In the early 1990s, Sierra Leone found itself mired in a 12-year bloody civil conflict that did not officially end until 2002. The effects of this conflict were devastating, leaving tens of thousands dead and over 2 million people (one third of the population) displaced. According to the Human Development Index (UNDP 1998), during this time, Sierra Leone had become the poorest country in the world. Per capita income plummeted from US$240 at the start of the conflict in 1991 to approximately US$140 at the end of the war in 2002.

A World Bank Social Assessment undertaken shortly after the war judged that for decades, the government had over-invested in the minerals sector, leaving rural agriculture to trail far behind. This led to rural poverty, a full-fledged agrarian failure, and eventually conflict and violence. Further the study concluded that the institutional failures that had existed before the war, still unfortunately remained. The over-protected rights of land owners coupled with the under-protected rights of rural laborers is considered the main institutional breakdown.

Based in part on the analyses of the Social Assessment, a Community-Driven Development (CDD) project was conceived for Sierra Leone both to reconstruct basic infrastructure destroyed by civil violence, and to give the rural poor practice in exercising their legal rights to participate in their own development.

The bases of this project are thus considered good practice on two fronts: first its design was based on sound social and political analyses which are especially important for CDD approaches since they are so context driven. And second, the project’s objective was framed within mitigating a root cause of the conflict in Sierra Leone, i.e. unequal development in rural areas. These project design practices are amongst those recommended by a recent World Bank study of 13 conflict-affected countries which have specifically incorporated CDD initiatives into their development efforts.

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1 This note was written based on a desk review of the May 2006 Beneficiary Impact Assessment and Technical Audit of the Sierra Leone National Social Action Project, together with supporting documents. Giuseppe Zampaglione, Task Team Leader, National Social Action Project, provided invaluable insights and additional information.


MEASURING PROGRESS IN A POST CONFLICT SETTING

The National Social Action Project (NSAP) was established in 2003 with the objective of assisting war-affected communities to restore infrastructure and basic services and build local capacity for collective action. NSAP is the principal Bank lending instrument intended to provide support for the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA). NaCSA was set up by an Act of Parliament in 2001 as successor to the National Commission for Reconstruction, Resettlement and Rehabilitation (NCRR), a ministerial-level government commission that coordinated humanitarian relief and reconstruction assistance and implemented donor-funded projects during the war including the World Bank-financed Community Rehabilitation and Reintegration Project from 1998 to 2003.

As a result of its long history and presence throughout much of the country, NaCSA was known and trusted both by Government and the broader public. CDD approaches supported by NaCSA were introduced in a gradual and politically sensitive way, and therefore not viewed as a threat to local and central governments, but rather as a partnering project which would help the Government to achieve its own goals of community reintegration and decentralization after the war.

Roughly two years into implementation, a Beneficiary Impact Assessment (BIA)° was conducted among targeted communities supported by NaCSA. This involved surveying one hundred sub-projects that had been completed by February 2006, as well as comparable non-beneficiary communities within a 30 kilometer radius of communities where sub-projects had been realized. Overall, there were a total of 630 respondents from beneficiary and non-beneficiary communities. Many respondents were from areas that previously had limited or no access to services, including the newly accessible areas that were targeted by the project (areas freed from rebel control in 2002).

Of the respondents, 56.5% were men and 46% were youth (under 35 years of age). Principle objectives of the assessment included: to determine the relevance of the NaCSA design and implementation strategies within a post-conflict recovery setting; to examine how the NaCSA has changed the lives of the members of beneficiary communities; to assess the level of community participation in the design and implementation of the NaCSA supported community projects; and to assess the effect of community contribution and the level of community satisfaction derived from the implementation of the sub-projects. The discussion below is based on selected, key findings from the BIA.

KEY FINDINGS

Overall Community Satisfaction

The overwhelming majority of respondents in NaCSA supported communities indicated that their project had directly benefited the community, particularly in terms of promoting social cohesion and imparting practical skills. Of the female respondents, 45% stated that the project met the identified need to a great extent and 29% to a very great extent. The same held true for male respondents at 42% and 41% respectively. Most also felt that they could turn to other community members in times of financial need which signaled a rebuilding of trust and social capital. Additionally, 41.1% reported an improvement in their family's economic situation over the two year period since the beginning of the project.


Empowerment: The majority of respondents reported that they felt they had gained control over decision-making in their lives. 72% of respondents felt their concerns were taken into consideration by decision makers (36% “a lot”, 36% “a little”); and 67.6% felt that the project implementation process had significant influence over local government and leaders in taking community concerns into account.

This is an important finding because as the 2006 World Bank study on CDD in conflict-affected countries found, even minor responses on the part of government can profoundly affect the way citizens view their government. As confidence grows among citizens that their voice can affect change, they are likely to become both more willing and more able to participate in governance issues and to become involved in the delivery of social services.

In contrast, respondents from communities not supported by NaCSA were much less likely to feel that their concerns were taken into account by decision makers. Almost half, 48.3%, said their concerns were not considered at all, compared with 27.5% from beneficiary communities, who said the same.

Collective Action and Cooperation: Within the beneficiary communities, there was a strong belief in the individual need to work towards the benefit of the community. 72% of respondents reported working together with other community members to benefit the community in some form. 75.4% reported helping out with local groups as a volunteer and the majority (83.7%) said that by helping others, you help yourself in the long run. This was an important indication that community members not only saw the importance of collective action in the rebuilding process, but were also willing to work alongside their neighbors to better the community as a whole.

Collective action and cooperation was found to be less among non-beneficiary communities. 50% of respondents said they had worked with others for the community good (as compared to 72% in communities with NaCSA supported sub-projects). Only 53.3% of these were volunteers to local groups; although a large percentage (85.9%) also agreed that helping others benefited themselves in the long run too.

Trust and Solidarity: Community trust and social networks were severely damaged during the war. However, two years into the project, 77.2% of beneficiaries felt that people in their neighborhood or village generally trusted one another. Many respondents claimed that the project process, which was driven by community demand and participation, also encouraged people to speak freely, with 73% of respondents saying that if they disagreed with what everyone else agreed on, they would feel free to speak out. 60% percent of respondents believed that the sub-projects had helped bridge divisions between groups and respondents cited a greater feeling of community cohesiveness.

These are positive findings in a state that was until very recently embroiled in civil war. By giving community members an opportunity to first participate at the grassroots level, the CDD approach in Sierra Leone is providing new channels for citizen voice, which thus creates an opening for incremental reform of governance. Additionally, the project is contributing to the peace process by reducing social divisions.

However, there was a marked difference and levels of trust did not increase as much in communities not reached by NaCSA. 16.3% of people in the latter felt that trust had worsened since the war, nearly twice as many as respondents in beneficiary communities. Additionally, although 47.7% of respondents from non-beneficiary communities did say levels of trust had improved, respondents from beneficiary communities were even more positive, with 69.9% saying that trust levels had increased.

Good Technical Quality

The Technical Audit conducted in conjunction with the BIA found that infrastructure constructed under the direct supervision of beneficiary communities was techni-cally sound and impressive. A big boost to the project is that the quality of construction was found to be comparable to that of other donor-funded projects that were not implemented with a CDD approach, such as those financed by the European Union and non-governmental organizations. Even more significantly, the Audit found that the unit costs of community sub-projects built under NaCSA were up to 50% lower than that of similar proj-

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pects undertaken by other ministries and donor agencies. This highlights that community involvement in project implementation can indeed lower costs, even in conflict settings. Most of the 13 country case studies in the 2006 Bank study on CDD and conflict also found that when communities manage their own resources, they have an incentive to economize. Moreover, community contributions of material, cash and labor are an important source of additional resources.

One flag raised for NaCSA, however, was that inflation was high immediately following the war and prices of goods and services were rising very quickly. High inflation combined with new more sophisticated Government sector standards meant that the unit cost of sub-projects estimated in the Project Appraisal Document, was now found to be too low. This experience can be taken into account in other social funds and CDD projects in post-conflict countries. Often there is an increased demand for, but limited supply of, quality goods and services in the immediate post-conflict period as reconstruction begins. Hence, a certain contingency level should be included in the unit cost estimates of sub-projects.

**BENEFICIARY IMPACT ASSESSMENT RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Community Contributions: Leveraging Resources**

Overall, a very high percentage of BIA respondents (96.4% of men and 87.3% of women) said they had contributed in some form to their community sub-project. 62% of all respondents said they provided in-kind labor to meet the required contribution of 10 percent of the sub-project value. Another 31% said they had provided use of their land as their contribution. Both men and women (approximately 70% each) concurred that the type of

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**Other Stakeholder Feedback**

*As part of the BIA, the team also interviewed a range of key stakeholders in addition to the direct beneficiaries. Responses are highlighted below:*

**Health professionals and teachers** interviewed reported that they knew about NaCSA, having heard about it either through a radio-based awareness campaign or via word-of-mouth. They felt that the social fund made significant efforts to reach out to and involve community members, and that this resulted in genuine improvement in decision-making and leadership capacity amongst the community. Although nurses and teachers reported minor disputes over disbursement of funds, they said all were solved amicably. However, they did complain about a lack of support from line ministries. Specifically they said supplies and equipment were not provided for the infrastructure built. Poor water supply was also a complaint that they said hindered full use of the infrastructure built.

**Police officers** interviewed felt that there had been a slight drop in both theft and violent crime in NaCSA supported communities. They felt that getting youth involved in the sub-projects was positive, because it increased their self-esteem and made them “better” and “more valued” citizens.

**District Council members** were happy with the amount of involvement and consultation that NaCSA did with them. They did not feel that their authority was undermined by the project, but rather that the process had improved communities’ organizational skills and understanding of governance.

**Project Management Committees** were almost all positive about their relationship with NaCSA (15 out of 17 rated their relationship as satisfactory). The 2 PMCs that were unhappy reported that there were delays in disbursement and poor financial management on the part of the PMC.
contribution for various community members was agreed upon at a community meeting.

However, there was some disagreement between community members and the Project Management Communities (PMCs) on the level of these contributions. Out of 10 PMCs that quantified the community contributions, only five confirmed that the 10% requirement had actually been met. Community respondents were unhappy that they were not compensated adequately for land and material contributed to the project, although the PMCs reported that they were paying for skilled labor. This highlights that community members did not fully understand the definition of community contributions and their purpose, and confused these contributions with paid employment opportunities created by the sub-project (e.g., in infrastructure construction).

**Gender Gap: Increasing Women’s Participation**

A significantly lower proportion of female respondents were involved in the PMC election process. As such, there was a considerable lack of understanding about key aspects of the project among women. One quarter of female respondents believed they had no input into the sub-project selection process. 83% of men compared to 68.9% of women trusted NaCSA staff and only 67.7% of women trusted PMC members as compared to 77.8% of men. While the majority of female respondents stated that the project met the identifying need, they were also four times more likely to identify negative or regressive effects on the community (16.7%). The majority of male and female respondents believed that more consultation—initially as well as throughout the process—would result in more overall participation within the community. Notably, women in general felt that they had less power to make decisions to change the course of their lives than men (88% compared to 68.6%). 23.9% also felt less valued by society than 7.6% of male respondents.

**BIA Recommendation:**

NaCSA should devise a mechanism to give the communities full credit for its levels of contribution, including quantifying contributions of land and material.

**Information Flows: Keeping Things Transparent**

Approximately 22% of both men and women did not fully understand the project processes and three times as many women as men believed that the community did not fully understand the PMC election process. This was further evidenced by the significant portion of male and female respondents (33%) who felt the need for longer consultations at the start-up phase of the project and the majority who believed that increased consultation would improve participation and understanding. One quarter of male and female respondents also believed there was a lack of transparency in the procurement of works, goods and services. Additionally, over half of both men and women felt there had been a lack of transparency in the project’s financial management.

**BIA Recommendation:**

NaCSA should endeavor to increase transparency by ensuring that there is a consistent and accurate flow of information from the PMCs to the community regarding procurement and financial management.
Greater Sustainability by Community Mobilization

At the time of the Assessment, community-level mobilization occurred primarily at the project promotion and identification stages and less so during project implementation. Facilitating agencies hired by NaCSA conducted participatory poverty analyses and ranking exercises with beneficiaries to assess their needs, and helped form Project Management Committees from amongst community members.

However, the BIA found that it is equally if not more important to sustain community mobilization throughout the entire duration of the project. Otherwise interest in, and momentum of, sub-project implementation is very likely to fade, especially since benefits of a sub-project are often community-wide, long-term, cumulative, and not immediately apparent.

Monitoring by the Community: Room to Improve

About 82% of all beneficiaries believed that project implementation meetings were taking place on a monthly basis, and 79% of them felt the meetings were satisfactory. This satisfaction rate fell to 72% amongst women. The main problem with the meetings cited by about a third of community members were that they were difficult to follow. In addition, more than a third of women and a quarter of the men felt that ‘nothing happened’ at the meetings. Since these meetings were supposed to update community members on what was happening in the sub-projects and to allow them to monitor progress collectively, the BIA recommends that both the running of and participation in these meetings be improved.

Who Maintains the Project?

A troubling finding is that almost half of all women and men interviewed (45% and 49% respectively) said they were not aware that they needed to contribute towards project maintenance. This does not necessarily mean that they are not willing to though, as 85% of all respondents said that they were willing to help maintain the project, including financially. However, no analysis had been done by NaCSA on how much communities can afford to contribute. The question of maintenance does not fall only on the communities. In fact, under the project, District Councils bear the overall responsibility, but it was discovered, the Councils had no fiscal means allocated to them to do so.

BIA Recommendation:

Fiscal data on realistic levels of contributions from the community for maintenance must be collected. The question of maintenance must be prioritized, and communities taught its importance.

BIA Recommendation:

Community mobilization should be carried out throughout the sub-project implementation process, and not only when identifying community needs and priorities. With more mobilization, beneficiaries might better understand why they need to stay involved throughout the project cycle and even beyond, to maintain the infrastructure and services put in place.

BIA Recommendation:

NaCSA should increase PMCs’ skills to run sub-project meetings, and also raise the capacity of community members to participate effectively. Sub-project documents should be simplified to fit the literacy skills of community members.

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