1. Introduction

The Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) embarked on a decentralization program in 2004 and committed to the transfer of power, authority, and resources to local level institutions. The World Bank has been supporting the GoSL’s devolution efforts through the Decentralized Service Delivery Project (DSDP) since 2008. The overall objective of DSDP, which currently is at its second phase (DSDP 2), is to support decentralized delivery of basic services and to achieve this, it provides (i) block grants to LCs to deliver basic services in five focus sectors (health and sanitation; education; solid waste management; rural water; and social assistance for disabled and other vulnerable groups) and (ii) capacity development and technical assistance to LCs as well as central government.

Box 1. Sierra Leone’s Devolution and Local Councils

Sierra Leone has been making a rapid recovery following a decade-long civil war that killed 20,000 people and displaced half of its population. The country has been on a path of reconciliation, reconstruction, and stabilization of its economy and governance systems. That being said, the challenge to sustain political stability, address the striking human development deficits, and build infrastructure remains. There is a particular need to strengthen the national and sub-national democratic institutions and translate the likely gains of economic growth into improvements in poor and vulnerable peoples’ lives through services delivered at the local level. To address shortfalls in service delivery and poor human development outcomes, the Parliament passed the Local Government Act (LGA) and its attendant Statutory Instrument in 2004, effectively launching a program of decentralization. The legislation provided for a phased transfer of service delivery functions from 17 Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) to the 19 Local Councils (LCs). Regular elections to LCs have become a hallmark of decentralization in Sierra Leone.

Local Councils operate within the LGA framework, and have quickly assumed major responsibilities in service delivery, including education and health. The Decentralization Secretariat (DecSec) at the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD) is in charge of supervising Sierra Leone’s decentralization agenda. DecSec assigns Resident Technical Facilitators (RTFs) to every LC to provide technical assistance and to facilitate communication flows with relevant MDAs. In turn, LCs operate with the Ward Committees (WDCs), which have been established under LCs with an aim of boosting community level dialogue and social mobilization for participatory development. LCs align their services with sectors at the national level by subsidiary agreements with the relevant MDAs and need to comply with the local development plans they approve.

2. Results & Social Accountability in DSDP 2--GRM

During phase 2 of DSDP2, the project is focusing on achieving results through selected social accountability (SA) approaches and tools. Social accountability refers to the extent and capability of citizens to hold the state accountable and make it responsive to their needs. A grievance redress mechanism (GRM) is one important tool by which SA can be advanced in projects. Effectively addressing grievances and feedback from people affected by World Bank-financed projects is a core component of managing operational risks and achieving results. The cost of ignoring disputes and grievances of project beneficiaries and affected people—or responding to them too late—can be high. When designed and implemented well, a GRM can be an effective tool for generating public awareness about the project and its objectives; deterring errors, fraud, and corruption; identifying, assessing, and providing resolutions at early stages as risk mitigation measures; and increasing stakeholder involvement in the project. Well-designed GRMs may improve project outcomes and can help both project team as well as project beneficiaries improve results.¹

3. DSDP 2’s GRM

For DSDP 2, DecSec is tasked to design and implement the project GRM. Working in close collaboration with the World Bank team, DecSec has:

- Coordinated with ongoing GRM initiatives in the country;
- Designed three-tier GRM process for the project based on lessons learned from similar social protection and decentralization projects in other countries;

Established the DSDP 2 GRM manual with principles, procedures, and templates;
- Created GRM communications materials, including posters, stickers, and radio jingles;
- Provided training workshops to GRM implementers at Ward, LC, and national levels;
- Issued a letter to establish a formal relations with the Anti-Corruption Commission and the Ombudsman office for relevant case referrals; and
- Assigned GRM focal points at each grievance tiers.

The lowest level of the three-tier GRM starts at the Ward level, then cascades to the LC level, and then to the national level. At each level, Grievance Redress Committees are formed to receive and resolve complaints and follow-up with the complainants. The community members are encouraged to approach and submit complaints at any relevant level through letters, a form to the Suggestion Box (see photo), telephone, or walk-ins.

Although the piloting of GRM has been delayed by the recent Ebola Virus Disease outbreak, it has been smoothly rolled out in five selected LCs (Kambia District Council, Bonthe Municipal Council, Freetown City Council, Tonkolili District Council, and Kono District Council) in September 2015. These LCs were selected based on the geographical locations (Southern and Northern LCs) and the data from 2013 CLoGPAS².

4. Results to Date and Next Steps

While DecSec is in the process of collecting detailed reporting from the relevant GRM focal points at LC level, it has received overwhelmingly positive feedback from the piloting from the LCs and WDCs. Feedback indicates that the DSDP 2 GRM is providing a formal, structured, and direct channel to listen to the citizen voices related to service delivery, which did not exist prior to the pilot.

The GRM pilot is gradually being picked up by the community members. For example in the Bonthe Municipal Council, a total of 16 complaints have been recorded at the Ward level for September and October 2015. Of which 14 complaints were related to the DSDP 2 and all³ have been resolved at the Ward level within the stipulated timeframe. Thus far, one case—one on the unfinished school construction without a sanitation facility—has been escalated to the LC level (level 2). Complainants have been utilizing different methods almost equally to submit their grievances—the channels used include walk-ins, suggestion boxes, and phone call. Among 14 complaints, one complaint was related to the environmental and social safeguard⁴.

In Kambia, a total of six complaints, including non-project related ones, were collected during the first month of GRM piloting. Of these, two cases have been referred to the LC (level 2) and are currently being processed. At the Kambia District office, the GRM Committee, which consists of the Deputy Chief (chair), an M&E officer, an Environmental and Social Officer, an Information, Education & Communications officer, Human Resource, and three representatives of civil society organization, religious institutions, and media, is meeting frequently with an aim of investigating the complaints and brainstorming on the possible resolutions. The incorporation of non-LC members to the GRM committees has been perceived as a progress towards LC’s greater transparency, accountability, and participation.

The GRM pilot is planned to conclude in August 2016. DecSec is coordinating closely with WDAs and LCs not only to collect data from the pilot but also to extract lessons learned. Such information is planned to be shared among stakeholders at a workshop planned in August/September 2016. Based on the pilot experience, the GRM manual may be revised and a phased GRM scale-up plan will be developed.

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² The Comprehensive Local Government Performance Assessment System. It aims at measuring LC’s performance on its core functionalities, including service delivery and good governance.

³ The Bonthe Municipal Council decided to take on all 16 complaints submitted as 2 complaints that were not related to DSDP 2 were related to service delivery, which LCs are responsible for. All 16 complaints were resolved at Ward level within the stipulated timeframe. One case that has been escalated is being processed at the LC level.

⁴ OP 4.01 Environmental Assessment and OP 4.12 Involuntary Resettlement have been triggered for DSDP 2. This specific complaint was related to OP 4.01. The complaint summary reads “Sand Hawking within the township resulting to environmental hazards” (from the Complaint Tracking Form of the Bonthe Municipal Council).