the 4Ws matrix of SGBV service providers within the 12 communities and at national level. The report was used to inform the community referral pathways for SGBV cases enabling the women groups and community at large to understand services available within their communities and those that they could also access outside their communities for their wellbeing. as a guide to explain to the women groups on the referral pathway and how they can access other service providers to enhance their general well-being.

During the 16 days of activism against GBV, the women group members supported the agents of change football galas by sharing messages and performing short skits on SGBV prevention across the 12 operational communities. Additionally, 4 radio discussion programs were also aired at community level emphasizing on the need to ending GBV taking into consideration that it is was also a human rights issue that calls for equity and justice, as well as decency and respect for each other. National wide programmes were also held on television on the AYV channel twice during the commemoration period were panel participants drawn from the different project communities, project staff, and volunteers discussed topics on SGBV risks, consequences, and mitigating strategies that communities are using to prevent and respond to SGBV issues.

Output 2.3: Women’s groups embark on informal and formal financial management practices.

The concept of Savings and Loan Associations (SLAs/VSLAs) is well documented as a simple and powerful tool to support women’s economic empowerment and to build social cohesion especially among the poor and vulnerable women (and men included in some contexts). It is one of the sustainable ways of breaking the vicious cycle of poverty faced by women as it plays an important role in achieving gender equality by providing them access and ownership over income, savings, and decision-making power in their homes or communities. Under this output, the IRP program seeks to achieve the same starting with 1,200 women organised into 48 SLAs who will be trained on the SLA concept, basic financial literacy including uptaking of formal financial services, and linked to financial institutions offering pro-poor financial services that meet their needs. In turn, the women groups are expected to encourage other women across their communities to engage in similar groups using their success as role models. This approach is expected to have a greater impact and address multiple barriers to increase women’s agency and shift social norms which were limiting their control over income and access to formal finances.

Activity 2.3.1 – 2.3.6 Women groups organised into Savings and Loans Associations (SLAs), trained on SLA principles and financial literacy, and conduct dialogues between SLAs to foster learning.



The main aim of the activity was to identify vulnerable women who were willing to participate in the programme by working with other likeminded women within their communities in groups to embark on informal (Osusu) and formal (SLAs) savings and loan activities. A total of 48 women groups with 1,200 members were established and strengthen within the twelve communities, thus a 100% achievement of the target. The process was coordinated by staff and community volunteers to avoid bias from community leaders using a pre-defined selection criteria from a random sample of community members.

Figure 10 Volunteer coaching a savings group in Fullah Town Community
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The SLAs/Osusu groups were each trained on how to conduct their savings and loan activities using the guidance of the Red Cross Easy Volunteer Actions Handbook by volunteers. They were also trained on basic financial literacy regarding income and budgeting, to build their knowledge and understanding on how they could save money. Immediately after the training, the majority of the groups started their self-initiated group savings from which some members were able to take loans and start income generating activities. The programme initially, intended for the groups to be involved in group income generating activities but a number of challenges were noted mainly around the members agreeing on the type of trade to engage in as most of them were involved in different trades already. It was agreed that those within the group with similar activities could join up or members engage in individual activities due to the complexity of the context in urban slums.

The women group members each received a cash support of £25 as a safety net to meet their immediate needs through mobile money. AfriMoney agents inducted the women on the use of the mobile money platform and encouraged the women to continue using the digital financial service for their safety and to safeguard their personal funds. The programme team later on, towards the end of 2022 supported the 48 women groups in formally registering their groups with the Freetown City Council and opening bank accounts with the United Bank of Africa (UBA) graduating them from informal to formal groups, thus the majority (90%) are now SLAs. The remaining 5 groups have been registered but are now being supported to resolve issues surrounding signatories as some of the group members within those groups who were signatories have relocated back to the rural areas. Seed grants of £900 per group for boost their income generating activities to improve their SLA activities were transferred into each group's account. Additionally, a metal cash box, passbooks, calculator, ledgers and pens were provided for keeping records, social funds and any savings or loan repayments if received outside the banking dates. The groups were mentored and coached on a regular basis by volunteers during their weekly meetings, where they also shared challenges, lessons learned, and successes building their confidence in credit management and savings as well as social cohesion as they also celebrated each other for important milestones in their lives such as birthdays, weddings, including unfortunate events like funerals.

Outcome 3: The capacity of SLRCS is improved for effective emergency response and long-term development programming.

To be written after final evaluation is completed and progress against outcome level indicators of loqframe is reported in final evaluation report.

Output 3.1: SLRCS staff and volunteers have the required skills to facilitate FSL/DRR/SGBV and Financial Inclusion interventions.

The Integrated Resilience Programme (IRP) was developed by the SLRCS staff and finalized early 2022 after which programme staff positions that were vacant were recruited for. There were challenges and some delays due to some staff leaving the organisation, however, the full programme staff were in place by mid-May. A programme inception meeting was held with all staff early June where the narrative proposal, PMEAL plan, Plan of Action, Programme Budget, and Risk Analysis were shared, discussed, and critiqued for improved understanding of the programme. At the end of the inception meeting, the staff were clear on the programme's goals, outcomes, indicators, budget, and were able to review the plan of action as it was 3 months behind in implementation. Clear roles and responsibilities were also defined and assigned for programme implementation, reporting, and monitoring.

The staff also took a week to visit the operational communities and interview potential community-based volunteers who were later selected in line with a selection criterion that had been developed for the programme. Once all staff and volunteers were in place, they were both trained using content that was tailored made for the programme adapted from key Red Cross Movement existing materials and other relevant materials from the sector and specific to Sierra Leone with the support of the BRC Programmes Manager and International Advisors. The staff and volunteers received diverse trainings on Safe and Inclusive Programming (PSEA, PGI), DRR, SGBV, FSL, Feedback and Complaints mechanism, and programme reporting focusing on data collection tools. The trainings were mainly delivered as 'Training of Trainers' (ToTs) to enable the staff and volunteers to effectively implement and monitor the planned programme activities, as well as for them to train, coach, and mentor both direct and indirect beneficiaries in the target communities to build their competencies and knowledge/skills that will ultimately result in enhancing their resilience.

Activity 3.1.2: Development and adaptation of training materials on key focus areas

Staff and Volunteers of the IRP programme have had access to a wide range of training materials that are aligned with the programme key thematic areas including the Easy Volunteer Actions (EVA) Handbook, trainer's manuals, self-instructional booklets, modules, session plans, handouts, and so forth. These training manuals were often developed or adapted from existing Red Cross Movement materials, and other organisations to support the training needs inclusive of them being guides for staff and volunteers. Prior to the development or adaptation of any training manual or guide, the IRP implementation team was involved in critically analysing the materials to determine their fit for purpose considering the Sierra Leone context and levels of

literacy rates. Various training methods were also considered to increase participation, understanding, and ultimately transfer of learning mainly centered around adult learning thus included visual aids, auditory, and read/write.



Figure 11 Facilitator using a visual aid to explain concept of gender equality.

Activity 3.1.1 Self-assessment of staff and volunteers on skills needed on FSL/DRR/SGBV/FI/PSEA/CEA

The self-assessment for staff and volunteers on their skills and knowledge related to FSL, DRR, SGBV, FI, PSEA and PGI was done using a Kobo form in which the respondents were asked various questions on their knowledge perceptions followed by specific subject matter questions. The submitted responses were analysed by the BRC Programs Manager and the SLRCS Director of Programs who then shared the results with staff and volunteers at the beginning of the IRP induction meeting. The areas that had the lowest knowledge and skills gaps (below 45%) were FSL and Financial Inclusion which was not surprising as these areas were relatively new to the Western Area Branch. The highest level of knowledge and skills (above 75%) were on DRR, SGBV, and CEA as these are areas of work that all the staff and volunteers were familiar with. During the induction meeting the Director of Programmes informed the staff and volunteers that they would receive trainings, mentoring and coaching on all the programme key focus areas during the year and refresher trainings in future years to assist in improving their levels of knowledge and skills.

Activity 3.1.3 Capacity building for NS staff and volunteers on required skills and reviews.



Figure 12 Financial literacy training for volunteers

Seventy (60 Volunteers and 10 Staff) have received different trainings during the first year of implementation of the IRP program to develop their capacity. All of the trainings conducted were aligned with the project key thematic areas; SGBV, financial inclusion and literacy, disaster risk reduction (DRR) and food security and livelihoods (FSL). For every training both pre and post training evaluation was done to assess the level of knowledge improvement of the participants. One key challenge was, that the volunteers knew the concepts/content and could facilitate extremely well, however when it came to results of both the pre and post training evaluations they tended to show little to no improvement. The volunteers were engaged to ascertain why the results were not matching their practical knowledge and it was noted that not all of them could understand the written statements as they stated that the English was not simplified in line with the tools they were using. It was agreed that in future verbal pre and post tests can be more meaningful in measuring their level of understanding on the various training content.

Activity 3.1.5 Training of Staff and Volunteers on SGBV, PSEA, PGI (Safe and inclusive programming).

The training on Safe and Inclusive Programming (SIP) was the first module that was conducted with sixty-eight participants in attendance, ten staff and fifty-eight community-based volunteers drawn from the twelve operational communities. The training was aimed at improving and increasing participants knowledge on the SGBV core concepts, prevention techniques, and survivor centered approaches to ensure that staff and volunteers would deliver activities in a safe and inclusive manner. Complaints and feedback mechanism; referral pathways and information sharing



Figure 13 Refresher training for staff & vols on SGBV concepts and prevention

were also key topics covered by the training resulting in staff and volunteers agreeing on several methods of ensuring the community members (direct and indirect) were at the center of all our interventions. Dignity, Safety, Access, and Protection (DAPS) and gender inclusion were also emphasized not only for communities but also internally for staff and volunteers. The basic principles of adult learning were employed by the facilitators which included role plays, group and plenary discussions to enhance learning but also to determine level of understanding of the topics covered, creating a safe learning platform for critical issues to be discussed in an interactive approach. The pre-test results showed 15% as the lowest mark and 70% as the highest and the change noted in the post test was 30% the lowest and 100% the highest. Furthermore, during the training and plenary discussions, the volunteers were not only appreciative of the training, but were also, energetic, passionate and portrayed strong leadership skills.

Similarly, volunteers have been trained on SGBV so they turn can cascade these trainings to all the different groups at community level. The BRC Advisor on SGBV likewise did a refresher training with the volunteers and thereafter selected two communities for field visit wherein the volunteers had a dialogue session with both male and female on SGBV issues whiles training the communities on the types, forms and consequences of GBV.

Output 3.2: Systems and procedures are in place and adhered to for smooth implementation of programmes.

Activity 3.2.1 Routine programme meetings held with various support units from SLRCS and BRC.

In person weekly meetings were held with the IRP staff and BRC Programs Manager for updates, activity planning, reviewing of reports, and mentoring/coaching of the IRP team as well as cross learning. BRC International advisors also held meetings with the IRP team to discuss technical issues as well as support on requested needs such as development of data collection tools and analysis of data. During the period under review, the FSL advisor supported the team in country with the assessment of petty trading viable business including development of petty traders selection criteria, training of staff and volunteers on financial literacy and the SLAs session of the EVA handbook. The BRC Head of Region and Director of Programmes also visited Sierra Leone and held meetings with the SLRCS management and IRP staff and volunteers to learn about the programme, challenges, successes, and lessons learned from a strategical viewpoint. They also visited two of the operational communities where they were able to interact with direct beneficiaries and community leadership where they were inspired by the testimonies of how the programme is positively influencing behavioral change despite the huge challenges the community members were facing such as lack of employment opportunities and access to income for undertaking livelihood activities. The BRC SGBV and Anti-Trafficking Advisor, supported with developing a curriculum for engaging Men and Boys which was finalised and also shared with the Min of Gender during her in country visit where she also conducted a refresher training on SGBV for staff and volunteers as well as prevention training and on the job coaching and mentoring.

A learning exchange visit was organised by the BRC Country Cluster Manager for Sierra Leone and Nigeria where the Nigeria team visited Sierra Leone to understand how programmes were being implemented by SLRCS as well as coordination with other organisations. During their visit they held meetings with IRP team, visited communities, met with two key stakeholders for the IRP namely the NDMA and Min of Agriculture, and conducted a training for the IRP team on how to use MS Project for managing their programme which they were using in Nigeria. Overall satisfaction was high and there were a lot of learnings and takeaways for both teams with a commitment to continue communications online and



Figure 14 NDMA, SLRCS & BRC Staff during exchange visit meeting

possibly in person in future between the Nigeria Red Cross staff/volunteers and SLRCS.

Activity 3.2.2 SLRC Staff attending coordination/sector meetings at National and District level.

The project team has been actively participating in diverse coordination meeting with line ministries, and forums chaired by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). Gender and social welfare coordination meetings co-chaired by the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs (MoGCA) and Min of Social Welfare (MoSW) were used to share feedback from women community action groups the IRP was working with as well as to strategically place the SLRCS as a key go-to organisation for dissemination of gender issues to community levels. They also strengthened collaboration between SLRCS and the ministries resulting in greater support from them during programme implementation activities. The SLRCS branch manager was in charge of attending the FSL Working Group (FSWG) meetings where key FSL issues were discussed and actions put in place with contribution from a wide range of actors from UN agencies, government ministries, INGOs, NGOs, Academia, CBOs to mention a few. During the assessment of food insecure households all through to distribution the cash support for their immediate needs, some of the FSWG members supported the SLRCS. The IRP officer was responsible for participating in the disaster management coordination meetings at the NDMA as she is also a key member of the SLRCS national disaster response team. During the flooding season between August and September, four of the operational communities were affected at varying degrees and the CBDMCs played a crucial role in supporting the NDMA response and recovery teams with coordination from the IRP officer. Likewise, when a fire incident occurred in Goderich Funkia, the IRP volunteers and CBDMC members were the first respondents who also reported the matter to the NDMA. Overall, the coordination/sector meetings were instrumental for the SLRCS to share ideas, make decisions, build relationships, and gather information that was shared back to community level.

Activity 3.2.3 Development of appropriate collaborative frameworks (such as MOU/SOPs) for operative collaboration with key actors.

The programme did not develop any SOPs/MoU during the reporting period, however, the mobile cash SOP was reviewed and updated accordingly to support and additional mobile money financial service provider namely, AfriMoney to be incorporated as the SLRCS only had one supplier. AfriMoney also offered more competitive rates as well as extra customer support which were key for the programme such as induction on use of their platform for community members and beneficiaries ahead of any cash distribution. The SLRCS will continue to review the terms of the SOPs and carryout market analysis to ensure that their suppliers are still offering good value for money.

Activity 3.2.4 Improve and strengthen appropriate feedback and complaints mechanism for target communities.

Accountability to beneficiaries and communities that the SLRCS works with is an important component of the cross-cutting approach of community engagement. The IRP set up a feedback and complaints mechanism at the start which was disseminated during the inception meetings and reiterated on throughout the reporting period whenever activities were being implemented. Direct beneficiaries, networks of local community leaders and chiefs engaged with staff and volunteers closely which developed good lines of communication and concerns raised were addressed swiftly. Over 300 feedbacks/complaints or questions were raised to which 95% were responded to and fully addressed as they were related to the IRP activities. However, the remaining 5% were referred to relevant partners and service providers from which follow ups were made and it was ascertained that the matters had been addressed satisfactorily. Feedback was also gathered through the post distribution monitoring and other monitoring visits conducted by staff as well as during the annual planning review were representatives from direct beneficiary groups, community stakeholders, and partners shared what worked well, what didn't and what could be improved.

Despite, the success in gathering feedback and complaints it was noted that there were still gaps that required addressing especially on recording feedback and following it up amongst volunteers at community level. This came out strongly during the annual review planning meeting and the SLRCS addressed this through a refresher training on feedback and complaints mechanism and social sciences. The volunteers gave positive feedback with one saying ***'I have not recorded any feedback and complaints as I thought a beneficiary or community member was supposed to come to me directly stating their concerns, now I understand that issues they raise during our support meetings are also feedback/complaints, the good and the bad. As volunteers we should share all this information for us to effectively support our beneficiaries for improved trust and commitment to our activities.'***

Activity 3.2.5 PMEAL & volunteer support activities.

Programme monitoring was carried out at various levels which included weekly monitoring of volunteer activities by branch staff, monthly monitoring by head office staff, and quarterly monitoring in coordination with the BRC Programme Manager and a key stakeholder (FSU and MoGCAs took part). The monitoring activities were crucial in supporting programme implementation, contributed to organizational learning, upheld accountability, and provided opportunities for community members (direct, indirect beneficiaries & community leaders) feedback to be captured resulting in evidence-based decision making. The decision to purchase cleaning materials for CBDMCs is an example of evidence based decision making gathered during monitoring visits as most had started implementing cleaning campaigns to unblock water ways and drainages on one hand. On the other, the purchase of metal savings boxes for the SLAs for safe keeping of their social safety net and contributions before they were deposited into bank account is another decision that was made from the feedback received from the SLAs members.