

Sierra Leone

GoBifo - Strengthening Social Capital through Capacity Development

A pilot initiative in Sierra Leone has successfully demonstrated the benefits that can result from enabling communities to take charge of their own development. The “GoBifo” Project, (GoBifo means “forge ahead” in Sierra Leone’s Krio language), was supported

by the JSDF and aimed at strengthening social capital at the community level. The project also aimed to strengthen the relationship between villages and wards, their most proximate locus of state administration and work closely with District Councils engaged in a national decentralization reform program.

The bottom-up approach embodied in *GoBifo* was very successful at energizing and mobilizing the target communities, which were provided funding to develop specific sub-projects. As well as physical improvements in infrastructure and livelihood opportunities, the project resulted in a number of “soft” benefits, notably more inclusive decision-making

processes that now include previously marginalized groups, improved trust, conflict resolution mechanisms and the ability to plan and execute collective local action plans.



The Project

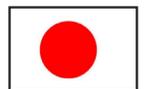
The Project had three components:

1. Capacity Development for Village and Ward Planning - this component aimed to create durable village-level institutions, notably forming or strengthening Village Development Committees (VDCs). A focal point for development interventions, the VDCs played a coordinating and advocacy role with other donors, line ministries and Ward Committees. Through the JSDF project, the VDCs were provided assistance to prepare Village Development Plans (VDPs). Ward Development Plans (WDPs) were also to be prepared reflected needs articulated through the VDPs and existing plans developed by local Councils (through the support of the Bank-financed Institutional Reform and Capacity-Building Project). Inclusion of vulnerable groups was a central facet of all planning activities.

2. Capacity Development to Manage Block Grants and Community-Driven Initiatives - To translate planning into action, the project provided funds which were delivered as block grants to villages and wards. Based on the VDPs and WDPs,

“The GoBifo methodology does not consider beneficiaries as mere end users of development products and services. GoBifo instead considers the beneficiaries as both producers and end users. In simple terms, the GoBifo project has empowered beneficiary communities ‘to eat what they choose to cook for themselves and not what others choose to cook for them’...”

*- Abdul Rahman Dumbuya,
Provincial Secretary of the
Northern Region*



communities were able to select sub-projects and receive development grants. These were delivered in phases, with a second phase following from the successful implementation of the first. Inclusion of poor and vulnerable groups in all stages of project implementation was an important success criterion.

3. Capacity Development for Monitoring and Evaluation. Rigorous monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is essential to validate lessons learned from pilot projects. This component enabled the communities to identify relevant indicators, and decide how and when to collect the necessary data. By using this system to track processes, sub-projects, and changes in indicators of social capital and conflict, the communities were able to contribute critical lessons on empowerment and social capital of particular interest within the broader development community. The component also included monitoring by media and journalists, NGOs and others and an emphasis on knowledge sharing through stakeholder exchanges. Provision was also made for an independent evaluation which might subsequently provide lessons for the scaling up of Community-Driven Development (CDD) in Sierra Leone and other post-conflict environments.



gara tie-dyeing and vegetable gardening with less visible “software” aspects that reflect the skills and knowledge gained by communities, improved community networking, positive changes in attitude and greater mutual trust, participation, ability to take collective action, transparency and accountability in decision-making.

Building capacity - Communities were trained in a range of skills in support of their sub-projects. These included project proposal writing, communication skills, advocacy and team building as well as in specific techniques that opened up or enhanced opportunities for livelihood improvement. The latter led to the identification of a wide range of income generating projects, notably by women, including soap making, garri (cassava) processing, and gara tie-dye. Youth similarly identified capacity needs that included skills training in carpentry, masonry, metalworking and auto-mechanics. The income generating projects have been extremely helpful in improving the well-being of individual community members.

The investment in local capacity building for both communities and wards has produced rich dividends in terms of collective action, mutual responsibility, civic engagement in local governance and ownership over local initiatives. Perhaps surprisingly, the block grants to communities have had a more positive impact than those provided to the wards, perhaps reflecting the level of demand and ownership fostered in *GoBifo* communities.

Developing trust and accountability - A critical benefit of the *GoBifo* project was the level of trust it built in the target communities. This was found to be largely dependent on the degree of transparency

Participatory Planning

To further improve the quality of results from the M&E, and recognizing the limited pool of funds available, the *GoBifo* villages and wards in the two pilot districts were selected using a lottery. Eighty-four villages and 19 wards were selected in the Bombali District and 40 villages and 8 wards in the Bonthe District. Under the block grant scheme, each participating village received a first payment of 9 million Leones (approximately \$1,700). Based on successful performance, this was followed by a phase 2 payment of 5 million Leones (approximately \$3,000). Each ward also received an initial sum of 20 million Leones (approximately \$6,800), again in two tranches.

In all cases, local facilitators from the *GoBifo* field teams ran participatory workshops that used various simulation tools such as village mapping, venn diagrams, semi-guided interviews, problem and opportunity mapping and dream maps. This led to the compilation of 124 Village Development Plans (VDPs) complete with project activities and budgets and 27 Ward Development Plans (WDPs).

Results

The project has carefully balanced the delivery of highly visible “hardware” projects such as well-equipped primary schools, health clinics, culverts, drains wells, latrines, cassava processing machines, soap making,

Project Data

- Implementing Agency: Ministry of Local Government and Community Development
- Grant (TF053440) Amount: US\$1.88 million
- Implementation Period: 02/23/2005 to 06/15/2009

and accountability exercised at the village and ward levels. This emphasis was introduced by *GoBifo* staff during training for communities from the pilot districts. As became clear in the workshops, this approach was a welcomed break from past experiences, where project implementers had served as contractors but did not always account for the use of resources and/or sometimes implemented activities messily and subsequently disappeared.

Against this background, there is now an increasing awareness in most of the communities supported by *GoBifo* that village development committees and ward development committees are now obliged to account publicly for the use of financial and material resources entrusted to them.

This trend has been supported by improved project-supported capacities in areas such as project conceptualization, design, implementation and maintenance, together with a better understanding of the processes surrounding the operation of personal and community bank accounts.

In contrast to previous practice where decisions in communities were taken by traditional opinion leaders and their council of elders on behalf of the communities without consultation, the *GoBifo* methodology has brought **a new emphasis on collective decision making**. This being broadly interpreted to include all segments and facets of a beneficiary community, particularly the marginalized and disadvantaged. This apparently radical shift was accomplished with little resistance, primarily as transparency, openness and inclusion were not seen as particularly threatening by those who fill the traditional roles. This, coupled with the rapid results produced by the project in what were communities without a history of CSO initiatives, seemed to largely negate any sensitivities.

Soft Governance - the *GoBifo* Steering Committee includes the Ministry of Local Government, the Decentralisation Secretariat and National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA) and civil society representatives. Lessons learned have been shared among this group to inform policy and practice with respect to community development and local civic engagement.

Empowerment - The *GoBifo* Project has empowered communities in the Bombali and Bonthe Districts to direct their own development process. In collaboration with project beneficiaries, *GoBifo* has influenced the development process to become more inclusive and cost-effective, strengthened the linkages between communities and government and has provided its target beneficiaries with skills and organizational structures that promote more

sustainable development. A large number of sub-projects have been supported in diverse sectors. Roughly 43% of the grants have been allocated to agricultural support activities, 22% to education sector initiatives, and 15% to skills training.

Social Inclusion - by and large, women, youth, the aged and disabled persons were included as active participants in the community meetings and project decision making activities in both pilot districts. Marginalized groups in villages and wards are reported to have participated in the use of appropriate participatory tools and to have promoted the identification of project activities that address their development challenges during the initiation and conceptualization phase of their projects.

Mainstreaming a successful pilot - As an outcome of the project, *GoBifo* facilitators have built up a valuable set of skills in local capacity building using direct community financing and participatory planning approaches. There have been numerous calls for the project to extend its operations either into other villages in the current pilot districts or into other districts. The technical expertise and methodological innovations accumulated in the implementation of *GoBifo* initiatives in the pilot districts are now accessible to other vulnerable communities.



GoBifo itself has become an institution with strong brand recognition in participating districts. Replication of *GoBifo* approaches is now being pursued across a variety of sectors, including rural development, social protection and artesanal mining.

Lessons Learned

A key result of the pilot is an understanding of the importance of the **critical investment in social capital** as an underlying denominator in the successful results chain of a project. Even with relatively small village block grants, achieving the appropriate balance between capacity building versus asset building can have significant payback and result in major dividends.

A second important contributing factor to the success of the project, and the ongoing enthusiasm for *GoBifo* in the communities and government, was the **effectiveness of the locally selected field teams**. These not only proved adept at developing relationships with the communities but also went the extra mile to be present in the communities. This finding is consistent with the results from other JSDF projects, typically associated with NGOs/CSOs - the characteristics of the implementing agency matter. Local knowledge, experience and commitment on the part of these agencies typically produces better results. The dynamism introduced by *GoBifo* was further highlighted by the fact that around 90% of the sub-projects were initiated even prior to the arrival of the funds.

A critical benefit of the *GoBifo* project was **the level of trust it built in the targeted communities**. This was found to be largely dependent on the degree of transparency and accountability exercised at the village and ward levels. The *GoBifo* methodology has brought a new emphasis on collective decision making that involves all segments and facets of a beneficiary community, particularly the marginalized and disadvantaged.

Monitoring and Evaluation - The randomised lottery method used to select pilot communities

“The *GoBifo* approach is the best we in Wongifor village have ever been exposed to”, said youth leader Boakei Elba during the field tour, disclosing that the project team gave his village “...a small money but with sufficient orientation, training and motivation” and then “left us in full control of the grant which we used to set up an effective cassava processing machine”.



“Now this cassava processing project has succeeded in killing several birds for us with one tiny stone - we are now processing cassava into *foofoo*, *toh* and *garrie* at a faster and cheaper rate for our own consumption and for sale to other villages; we charge a processing fee for use of the machine itself in order to generate income for the new Wongifor Village Trust Fund on Emergencies; we have gained new skills and experience in record keeping, bank transactions, participatory procurement, accounting and demanding accountability during the course of the project implementation, and the project has served as a rallying point for mending fences between sworn enemies which has built trust in the village as a whole and has made it more easier now than before for us to act collectively”.

caused some tension throughout the life of the project (as to why some communities were ineligible to benefit from *GoBifo*, having been assigned to the control group). This suggests both the need for a clear communications strategy and expectation management in pilot projects of this nature. Rigorous impact evaluation results and demonstration cases are essential in CDD programs - if they are to be mainstreamed and scaled. Local, participatory M&E undertaken by communities also has a huge impact in terms of social accountability and capacity to pressure and influence change.

About this Note

This note has benefited from input from the Task Team Leader, Daniel Owen, Sr. Social Development Specialist, Sustainable Development Department, Europe and Central Asia (ECA) Region.

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The Japan Social Development Fund -- The JSDF is a partnership between the Government of Japan and the World Bank that supports innovative social programs in developing countries. JSDF grants are executed by NGOs/CSOs and local governments and implemented at the community level. JSDF projects meet four basic requirements: (i) they target and respond to the needs of poor, vulnerable, and disadvantaged groups, and aim to achieve rapid results, (ii) they are innovative and pilot alternative approaches or partnerships, (iv) they use participatory designs and stakeholder consultation to design inputs and as an integral part of monitoring and evaluation, (iii) they empower local communities, local governments, NGOs/CSOs through capacity building and rapid feedback of lessons learned, and (v) they focus on scale-up potential, replication and the sustainability of interventions.