



IRC Sierra Leone

A LEGACY OF HUMANITARIAN
ACCOMPLISHMENTS

August 2025





DRIVERS:
WEAR YOUR SEAT BELT
FOR CYCLISTS:
WEAR YOUR HELMET

It's not healthy to drink alcohol when driving. Drinking and driving seriously can increase your chance of a fatal injury by 120%.
Don't believe your car is safe. It's not.

SAFE DRIVING PLEDGE

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COVER: Adolescent girls attend an Every Adolescent Girl Empowered and Resilient (EAGER) session in Tongo Community, Sierra Leone.

LEFT: As part of the IRC UNIVAC project, Yema Kargbo, 9, is vaccinated by an IRC staffer at her primary school while her classmates stand in line waiting their turn. The IRC UNIVAC project works collaboratively with community health centre outreach teams and mobile vaccinations teams to optimize the uptake of childhood vaccinations in vulnerable communities.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Training of the trainer for EAGER Facilitators conducted by IRC in Bo City, Sierra Leone

For over 26 years, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) has stood with the people of Sierra Leone during their most challenging moments from the devastation of civil war to the Ebola outbreak, cholera, and COVID-19. Since 1999, IRC has reached more than 3.5 million Sierra Leoneans with lifesaving and life-changing support, while strengthening national systems and building resilience for the future.

Our mission in Sierra Leone has always been clear: to save lives, restore dignity, and support communities on the path to recovery and growth. This legacy is

defined not only by the scale of services delivered but also by the deep partnerships built with government institutions, civil society, local organizations, and communities across the country.

Through our health programs, we strengthened national systems, provided maternal and child health services, improved infection prevention and control during Ebola and COVID-19, and supported vaccination campaigns that reached hundreds of thousands. In education, we improved literacy and numeracy, supported vulnerable children and adolescent girls, and equipped out-of-school girls with skills and confidence for brighter futures. Our work in women and girls' protection and empowerment prevented and responded to gender-based violence, shifted harmful norms, and empowered women and girls to lead safe, dignified lives. In livelihoods, IRC enabled women and families to recover from economic shocks through skills training, financial inclusion, and entrepreneurship support. We also pioneered localization, building strong partnerships with national organizations such as RAINBO Initiative, Defense for Children International, Falaba Women's District Network, and MoPADA, ensuring sustainable local ownership of critical programs.

As IRC closes its country program in Sierra Leone in 2025, this exit is not an end but a transition, a deliberate handover to strong local organizations who are now leading the charge for a brighter future. The IRC's departure reflects confidence in the capacity, resilience, and vision of Sierra Leonean partners and institutions.

This Legacy Report is both a reflection and a celebration of the millions reached, the systems strengthened, and the lives changed. It is also a recognition of our staff, partners, donors, and communities whose dedication and courage have made this journey possible. Sierra Leone's future is bright, and IRC is proud to have played a role in lighting the way.

MESSAGE FROM THE REGIONAL VICE PRESIDENT

As we mark the closure of the International Rescue Committee's operations in Sierra Leone, I am filled with profound respect and admiration for the journey we have walked together with this resilient nation. Since 1999, when the IRC first arrived in Sierra Leone during the devastating civil war, our mission has remained steadfast: to stand with communities in their most difficult moments and to help build a foundation for recovery, resilience, and growth.

The road ahead is bright, and we are proud to have walked alongside you in helping light the way.

Over the years, IRC teams, alongside committed local partners, stood shoulder to shoulder with Sierra Leoneans during some of the most challenging periods in the country's history from the civil war to the Ebola outbreak, cholera, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Together, we provided life-saving support when it was needed most and built systems that endure beyond our presence.

Since I assumed the role of Regional Vice President for West Africa in 2021, I have witnessed firsthand the extraordinary dedication of our teams and partners. Together, we reached more than 3.5 million Sierra Leoneans through programs in health, education, WASH, protection, and livelihoods. These achievements speak not only to scale but to the depth of our commitment to Sierra Leone's people.

One of our most inspiring partnerships has been with the RAINBO Initiative, which began with IRC's support and has since grown into one of the nation's foremost organizations for gender-based violence response now even extending its impact into Liberia.

Similarly, through long-term partnerships with Irish Aid and others, we advanced women's protection and empowerment, shifted harmful norms, and promoted safer, more equitable communities.

As we close this chapter, it is important to be clear: the IRC is not abandoning Sierra Leone. We are exiting because we are confident that strong local organizations are now leading the way, rooted in their communities, equipped with knowledge, passion, and experience to continue this work. We are handing over the torch with trust and pride.

To every IRC staff member, partner, and community member who has been part of this journey thank you. Your dedication has left a legacy that will continue to shape Sierra Leone's future. The road ahead is bright, and we are proud to have walked alongside you in helping light the way.



A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke.

Modou Diaw
Regional Vice President, West Africa

International Rescue Committee

LETTER OF COUNTRY DIRECTOR

It is with great pride and heartfelt appreciation that I present the International Rescue Committee (IRC) Sierra Leone's Legacy Report. This report captures the dedicated work, collaboration, and impact across the sectors of health, education, protection, economic recovery, and governance.

Over the past 26 years, IRC Sierra Leone reached a more than 3.5 million clients with lifesaving, life-building and life-changing support, while strengthening local systems and promoting sustainability. From advancing adolescent girls' and women empowerment to strengthening access to quality healthcare services, enhancing quality education, livelihoods, and promoting evidence-based decision-making, our work has been rooted in partnership—with government, partnerships with international and local partners, donors, and, most importantly, the communities and clients served in 10 districts of Bo, Kanema, Kono, Kailahun, Karene, Falaba, Moyamba, Pujehun, Bonthe and Western Area Urban

We could not have achieved all this without the incredible favorable environment, and collaboration with the Government of Sierra Leone, and Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, Ministry of Health; Ministry of Water Resources, Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs; Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education and Local Government and Community Affairs. The IRC delivered interventions that align with national government level policies, priorities and ambitions. We are grateful to the Government of Sierra Leone for the favorable environment created for the NGOs to operate.

We are also indebted to our international and national/local partners. We have been sharing capacity with local partners over the years, and an example of that is the existence of the national partner RAINBO Initiative. IRC is proud of RAINBO Initiative as it has become one of the leading organizations in the gender sector for gender-based violence (GBV) services and case management. Again, the IRC has been working and sharing

capacity with two other local organization Defense for Children International (DCI) and Falaba District Women's Network (FDWN) for over two years and we have handed over the Women and Girls Empowerment and GBV programing funded by the Government of Ireland/Irish Aid to the consortium of local partners led by DCI, with other partners being FDWA and Women Against Violence & Exploitation in Society (WAVES) and is implementing in Karene, Falaba and Bo districts.

Our legacy is not only in the implemented programs but in the capacities strengthened and the relationships built over the years. Our exit is a celebration of our contribution and handing over the torch to local partners!

In 2024, the IRC piloted a locally-led partnership model where a local Civil Society Organization (CSO) acts as the lead or "prime" recipient of donor funding, and an INGO such as the IRC assumes the role of sub-recipient. In respect to this the IRC partnered with Movement towards Peace and Development Agency (MoPADA); MoPADA approached IRC-SL to support one of their projects, funded by Government of Ireland through the Irish Aid, comprising of GBV and Village Savings Loans Association (VSLA) program components and this partnership was very successfully implemented with a significant number of lessons learnt. The IRC is extremely proud of

its commitment to localization and the work it has accomplished in Sierra Leone since its inception to date and, most importantly having shared capacity with local partners and now seeing them take over the work from the IRC and lead in the national development of their own nation.

The IRC is grateful to our institutional and private donors, specifically, Government of Ireland through Irish Aid, United Kingdom government through the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), Canada Government through Global Affairs Canada (GAC), UNICEF Sierra Leone, Moderna Philanthropies and Helping Africa Foundation as well as innumerable donors throughout the years for their generous funding support that led the provision of critical services and flagship programs at national reach.

As we mark 26 years of IRC's services to the people of Sierra Leone and closure of IRC operation in Sierra Leone by September 2025, we do so with deep gratitude and reflection. Our legacy is not only in the implemented programs but in the capacities strengthened and the relationships built over the years. Our exit is a celebration of our contribution and handing over the torch to local partners!

The IRC could not have reached this pivotal moment without the remarkable IRC Salone team and the SMT which is composed of strong and dedicated national staff- Fatmata Bintu Koroma, Josephine Bertin and John Tamba Kpalaye. Their unwavering teamwork, dedication, positive attitudes and resilience through the so many challenges, is so inspiring and made all the difference and I couldn't be more grateful for it – thank you so much for your collaborations, your teamwork and dedication helped us achieve the great results. All the great work in Sierra Leone would not have been possible without the exceptional leadership, visionary approach and the inspiring guidance of the West Africa Regional Vice President, Modou Diaw and the Regional & Global Leadership – thank you for the great leadership!

As we pen off our last report, we want to remember and recognize employees who we lost to death while in active service as humanitarians with IRC Sierra Leone country program that is the late IRC Sierra Leone Country Director Allan Mukuru with other staff, who passed on 29 June 2004 in a helicopter accident going to the field. You will always remain in our hearts!!!

To the great people of Sierra Leone, we are honored to have walked this journey with you. The future is yours, and we remain inspired by your resilience and determination to thrive.

I was privileged to have worked with you all and I say thank you!!



A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Mercy Alidri'.

Mercy Alidri
Country Director

International Rescue Committee, Sierra Leone
2024 - 2025

A LEGACY OF RESILIENCE AND IMPACT:

Reflections on my time with IRC Sierra Leone

As the IRC prepares to close its chapter in Sierra Leone, I reflect with deep pride and humility on the journey we've traveled—one defined by resilience, innovation, and an unwavering commitment to the people we served. Leading IRC Sierra Leone was more than a professional responsibility, it was a personal mission grounded in hope, justice, and the belief that every community deserves dignity and opportunity.

Over the years, the IRC's programming evolved in response to the shifting landscape of Sierra Leone's needs, from conflict recovery to public health crises, economic empowerment, and long-term development. We provided vital services in protection, health, education, emergency response, and livelihoods, partnering with local communities, international donors, and government institutions to build sustainable change.

One of our most groundbreaking contributions was in the field of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) prevention and response. Through the Rainbow Centres, at the time, the only comprehensive GBV service facilities in the country, we offered medical, psychosocial, and legal support to survivors. These centres didn't just respond to violence; they gave women a path forward, often connecting them to safe houses or small business opportunities. I will always remember the story of a father who walked miles to attend every court hearing for his daughter, a GBV survivor. His persistence, backed by our legal aid, led to a successful conviction which was a rare and powerful victory in a system often stacked against survivors.

We also invested heavily in community mobilization and women's empowerment initiatives. By supporting the creation of Women's Action Groups, building Women's Centres, and launching Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLA), we helped women gain economic independence and voice. Many of

these groups remain active today, a testament to the sustainability of locally-driven development.

In health and emergency response, IRC managed the country's largest health portfolio, responding to multiple public health emergencies—from the cholera outbreak in 2012 to leading a consortium during the Ebola crisis in 2014. Our approach combined community mobilization, contact tracing, treatment, and psychosocial support, helping to slow the spread and save lives. One initiative I'm particularly proud of is the Community Health Worker Program which trained locals to diagnose and treat childhood illnesses. The drop in child mortality in some of the hardest-hit areas was remarkable—and when the government later adopted the program nationwide, placing workers on the public payroll, it marked a significant win for health equity.

Leading IRC Sierra Leone was more than a professional responsibility, it was a personal mission grounded in hope, justice, and the belief that every community deserves dignity and opportunity.

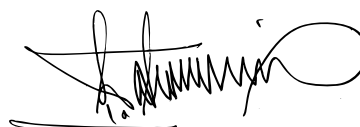
We also contributed meaningfully in education and youth employment. This involved constructing schools, developing curricula, training teachers, and implementing a World Bank-funded youth entrepreneurship project that gave thousands of young people the skills and confidence to start businesses and shape their own futures.

These achievements did not come without challenges. Post-war destruction left a legacy of poverty, weak infrastructure, and trauma that we navigated alongside the communities we served. Government capacity was often limited, and navigating regulatory bureaucracy, particularly with policies that positioned NGOs as competitors, required a principled stance. Over time, this integrity earned us respect and led to strong partnerships, especially with the Ministry of Planning and the NGO department.

Looking back, I'm proud not just of the services we delivered, but the systems and policies we helped shape. IRC was instrumental in the passage of the 2007 Gender Acts, securing critical protections for women under the law. We led the revision of the national NGO policy, helping to create a more enabling environment for civil society. And the Rainbow Initiative, once an IRC program, is now a thriving local NGO expanding its model beyond Sierra Leone into Liberia.

This legacy belongs not to IRC alone, but to every community member, partner, and frontline staff who

stood with us through crises and recovery. As we close this chapter, my hope is that the seeds we planted will continue to grow, led by Sierra Leoneans who believe, as we always have, that every life holds value, and every voice deserves to be heard.



Saffea Senessie
Former Country Director, IRC Sierra Leone

In Tongo Community, adolescent girls attend an EAGER session, where they are taught to develop the confidence, knowledge, skills and friendships to achieve their goals.

LILOMA NYAGAA

SUPPORT CENTRE TONGO



funded by:

Novo F



aid

British people



CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) has maintained a significant presence in Sierra Leone since 1999, dedicating its efforts to aiding communities affected by various humanitarian crises, including the civil war, the Ebola epidemic, cholera, and the COVID-19 pandemic. The organization's overarching mission in Sierra Leone has been to support the country's recovery and build long-term resilience by collaborating with the Sierra Leone government, local institutions, civil society organizations, community-based groups, and the private sector.

Programmatic Focus and Impact

The IRC's work in Sierra Leone was strategically designed to improve the lives of women, youth, and children through key programming areas:

- **Health:**

The IRC was instrumental in strengthening Sierra Leone's overstretched health systems. They provided vital support to healthcare centers and workers, focusing on preventing and treating diseases, addressing complications from pregnancy and childbirth, and reducing infant and child mortality, particularly in hard-to-reach rural areas. Their efforts also extended to improving supply and demand for reproductive, maternal, and child health services. Notably, the IRC played a crucial role in the aftermath of the Ebola epidemic, working to improve infection prevention and control measures in primary healthcare facilities and supporting the national COVID-19 vaccination campaign.

- **Education:**

Recognizing the challenges in Sierra Leone's education system, where most primary school children struggle with literacy and many teachers are unpaid or untrained, the IRC was committed to strengthening student learning across the country. They led consortiums of organizations to achieve this, integrating numeracy and expanding improved learning opportunities into secondary education. A

particular focus was placed on supporting children and vulnerable groups, such as young mothers and girls affected by violence, to access quality education and future employment opportunities.

- **Women and Girls' Protection and Empowerment (WGPE):**

Gender inequality and gender-based violence are significant issues in Sierra Leone. The IRC actively worked to mitigate gender-based violence and empower women and girls. Their WGPE programming aimed to ensure equal outcomes for women and girls, as well as men and boys, by building movements of actors within the country to advocate for large-scale change.

- **Livelihoods:**

To address economic challenges, including those exacerbated by COVID-19, the IRC helped women develop entrepreneurial skills and facilitate their access to financial services and products, enabling them to meet their families' needs and build economic resilience.

Operational Presence and Approach

The IRC operated with a strategic presence across Sierra Leone with a Country Program office in Freetown, a Regional Field Office in Kenema, Field Offices in Kono and Bo, and a satellite office in Kailahun. Furthermore, the IRC extended its reach by working through civil society partners in Falaba and Karea districts in the northern region of Sierra Leone. Our approach centered on community engagement and resilience, partnership and capacity building, and adaptability to evolving humanitarian needs. Combining direct service delivery with advocacy, we remained committed to effectiveness, learning, and innovation to help crisis-affected populations in Sierra Leone survive, recover with dignity, and rebuild their futures.

Addressing Complex Challenges

Sierra Leone, despite improvements in political stability and infrastructure post-civil war, continues to face complex challenges. The country ranks low on the Human Development Index and has one of the highest maternal mortality rates globally, with only 43% of its adult population being literate.^{1,2} Gender barriers to education, equal employment, and political participation persist, contributing to a high rate of gender-based violence. Health crises, corruption, poor infrastructure, and high inflation further exacerbate humanitarian needs. The IRC's long-standing commitment since 1999 has demonstrated their dedication to supporting Sierra Leone in navigating these multifaceted challenges and fostering long-term recovery and self-sufficiency.

1 UNDP. Human Development Insights. 6 May 2025. <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/country-insights>

2 World Bank. Sierra Leone : Gender Landscape Brief. March 29, 2025. <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/economies/sierra-leone>

3 Human Rights Watch. 'The Armed Conflict in Sierra Leone'. 11 April, 2012

4 IRC. After Ebola, West Africa rebuilds for a better future. June 21, 2016. <https://www.rescue.org/article/after-ebola-west-africa-rebuilds-better-future>

5 The Guardian. Explosion of violence': Sierra Leone picks up the pieces after protests. 21 August 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/aug/21/sierra-leone-protests-inflation-cost-of-living>

NOTABLE EVENTS

(Chronology)

1991–2002

Between 1991 and 2002, Sierra Leone was engaged in a violent civil war that displaced two million people, killed more than 50,000 and fostered widespread human rights abuses.³

2014

Following the end of the war, Sierra Leone began to make great strides in reconstruction and peacebuilding, as evidenced by the United Nations 2024 Annual Results Report for Sierra Leone. However, the arrival of the **Ebola** epidemic in March 2014 strained resources and worsened long-standing economic and social challenges. The disease claimed nearly 4,000 lives in Sierra Leone.⁴

2020

More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic and the global fallout from the war in Ukraine have contributed to social and economic issues in Sierra Leone. Unemployment rates and inflation continue to rise alongside the cost of living, while significant spikes in the prices of fuel and commodities have contributed to **civil unrest** in Sierra Leone's capital, Freetown.⁵ Gender-based violence and barriers to women's and children's rights also persist in the country.



SECTION 1

IRC Programs and Achievements

Outlined in the following pages is an overview of the different projects implemented by IRC Sierra Leone and partners highlighting the achievements of each project, their overall reach, as well as success stories from the clients.

ABOVE: Students at an EAGER session in Tongo Community.

PROJECT NAME

Piloting of Good Kombra na Gladi Family Fambul (GKnGF) Positive Parenting Education Programme (PPEP) for Sierra Leone

DONOR

Ministry of Social Welfare,
Government of Sierra Leone,
with funding from UNICEF
Sierra Leone

SECTOR

Education

DONOR COMMITMENT

16,893.33 USD

DURATION

Dec. 1, 2020 – Apr. 15, 2021

LOCATION

Dambala, Monghere, Bo districts

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

IRC Sierra Leone in collaboration with Ministry of Social Welfare (MSW), Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs (MoGCA), Defense for Children International (DCI) and Save the Children International Sierra Leone (SCI-SL)

Project Objectives:

To test a culturally-adapted Positive Parenting curriculum to reduce violent discipline and improve caregiver–child relationships, forming the foundation for national curriculum rollout.

IRC's Impact and Major Accomplishments

- Trained **four community facilitators** and **two chiefdom ward councilors**, supported **80 parents** (40 per community), and conducted **12 structured sessions** on the pilot parenting curriculum.
- Conducted Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with over **200 people** and administered post-tests and satisfaction surveys to assess the impact of the pilot parenting curriculum.
- Feedback indicated **improved parenting, reduced household conflicts**, and a **drop in child-related court cases**.
- Community leaders called for **integrating parenting education** into school and tertiary curricula

PROJECT NAME

Protection of Women through Empowerment and Response (POWER)

DONOR

U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)

SECTOR

Women Protection and Empowerment (WPE)

DONOR COMMITMENT

1,148,294 USD

DURATION

Oct.1, 2018 – Dec. 31, 2020

LOCATION

Kenema district

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

IRC Sierra Leone

Project Objectives:

To test a culturally adapted Positive Parenting curriculum to reduce violent discipline and improve caregiver–child relationships, forming the foundation for national curriculum rollout.

IRC's Impact and Major Accomplishments:

- Formed **40 VSLAs benefiting 1,000 women**, with 100% developing viable business plans and receiving cash grants.
- **76%** reported ≥10% income increase; **99%** saved regularly; **88%** felt their ideas were valued.
- Conducted Engaging Men through Accountable Practice (EMAP) and Discussion Group Series (DGS) for **2,000 participants** (men and women).
- Trained **40 facilitators**, formed **20 Women Action Groups**, and improved GBV referral and coordination systems.
- **82%** of men demonstrated reduced harmful attitudes toward women.

PROJECT NAME

Empowerment of Adolescents' Project (EAP)

DONOR

UNICEF Sierra Leone

SECTOR

Education

DONOR COMMITMENT

1,281,912.61 USD

DURATION

Jul. 20, 2020 – Dec. 31, 2022

LOCATION

Kambia, Moyamba districts

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

- IRC Sierra Leone (prime)
- Association for the Well-Being of Communities and Development (ABC Development)
- Community Action for Restoring Lives (CARL)

Project Objectives:

The EAP aimed to mitigate Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and increase educational and economic opportunities for adolescents. The project created safe spaces for adolescent girls (10–19 years) to build life skills and self-efficacy, engaged adolescent boys (10–19 years) to promote gender equality and challenge harmful norms, worked with local stakeholders (Police, Ministries, Councils, community leaders) to improve referral pathways for GBV cases and sought to raise awareness of gender rights, health, and education through dialogues and mentorship.

IRC's Impact and Major Accomplishments:

- **12,000 girls and 6,000** boys were registered and **9,337 girls** completed life skills training (Girl Shine cycle).
- **80%** of girls reported increased confidence to delay marriage and to stand up for themselves.
- **57%** of girls aged 15–19 made informed decisions on sex, contraception, and healthcare.
- **66%** of boys knew how to report GBV; 96% were willing to report violations.
- Acceptance of wife-beating among boys **dropped to 11%.**
- **2,837 boys (59%)** participated in gender-transformative life skills sessions.
- **600 mentors** were trained on GBV prevention and referral pathways.

PROJECT NAME

Unite for Save Life Na Salone – Saving Lives in Sierra Leone

(Phase II)

DONOR

UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)- formerly known as Department for International Development UK (DfID)

SECTOR

Health

DONOR COMMITMENT

38,644,863.56 GBP

DURATION

Oct. 1, 2018 – Nov. 30, 2023

LOCATION

Bo, Bombali, Bonthe, Kailahun, Kambia, Kenema, Koinadugu, Kono, Moyamba, Port Loko, Pujehun, Tonkolili, Eastern Area Rural, Western Area Urban districts

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

- IRC Sierra Leone (Lead)
- Concern Worldwide
- Restless Development
- Marie Stopes International
- GOAL
- Royal College of Pediatrics and Child Health
- CUAMM Doctors with Africa
- King's College London

Project Objectives:

The Saving Lives in Sierra Leone Phase II project aimed to strengthen the national health system and reduce maternal, newborn, child, and adolescent morbidity and mortality. Funded by the UK FCDO, the IRC-led consortium supported government efforts through technical, operational, and managerial assistance to hospitals, clinics, and District Health Management Teams (DHMTs).

IRC's Impact and Major Accomplishments:

- **99,207 women and girls** accessed family planning services across 14 districts.
- **28%** (27,578) were adolescent girls (10–19 years), contributing to prevention of unplanned pregnancies.
- **101,563** couple years of protection (CYPs) were generated.
- **382** maternal deaths investigated by DHMTs, representing **84%** of all reported cases, with actionable recommendations developed.
- **10,843 units** of blood were collected across **15** district hospitals.
- Minimum daily blood stock levels were maintained on **83%** of the days.
- **260 healthcare workers** received mentorship on Basic Emergency Obstetrics and Neonatal Care (BEmONC).
- **44%** (115) demonstrated competence in all seven BEmONC signal functions.

PROJECT NAME

Scaling up Mentorship to Save Lives (SUM-SL)

DONOR

Helping Africa Foundation (HAF)

SECTOR

Health

DONOR COMMITMENT

50,000 USD

DURATION

Sept. 1, 2024 – Mar. 31, 2025

LOCATION

Bo district

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

IRC Sierra Leone (Lead)
in collaboration with Bo
District Health Management
Team (DHMT)

Project Objectives:

To improve the quality of Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health (MNCH), Infection Prevention and Control (IPC), data use, and Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health (ASRH) through peer mentorship and quality improvement approaches in 60 Primary Health Units (PHUs) in Bo District.

IRC's Impact and Major Accomplishments:

- **60** PHUs supported through routine peer mentorship.
- **Ten midwife mentors** trained and deployed.
- **98%** of delivery complications were managed according to protocol.
- **98%** of PHUs correctly used the World Health Organization (WHO) Labor Care Guide.
- **96%** of eligible women received post-partum family planning before discharge.
- **5,655 adolescent girls** were reached with Sexual Reproductive Health education through safe spaces.
- Facility management committees **revitalized in 20 PHUs**.
- **Renovated** the WASH infrastructure in one PHU.
- Monthly data audits and supervision **strengthened accountability and service quality**.

PROJECT NAME

UNIVAC – Integrated COVID-19 and Routine Immunization Support

DONOR

Concern Worldwide funded through UNICEF Sierra Leone

SECTOR

Health

DONOR COMMITMENT

819,550.61 USD

DURATION

Oct. 1, 2022 – May 15, 2024

LOCATION

Bo, Kenema, Kailahun, Bonthe, Moyamba, Pujehun, Kono districts

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

IRC Sierra Leone (sub-recipient)

Project Objectives:

To increase uptake of routine childhood and COVID-19 vaccines among children and adolescents (12–18 years) in underserved communities by integrating services with routine health delivery.

IRC's Impact and Major Accomplishments:

- Supported outreach and mobile teams in **hard-to-reach areas**, including island and riverine communities in Bonthe and Kambia.
- **251 Community Health Centres** equipped to supervise and support lower-level facilities.
- **Ensured access** to zero-dose and dropout children via intensified outreach and Periodic Intensification of Routine Immunization (PIRI) campaigns.
- **Transport support** to Falaba district for AFP (alpha-fetoprotein) sample transfer to national labs.
- **Strengthened** coordination with the national Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI) for strategic alignment.
- **Distributed medical supplies and fuel support** to Peripheral Health Units (PHUs) nationwide.

PROJECT NAME

The PLANN Project (Promoting Livelihoods, Agriculture, Nutrition and Natural Resource Management)

DONOR

Movement Towards Peace and
Development (MoPADA) –
through funding from Irish Aid

SECTOR

Women Protection
and Empowerment

DONOR COMMITMENT

245,579.23 EUR

DURATION

Sept. 1, 2024 - Mar. 31, 2025

LOCATION

Bo district

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

IRC Sierra Leone (sub-recipient)

Project Objectives:

The PLANN project (Promoting Livelihoods, Agriculture, Nutrition and Natural Resource Management) was implemented in 40 communities across Upper Bambara and Mandu chiefdoms in Kailahun District, Sierra Leone. The project aimed to improve food security, sustainable livelihoods, and nutrition through gender-sensitive agriculture, community empowerment, and natural resource management. IRC focused on ensuring women's safety, leadership, and participation by establishing safe spaces, building local capacities, and promoting gender equality through dialogue and advocacy.

IRC's Impact and Major Accomplishments:

- Formed **40 Women Action Groups** (WAGs) with 800 members, trained in leadership, advocacy, and campaigning.
- **Registered all 40 WAGs** as community-based organizations (CBOs) to sustain advocacy beyond the project.
- Established and equipped **40 safe spaces** where women met regularly for learning, support, and mobilization.
- Trained **40 WAG facilitators** and **40 Gender Based Violence (GBV) case workers** to lead sessions, provide support, and handle referrals.
- Raised GBV awareness among over **1,000 participants**, including male leaders, enhancing community response.
- Conducted **320 gender dialogue sessions** through 80 trained facilitators, reaching **1,755 men and women**.
- Observed **significant attitude shifts** among men towards joint decision-making and gender roles in households.
- **Strengthened community ownership** through collaboration with local leaders and linkage to government systems.

PROJECT NAME

FOUNDATIONS – Sierra Leone

DONOR

Save the Children International
through funding from Global
Affairs Canada (GAC)

SECTOR

Education, Women Protection
and Empowerment

DONOR COMMITMENT

1,333,245 CAD

DURATION

Jul. 27, 2021 – Mar. 31, 2025

LOCATION

Kailahun district

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

IRC Sierra Leone (sub-recipient)

Project Objectives:

The Foundations Project, aimed to strengthen Adolescent girls' Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (ASRHR). The project also focused on engaging men through the Engaging Men through Accountable Practice (EMAP) approach, strengthening health systems for GBV response, and building advocacy capacity among women's rights organizations to influence ASRHR policy.

IRC's Impact and Major Accomplishments:

- **10,262 adolescent girls** (3,162 Very Young Adolescents and 7,100 Older Adolescents) were enrolled in four cohorts and completed the Girl Shine early marriage curriculum.
- **49 safe spaces** were equipped with learning and hygiene materials to facilitate weekly sessions.
- **94 mentors** were trained and supported to deliver Girl Shine sessions across the 11 project communities.
- **22** community-based EMAP facilitators were trained to lead gender-transformative sessions for **220 men and 220 women**; post-assessments showed a 57% increase in men's positive attitudes toward ASRHR and gender equality.
- **265 health workers** (186 female, 78 male) were trained to provide survivor-centred care to GBV survivors using the Caring for Women Subjected to Violence curriculum.
- **220 WAG members** were trained in GBV core concepts, gender laws, and referral pathways, with 11 of them further trained as GBV case managers.
- **11 Women and Girls Rights Organizations** (WGROs), comprising of 220 women, were trained in advocacy and ASRH knowledge, and supported to develop and begin implementing community-level advocacy action plans.
- Community feedback highlighted **improved decision-making** by girls, **increased male support** at the household level, and **stronger adolescent peer bonds** and confidence in accessing sexual & reproductive health (SRH) services.
- Supervision and coaching of mentors **enhanced their confidence, literacy skills, and capacity to support** girls and engage caregivers.

PROJECT NAME

Every Adolescent Girl Empowered and Resilient (EAGER) project

DONOR

UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)- formerly known as Department for International Development UK- through the Girls' Education Challenge

SECTOR

Education, Women Protection and Empowerment

DONOR COMMITMENT

18,103,572.87 GBP

DURATION

Feb. 1, 2019 – Mar. 31, 2023

LOCATION

Kono, Freetown Area Urban, Bo, Kailahun, Kambia, Kenema, Koinadugu, Port Loko, Pujehun, Tonkolili districts

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

- IRC Sierra Leone (Lead)
- Restless Development (RD)
- Concern Worldwide (CWW)
- BBC Media Action

Project Objectives:

The Every Adolescent Girl Empowered and Resilient (EAGER) project targeted out-of-school girls aged 13-17 with low literacy and numeracy skills.

IRC's Impact and Major Accomplishments:

- The EAGER project reached a total of **27,300 out-of-school adolescent girls** aged 10–19 years across 10 districts in Sierra Leone. At project completion, **91.9%** of girls had finalized their Empowerment Plans, and **91.2%** had taken at least one step toward achieving their goals, with the highest completion in learning (97.4%) and financial (95.4%) goals.
- **Over 96%** of girls reported using life skills, literacy, numeracy, and financial literacy gained through the program, and **92.6%** believed they could achieve the goals they set for themselves. Cash transfers were vital, with **42.9%** of girls identifying them as key to achieving their goals, while **90%** found the accompanying Empowerment Packages helpful.
- During the Transition Phase, **76.8%** of girls engaged in petty trading, reflecting strong uptake of entrepreneurship skills. Girls also reported **increased self-confidence, decision-making power, and respect** from families and communities. Mentors and caregivers observed improvements in communication and financial management skills.
- The Wae Gyal Pikin Tinap radio program supported broader attitude change, with **87.8%** of caregivers saying it helped them understand girls' learning and development needs. **70%** of girls continued to meet in informal peer groups after completing the learning program, contributing to sustainability.
- While system-level change was not a core focus, EAGER established **strong relationships with national government stakeholders**, setting the stage for policy influence. However, technical-level engagement and structural support remain areas for further growth to sustain long-term gains.

PROJECT NAME

Ending School-Related Gender – Based Violence (ESRGBV)

DONOR

UNICEF Sierra Leone

SECTOR

Education, Women Protection and Empowerment

DONOR COMMITMENT

490,362.62 USD

DURATION

Sept. 8, 2023 and Apr. 30, 2024

LOCATION

Kenema, Kono districts

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

IRC Sierra Leone

Project Objectives:

The ESRGBV Project, aimed to prevent and respond to School-Related Gender-Based Violence (SRGBV) in Kenema and Kono districts.

IRC's Impact and Major Accomplishments:

- SRGBV incidence dropped from **99%** at baseline to **91%** at endline. Sexual violence saw the most significant decline (from 85% to 52%), followed by corporal punishment (95% to 71%) and bullying (94% to 85%).
- The percentage of students who felt safe at school **rose to 98%**. Only 10% missed school due to safety concerns, compared to 38% at baseline.
- The percentage of students who respected adolescent girls' rights **increased from 5% to 27%**, and those who believed hitting girls was acceptable **dropped from 59% to 20%**.
- Students' confidence in reporting violence rose from **71% to 97%**, and 97% knew where to access support services, up from 66%.
- **100%** of schools established SRGBV reporting and response systems and safe spaces.
- **98%** of peer-to-peer support group participants attended three or more meetings in the last three months.
- **82%** of girls attended at least 70% of Girl Shine sessions.
- **744 SRGBV awareness-raising activities** were held in schools.
- **206 positive parenting sessions** were conducted for parents.

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PROJECT NAME

Technical Assistance to the Office of the Vice President (OVP)

DONOR

Foreign, Commonwealth &
Development Office- FCDO

SECTOR

Health

DONOR COMMITMENT

296,886.17 GBP

DURATION

Mar. 4, 2024 – Jul. 31, 2025

LOCATION

Freetown

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

IRC Sierra Leone

Project Objectives:

The Technical Assistance to the Office of the Vice President (OVP) project is funded under the IRC's Health Systems Accountable Grant to strengthen health governance and leadership in Sierra Leone. The project deploys a full-time Health Advisor embedded in the Vice President's office. This Advisor provides high-level technical support through strategic briefings, coordination across ministries, technical advice on national health reform processes, and facilitates multisectoral collaboration. Core focus areas include health financing, universal health coverage (UHC), drug and substance abuse response, hospital system strengthening, nutrition coordination, and digital health transformation.

IRC's Impact and Major Accomplishments:

- **Led the development** of a Universal Health Coverage (UHC) Act, replacing the outdated Sierra Leone Social Health Insurance (SLeSHI) Act, with multisectoral and donor engagement.
- **Monitored health budget processes**, escalated critical delays, and enabled timely VP interventions to release essential funds (e.g., for vaccines and hospitals).
- Supported a **lean, cost-effective national Kush response** and established a national referral pathway to improve coordination and continuity of care.
- Facilitated VP-led **hospital visits**, resulting in targeted improvements and plans for a National Hospital Strategy.
- Coordinated the **successful EMR pilot at Connaught Hospital**, demonstrating feasibility and highlighting challenges for digital scale-up.
- **Strengthened SUN Secretariat operations** and led the new SUN & Food Systems Unit, securing funding for a national Nutrition Information System.
- Established the Health Private Sector Partners group, **mobilizing support for hospital operations** and advocating for sustainable public-private partnership (PPP) models.
- Drafted Host Country Agreement Guidelines for NGO-run hospitals and **contributed to key national initiatives on social protection and health governance**.

PROJECT NAME

Adolescent Girls Empowerment and Protection Project (AGEPP)

DONOR

Irish Aid

SECTOR

Education, Women and Protection Empowerment (WPE)

DONOR COMMITMENT

1,792,428.44 EUR

DURATION

Apr. 1, 2019 – Mar. 31, 2022

LOCATION

Bo district

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

- IRC Sierra Leone (Lead)
- Concern Worldwide (CWW)

Project Objectives:

Ensure that adolescent girls are empowered to reach their full potential through advocacy, skills acquisition and financial empowerment.

IRC's Impact and Major Accomplishments:

- **900 girls** completed the IRC Girl Shine + National Life Skills Curriculum; **93%** showed increased knowledge on Sexual Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR), Gender Based Violence (GBV), child marriage, and teenage pregnancy prevention.
- IRC's Female Caregivers Curriculum implemented in **12 communities**; **86%** of mothers engaged daughters in SRHR and education dialogue.
- **147 older adolescent girls** trained in vocational skills (breadmaking, catering, hairdressing, masonry, etc.); graduation ceremony held in Year 3 of the project.
- **275 adolescent girls and women** received business mentoring and monitoring support.
- Cash grants disbursed to **275 women and girls** across three years; start-up kits provided to vocational graduates.
- **12 Women Action Groups (WAGs)** trained in GBV case management, referral pathways, and national gender laws.
- **30 Primary Health Unit (HBU) staff trained** in Clinical Care for Survivors; 50% were female; quarterly pharmaceutical supplies provided.
- GBV revolving fund **established and managed** by trained community case workers and Sierra Leone Police Family Support Units (FSUs) trained on GBV SOPs and data management.
- Boys and male caregivers included in GBV and rights education, EMAP for Boys **piloted and scaled to six additional communities**, promoting gender-equitable attitudes.
- **Girls led community development projects** (e.g. water wells, toilets, school rehabilitation, COVID-19 awareness), fostering civic engagement and leadership.

PROJECT NAME

Adolescent Girls Empowerment and Protection Project (AGEPP Phase II)

DONOR

Irish Aid

SECTOR

Education, Women and Protection Empowerment (WPE)

DONOR COMMITMENT

1,189,398.12 EUR

DURATION

Apr. 1, 2022 – Mar. 31, 2025

LOCATION

Bo, Falaba, Karene districts

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

- IRC Sierra Leone (Lead)
- Falaba Womens District Network (FWDN)
- Defense for Children International (DCI)

Project Objectives:

The project aimed to empower women and adolescent girls through education, knowledge, and skills to reach their full potential and participate in society by providing safe spaces for women and girls in to meet and learn in a safe environment.

IRC's Impact and Major Accomplishments:

- **Safe spaces established** for adolescent girls and women across Bo, Falaba, and Karene districts, fostering inclusive learning and protection.
- **80 young women** fielded as mentors across intervention communities; **100%** of adolescent girls completed the Girl Shine Curriculum.
- **96%** of out-of-school adolescent girls completed vocational training with 61% showing improved literacy/numeracy.
- **83%** of women and girls reported increased decision-making power and awareness of protection mechanisms.
- **20 Women's Action Groups (WAGs)** formed, engaging 500 women in GBV awareness, case management, referral pathways, and gender law training.
- **20 boys' and 20 men's groups** established; **60** facilitators trained to implement Engaging Men through Accountable Practice (EMAP) and EABAP (Engaging Adolescent Boys through Accountable Practice) curricula.
- **396 Older Adolescent Girls (OAGs)** and mentors received vocational training; **889 women and girls** received cash grants to launch or expand businesses.
- **20** Village Savings Loans Associations (VSLAs) for Older Adolescent Girls (OAGs) launched, **85%** of women and OAGs attended weekly sessions and 6 VSLA clusters were formed.
- Women and adolescent girls engaged in **environmental resilience efforts** tied to agriculture and caregiving roles.
- **81%** of girls gained decision-making power over safety and **94%** knew how to respond to sexual abuse.

PROJECT NAME

Strengthening Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) for Improved and Resilient Health Systems.

DONOR

Moderna Philanthropies

SECTOR

Health

DONOR COMMITMENT

2,500,000 USD

DURATION

Apr. 1, 2022 – Jan. 31, 2024

LOCATION

Bo district

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

IRC Sierra Leone

Project Objectives:

Support 20 health facilities by improving basic IPC and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) standards and strengthening the capacity of health service delivery institutions.

IRC's Impact and Major Accomplishments:

- **20 Primary Health Units (PHUs)** rehabilitated with basic WASH infrastructure and provided with water storage tanks.
- **20 PHUs** provided with water treatment supplies and water monitoring kits.
- Latrines and waste zones **rehabilitated**, and waste collection tools and equipment provided in **20 PHUs**.
- **20 PHUs** provided with basic Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), Information Education and Communication (IEC) and IPC materials.
- Conducted IPC trainings for **104** PHU staff and Community Health Workers (CHWs), including midwives, Community Health Assistants (CHAs), State-Enrolled Community Health Nurses, Maternal and Child Health (MCH) aides and cleaners.
- Conducted a **two-day workshop** for the District Health Management Team (DHMT) on organizational capacity assessment and organizational development plans.
- Supported community scorecard meetings for **600 community members** to promote basic hygiene practices and accountability, which led to setting up hand washing stations (tippy taps) and building compost fences around waste disposal areas.
- **Enhanced awareness** on basic hygiene practices through door-to-door visits conducted by community volunteers.

PROJECT NAME

Mainstreaming Gender into COVID-19 Response in Sierra Leone

DONOR

UN Women Sierra Leone

SECTOR

Health

DONOR COMMITMENT

SLL 10,015.35 USD

DURATION

Jul. 1 – Sept. 20, 2020

LOCATION

Kono, Kenema, Kailahun,
Bo districts

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

IRC Sierra Leone

Project Objectives:

To strengthen gender-responsive COVID-19 emergency response by embedding Gender Mainstreaming Facilitators (GMFs) into district response teams, building the capacity of the District COVID-19 Response Emergency Operations Centre (DICOVERC) on gender and GBV, and ensuring gender-sensitive data collection and decision-making.

IRC's Impact and Major Accomplishments:

- Gender was **effectively integrated** into COVID-19 district emergency response structures.
- **Increased awareness and capacity** among DICOVERC Coordinators on gender issues and GBV.
- GMFs **identified and addressed gender gaps**, influencing the inclusion of gender-sensitive measures (e.g., provision of dignity kits, addressing sexual harassment concerns, and flagging adolescent girls' vulnerabilities).
- **Raised national and district-level attention** to the need for disaggregated data and gender-sensitive planning in emergencies.



SECTION 2

Major Constraints (to Delivery of Humanitarian Services)

ABOVE: Theresa B. Lusine, 50, a local UNIVAC community vaccinator, shows the current stock of vaccines for the mobile vaccination project at a primary school in Bo.

Sierra Leone, like many countries that have experienced significant crises, faces a unique set of challenges and complexities in humanitarian operations. Outlined below are the key challenges and complexities faced during IRC interventions in Sierra Leone.



WEAK INFRASTRUCTURE AND LOGISTICS

- **Poor Road Networks:**

Many rural areas are difficult to access, especially during the rainy season, due to unpaved or damaged roads. This significantly impeded the timely delivery of aid, supplies, and medical personnel to affected populations.

- **Limited Storage and Distribution Capacity:**

Inadequate warehousing facilities and a lack of reliable transportation networks made it challenging to store and distribute humanitarian aid effectively across the country.

- **Connectivity:**

Limited mobile network coverage and emergency telecommunications infrastructure often hindered real-time information sharing and coordination among humanitarian actors, particularly in remote areas.



HEALTH SYSTEM FRAGILITY AND DISEASE OUTBREAKS

- **Vulnerable Health System:**

Sierra Leone's health system remains fragile, with chronic underfunding, a severe shortage of qualified healthcare professionals (especially in rural areas), and a lack of essential equipment and medicines. This made it difficult to respond to everyday health needs, let alone large-scale emergencies.

- **High Disease Burden:**

The country faces a high burden of communicable diseases like malaria, tuberculosis, and HIV, alongside high rates of maternal and child mortality. This pre-existing vulnerability exacerbated the impact of new outbreaks.

- **Recurrent Epidemics:**

Sierra Leone has a history of devastating epidemics (e.g., Ebola, COVID-19, and Mpox). These outbreaks strain an already stretched health system, lead to fear and stigmatization, and require rapid, coordinated, and often long-term humanitarian responses.

- **Access to Healthcare:**

Cost of services and geographical barriers often limited access to healthcare, pushing vulnerable populations further into distress.



SOCIO-ECONOMIC VULNERABILITIES AND FOOD INSECURITY

- **Poverty and Unemployment:**

A significant portion of the population lives in poverty, with high unemployment rates and limited livelihood opportunities. This reduces resilience to shocks and increases dependence on humanitarian aid during crises.

- **Food Insecurity:**

Despite agricultural potential, food insecurity remains a major concern due to factors like climate change (erratic rainfall, floods), market disruptions, and high import dependency. This necessitates ongoing food assistance programs.

- **Inflation and Cost of Living:**

Rising inflation and the increased cost of living, often exacerbated by global events, reduced purchasing power and deepened humanitarian needs.



CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS

- **Extreme Weather Events:**

Sierra Leone is highly vulnerable to climate change impacts, including unpredictable weather patterns, severe flooding (especially in urban areas like Freetown), and destructive mudslides. These events led to displacement, damage to infrastructure, and loss of livelihoods, requiring recurrent emergency responses.



In Bendu Community, three-month-old Lansama Keroma is vaccinated by Lucy Vincent, 50, of the UNIVAC mobility team.

- **Environmental Degradation:**

Deforestation and unsustainable land use practices contributed to environmental degradation, increased the risk of natural disasters and impacted agricultural productivity.



GOVERNANCE AND COORDINATION

- **Capacity of Local Institutions:**

While there's a strong push for localization in humanitarian aid, the capacity of local government institutions and national NGOs to lead and coordinate responses can sometimes be limited, requiring significant support and capacity building from international partners.

- **Corruption:**

Corruption remains a significant challenge, potentially diverting resources away from intended clients and undermining public trust in institutions and aid efforts. This necessitates robust accountability and transparency mechanisms in humanitarian operations.

- **Coordination Challenges:**

Ensuring effective coordination among numerous international and national humanitarian actors, government bodies, and local communities proved challenging when trying to avoid duplication of efforts and ensure aid reaches those most in need.



PROTECTION ISSUES AND SOCIAL DYNAMICS

- **Gender-Based Violence (GBV):**

High rates of GBV persist, especially affecting women and girls, exacerbated during crises. Humanitarian responses must integrate strong protection components and support services.

- **Stigmatization and Misinformation:**

During health emergencies, stigmatization (e.g., related to Mpox or Ebola) and the spread of misinformation can hinder prevention efforts, case reporting, and access to treatment, complicating humanitarian health interventions.

- **Community Engagement:**

Building trust and ensuring genuine community engagement is crucial for effective humanitarian action, particularly in a context where traditional beliefs can influence health practices and disaster response.



Joseph Sandi, district clinical mentor, teaches midwife mentors in Nengbema Community, Bo. By training midwives, promoting data-driven decision-making, and assisting with integrated supervision and mentorship checklist reviews, the IRC supported the Saving Lives through Integrated Peer Mentorship (SLiPM) project.



SECTION 3

Client Success Stories and Case Studies

ABOVE: Gibrinatu B. Dumbuya, 18 years old, had to stop school at class 5. Her husband didn't have money for her to finish. Now her husband has left and she has no one else to support her financially. Gibrinatu graduated from EAGER and used the grant money to buy stock for her stall.

From Struggle to Strength: Iye Koroma's Journey Toward Economic Empowerment

In the quiet village of Ngola, nestled within Valunia Chiefdom, 49-year-old Iye Koroma is rewriting her story. A widow and mother of six, Iye has long relied on petty trading and smallholder farming to support her household and fund her children's education including one child at Njala University's Bo Campus and another in senior secondary school.

For over six years, Iye sold salt, vegetables, onions, pepper, and food seasonings in modest quantities. Despite her determination, the lack of financial support from relatives and minimal farming income made it impossible to grow her business. Her savings, stored in a handmade wooden "cash box," were often compromised—her son would break into it, leaving her with nothing to reinvest.



Iye sitting by her expanded business after receiving her cash grant and VSLA Share-Out – March 2024.

“I was overjoyed,” she shared. “With this money, I can finally expand my business and sell plastic bowls, imported rice, and local palm oil.”

Everything changed in December 2022, when Iye joined the Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) in Ngola. Though initially hesitant about making weekly contributions due to slow sales, she quickly found that the group offered more than just financial structure, it gave her hope. Through the VSLA, Iye began saving consistently and accessing small loans to stabilize her business.

She also participated in Business Development Skills sessions facilitated by the IRC, where she learned practical tools for record keeping, customer care, and business planning. In February 2024, her efforts paid off: Iye presented a successful business plan and was awarded a grant of SLE 5,400 (approximately €214.80) through the Adolescent Girls Empowerment and Protection Program (AGEPP) Phase II project.

“I was overjoyed,” she shared. “With this money, I can finally expand my business and sell plastic bowls, imported rice, and local palm oil.”

Her momentum continued. In December 2024, Iye received her share of the VSLA group's annual Share-Out—an interest-bearing return on her year-long savings. With renewed confidence and capital, she's now on a path to financial independence and long-term stability.

Iye's story is a testament to the power of community-led savings, targeted training, and donor-supported grants. Through AGEPP Phase II, women like Iye are not only building businesses—they're building futures.

Justice in Golu: How VSLA Women Fought Back Against Theft and Won

In Gollu, a bustling community in Baoma Chiefdom, Bo District—known for its sand and alluvial diamond mining—women once lived in the shadows of vulnerability. Before May 2022, many lacked access to basic knowledge about Gender-Based Violence (GBV), referral pathways, and economic empowerment. That changed when the IRC launched a transformative initiative, forming a Women Action Group and delivering training on GBV core principles, psychosocial First Aid, and legal referral systems.

As part of the intervention, under the Adolescent Girls Empowerment and Protection Program (AGEPP) Phase II project, the women established a Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA), enabling them to save collectively and access small loans. For twelve months, the group thrived, building financial confidence and solidarity.

But in January 2024, their trust was shaken. During the annual share-out, the group discovered that SLE10,053 (USD 432) was missing from their locked metal cash box. Investigations revealed that the box keeper's two sons, aged 14 and 21, had tampered with the box and stolen the funds.



Golu VSLA women in Bo District at a share out meeting, planning to seek redress for stolen VSLA money from the metal cash box in January 2024

The women mobilized swiftly. They first sought resolution through community leaders, but when the box keeper's husband failed to honor his promise to repay, and responded with hostility, they escalated the matter to the Sierra Leone Police in Gerihun. Despite initial resistance from officers, the women persisted, demanding accountability.

This incident became more than a theft recovery, it was a turning point. The women implemented stronger financial safeguards and reinforced governance within their VSLA. More importantly, they proved that grassroots mobilization, legal literacy, and collective action can drive justice and protect community assets.

Their determination paid off. The police launched an investigation, arrested the perpetrators, and recovered the stolen funds. The box keeper's husband issued a formal apology, and the VSLA was able to complete its share-out in the fourth week of January using the refunded money and remaining savings.

This incident became more than a theft recovery, it was a turning point. The women implemented stronger financial safeguards and reinforced governance within their VSLA. More importantly, they proved that grassroots mobilization, legal literacy, and collective action can drive justice and protect community assets.

Building More Than Bricks: How Adolescent Girls in Kpumbu Sparked Community Ownership

In the remote village of Kpumbu, Baoma Chiefdom, Bo District, a long-standing dream was quietly taking shape. For nearly four years, residents had hoped to construct a new “barray”—a multipurpose community meeting space to replace the aging structure built in 1965. Despite promises from stakeholders and diaspora descendants, progress remained stalled.

That changed in May 2019, when the IRC launched the Adolescent Girls Empowerment and Protection Project (AGEPP) in Kpumbu. During the initial community engagement meeting—held in the dilapidated barray—adolescent girls saw firsthand the need for a safe, functional space. Inspired by the project's focus on social responsibility, they chose to make the barray construction of barray community initiative across the three years of AGEPP project intervention.

The girls mobilized sand, stone, and water from within their community to mold 1,250 cement bricks... [They] contributed corrugated iron sheets and roofing nails, bringing the building closer to completion. Their sustained involvement demonstrated that adolescent girls are not just beneficiaries of development, they are its architects.



Golu VSLA women in Bo District at a share out meeting, planning to seek redress for stolen VSLA money from the metal cash box in January 2024

Between April 2019 and March 2020, the girls mobilized sand, stone, and water from within their community to mold 1,250 cement bricks. With IRC support—including 60 bags of cement, brick molding containers, shovels, and head pans—they laid the foundation for the new barray. Their visible commitment sparked renewed interest from other residents, who began pledging donations toward the project.

By March 2021, the girls had donated 50 plastic chairs for community use, facilitated sanitation campaigns, disinfected household and school toilets, and led COVID-19 awareness efforts. They distributed facemasks and hygiene supplies, reinforcing their role as health advocates and community leaders. Their activism reignited donor commitments, enabling the construction of the barray's superstructure and procurement of roofing boards.

From April 2021 to March 2022, the girls contributed corrugated iron sheets and roofing nails, bringing the building closer to completion. Their sustained involvement demonstrated that adolescent girls are not just beneficiaries of development, they are its architects.

LEGACY AND THE WAY FORWARD

The International Rescue Committee's 26-year journey in Sierra Leone is one of resilience, partnership, and transformation. From responding to emergencies in the aftermath of war to strengthening health systems during Ebola and COVID-19, the IRC has been a trusted partner, standing side by side with communities through their most difficult times.

Our legacy is not only reflected in the millions of lives reached but in the stronger local systems and organizations now leading the way. The establishment and growth of **RAINBO Initiative** as well as the expansion of **Defence for Children International Sierra Leone (DCI-SL)**, **Falaba District Women's Network**, and **MoPADA** are clear examples of how shared capacity and long-term partnership can create lasting change. Today, these organizations continue to champion protection, empowerment, health, and livelihoods at scale a proof to the vision of localization and sustainability that has guided IRC's work.

As the IRC closes its country program in Sierra Leone, this is not a departure but a transition. We hand over the torch to capable national partners who are embedded in their communities, deeply trusted, and determined to continue the mission of creating a safer, healthier, and more prosperous Sierra Leone. We are confident that the work will not only continue but will grow in strength and relevance.

The way forward is clear: to continue building on the foundation laid, to ensure strong national leadership, and to support a future where Sierra Leone's people are empowered to thrive. The IRC is proud to have been part of this journey and remains deeply committed to Sierra Leone's success through global partnerships, advocacy, and solidarity.

This closing chapter is a celebration of what has been achieved and a call to continue advancing the progress made. The future is bright, and together, Sierra Leone will keep moving forward with resilience, dignity, and hope.

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) helps people affected by humanitarian crises to survive, recover and rebuild their lives. We deliver lasting impact by providing health care, helping children learn, and empowering individuals and communities to become self-reliant, always with a focus on the unique needs of women and girls. Founded in 1933 at the call of Albert Einstein, we now work in over 40 crisis-affected countries as well as communities throughout Europe and the Americas.

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