



**PEACEBUILDING
FUND** 



ADVANCING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AND SUSTAINING PEACE IN SIERRA LEONE

THE 'LOCALIZATION AND WORKING TOGETHER FOR PEACE:
REPOSITIONING WOMEN-FOCUSED CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS
FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACE IN SIERRA LEONE' PROJECT
IMPACT NEWSLETTER 2023-2025



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**THE UN PEACEBUILDING FUND
LOCALIZATION AND WORKING TOGETHER FOR PEACE PROJECT
SIERRA LEONE IMPACT NEWSLETTER**

BUILDING PEACE IN SIERRA LEONE THROUGH WOMEN

Sierra Leone's 11-year civil war (1991–2002) left deep scars, with over 50,000 deaths and lasting socio-economic challenges. While post-war recovery has been significant, political polarization, ethnic divisions, and marginalization remain sources of tension. Women played critical roles in harnessing peace during the 11-year war and continue to contribute to bringing democratic rule in the country and to the restoration of peace.

In 1995, the Sierra Leone Women's Movement for Peace in collaboration with other women's groups galvanized support for democracy through the Bintumani 1 and 2. Although women make up over 50% of the population, they currently hold less than 30% of elected positions.

However, there is a growing awareness of the importance of women's participation in decision making and efforts are being made to address barriers including gender-based violence, particularly during elections, to encourage more women to engage in the political process.

Addressing these inequalities is critical to ensuring sustainable peace and inclusive governance which this project successfully demonstrated.





In 2009, Sierra Leone became the 4th country in West Africa and 7th in Africa to develop a National Action Plan (NAP) for the full implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security. Sierra Leone recently developed and launched its third generation National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 (2024- 2029).

The United Nations Peacebuilding Fund (PBF)'s *Localization and Working Together for Peace Project*, jointly implemented by the United Nations Entity for the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and World Vision International (WVI), seeks to strengthen the institutional capacity of Women-Focused Civil Society Organizations (CSO)'s to coordinate their effort in sustaining peace and enhance the safety and security of women and girls in Sierra Leone.

This has been done through the launch of a coalition of 120 (now grown to 150) Women-Focused Peace and Security CSOs with six established secretariats in Bombali, Karene, Pujehun, Kono, Western area Rural and Western area Urban districts.

This is to ensure CSOs have necessary technical and institutional capacity to function and deliver as one coordinated entity and network and enable them to make them work together as a collective force to prevent conflict, carry out mitigation efforts as well as promote equal participation of women at both national and community level.



A 2019 UN Women study identified major gaps in women-led CSOs, including perceived elitism, limited outreach to rural communities, and a focus on short-term projects.

To address these challenges, UN Women, UNDP, and World Vision launched the Strengthening Women-Focused Civil Society Organizations for Peace and Security in Sierra Leone project, funded by the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund (PBF).

The initiative aimed to enhance coordination and institutional capacity among 150 women-focused CSOs to influence political and peace processes, particularly ahead of the 2023 general elections.

The project aligns with Sierra Leone's Medium-Term National Development Plan (2019–2023) and UN Security Council Resolution 1325, reinforcing global commitments to gender equality and peace.

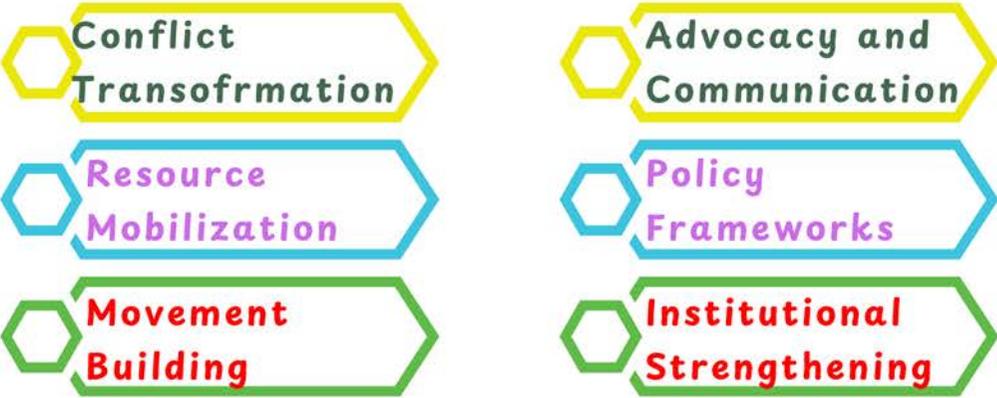


PROJECT GOALS

The Localization project aimed to strengthen institutional capacity and create a unified Women-Focused CSO Coalition for peace and security.

Through training, joint advocacy, and partnerships, the project supported CSOs in addressing gender-based violence, political participation, and electoral processes. A key component was the development of a Women’s Manifesto, ensuring women’s priorities were represented before, during, and after elections.

The initiative also focused on enhancing access to justice and fostering reconciliation efforts by engaging security agencies, government institutions, youth peacebuilders and traditional leaders. **150 Women Peace and Security (WPS) civil society organizations in 6 districts have benefited from the project through:**



These trainings enhanced CSOs’ skills and capacity to advocate for gender-sensitive policies and contribute to conflict prevention and sustaining peace locally.

STRENGTHENING WOMEN-FOCUSED ORGANIZATIONS

Women's civil society organizations (CSOs) have actively engaged in conflict prevention and governance advocacy, with inspiration from UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

Their efforts are contributing to the implementation and popularization of the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Act, mandating 30% female representation in governance.

However, persistent patriarchal norms, election-related violence, and weak institutional support continue to limit women's leadership roles.

Many CSOs operate in isolation, leading to duplication of efforts and reduced impact. Strengthening alliances, ensuring sustainable funding, and improving coordination among CSOs are critical to amplifying women's voices in political and peacebuilding spaces.

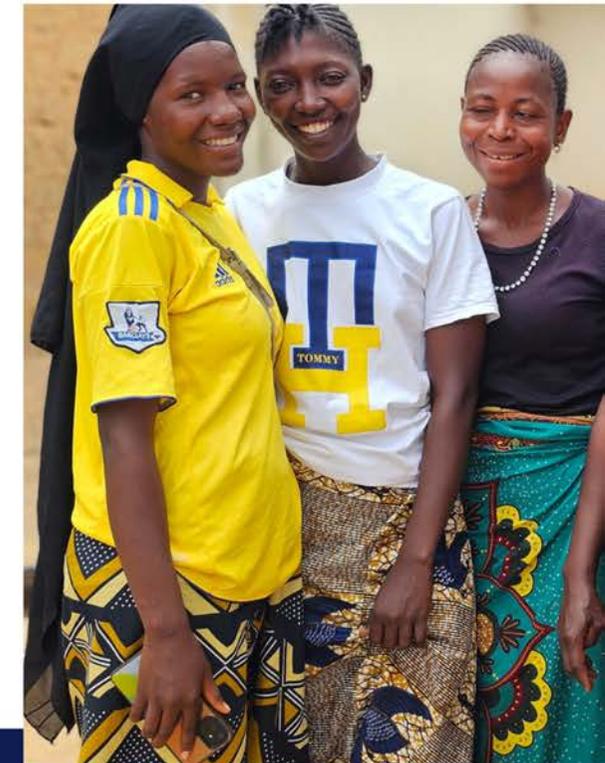


SIERRA LEONE'S WOMEN IN PEACEBUILDING

Women have played a crucial role in peacebuilding in Sierra Leone. From the Bintumani Conferences (1995–1996) to their involvement in the Elections Situation Room which led to peace and contributed to credible elections since 2002. Since then, women-led organizations have been instrumental in voter mobilization, legal advocacy, and conflict prevention.

However, despite these contributions, their influence remains limited due to a lack of organizational capacity, fragmentation, and insufficient financial support.

The Women's Situation Room, established with support from UN Women that played a vital role in mitigating election-related violence lacked long-term sustainability.



**Strengthening women's participation
in governance and conflict resolution
remains essential for national
stability.**



PARTNERSHIPS AND IMPLEMENTATION



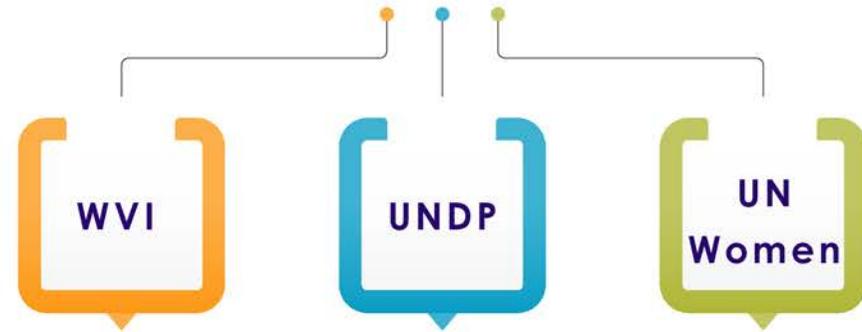
From the project's outset, consultations were done with women's organizations, government agencies, and community leaders to inform the project's design.

Discussions with the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs, the Independent Commission for Peace and National Cohesion, and the Sierra Leone Police ensured alignment with national peace strategies.

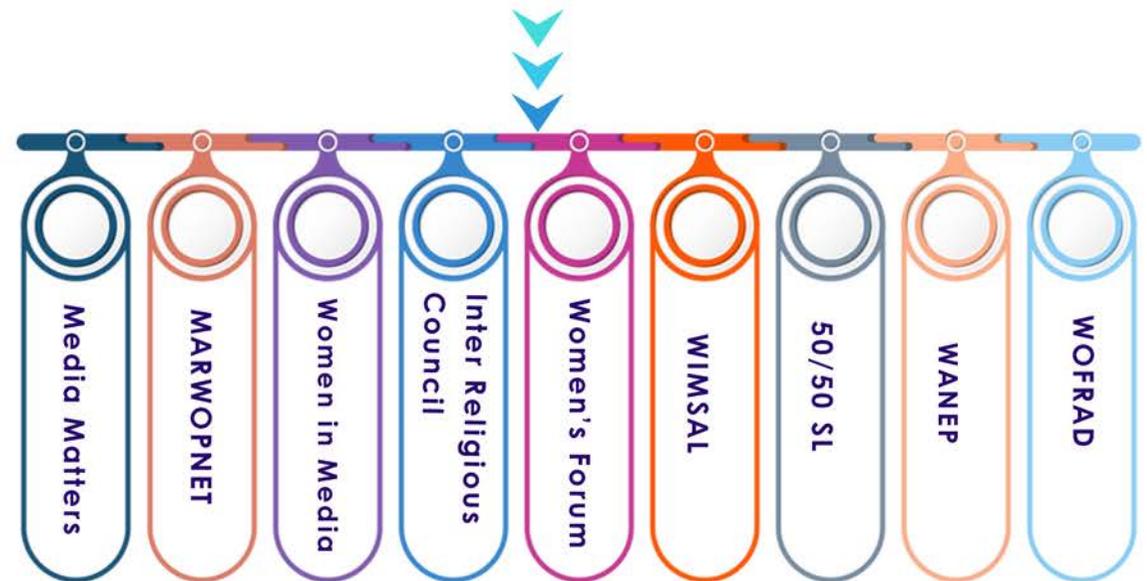


Regional engagements took place in Bombali, Pujehun, Kono, and Western Areas, ensuring grassroots participation in decision-making. The findings emphasized the need for a coalition to drive collective advocacy and promote women's political inclusion.

IMPLEMENTATION STRUCTURE



CSO Coalition
Project Implementing Partners



PROJECT LOCATIONS



These districts were identified as security hotspots by the National Threat Assessment conducted by the Office of National Security (ONS) ahead of the 2023 general elections. In alignment to this assessment, the project ensured that interventions targeted the highest security risk districts.



KEY OUTCOMES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Women-Focused Civil Society Organizations' Formation and Coordination

Repositioning Women-Focused CSOs for Sustainable Peace in Sierra Leone.



01

CSO Coalition Established

A Women-Focused CSO Coalition of 150 members was successfully established.

Repositioning Women-Focused CSOs for Sustainable Peace in Sierra Leone.



02

CSO Coalition Secretariat Established

A national secretariat and regional networks to coordinate peace and security interventions.

03

'Working Together' Manual developed

A Working Together Manual was developed to guide coalition efforts, alongside training programs on UNSCR 1325, gender-responsive budgeting, advocacy, and financial management.



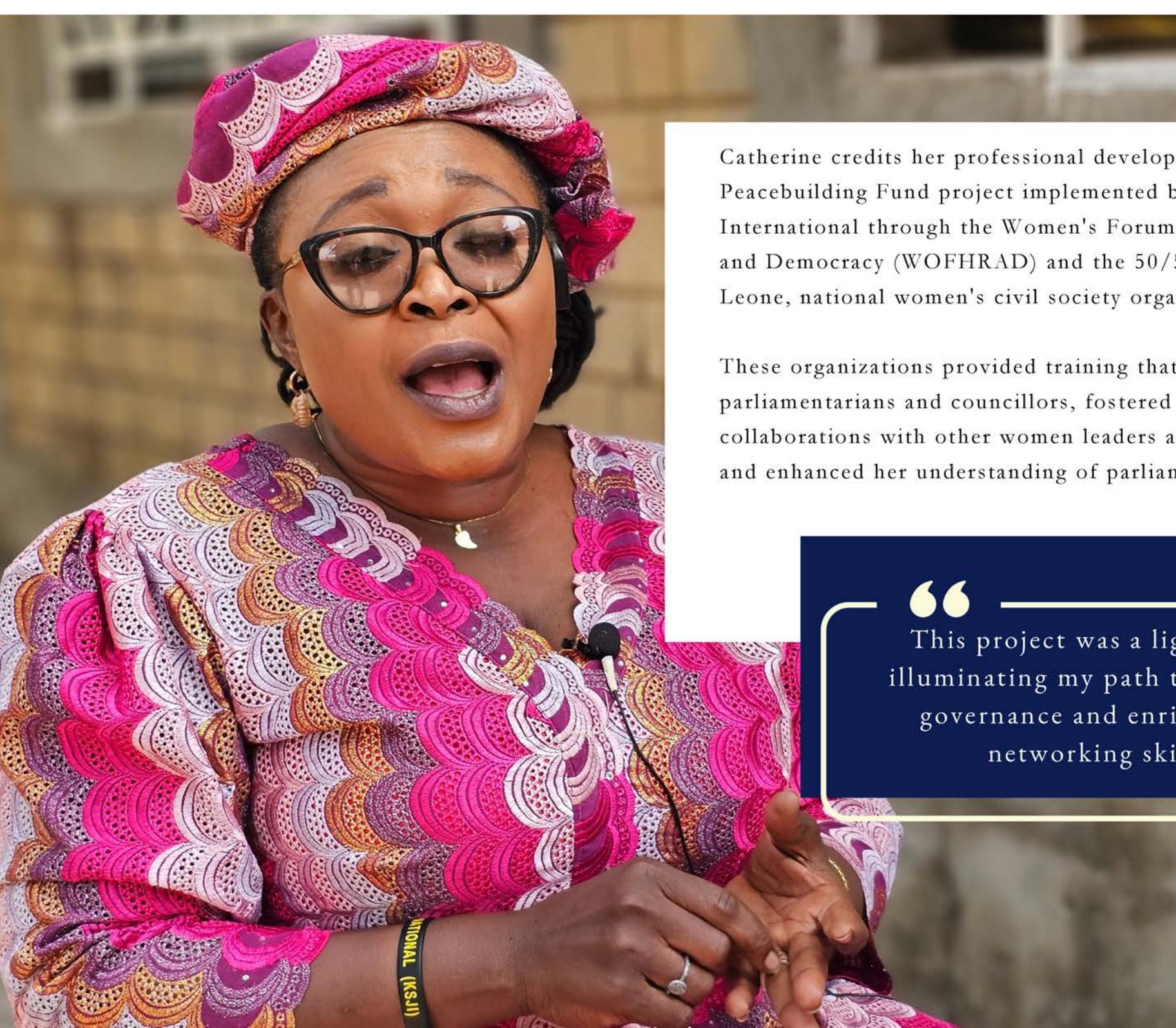
EMPOWERED LEADERSHIP

Catherine Zainab Tarawally's Journey

“The leadership and lobbying skills I gained during the training have greatly helped me in my role as the Chairperson for the Gender and Child Protection Committee in Parliament. These skills were instrumental in the swift enactment of the Prohibition of Early Marriage Act of 2024.”

Catherine Zainab Tarawally is not only a dedicated Member of Parliament representing Constituency 30, but she also chairs the Gender and Child Protection Committee thanks to her tireless advocacy and deep commitment to creating meaningful change.

Catherine skillfully navigates governance complexities, collaborating effectively with local councillors to address community needs, particularly through her leadership in the district box system.



Catherine credits her professional development to the UN Peacebuilding Fund project implemented by World Vision International through the Women's Forum for Human Rights and Democracy (WOFHRAD) and the 50/50 Group Sierra Leone, national women's civil society organizations.

These organizations provided training that clarified the roles of parliamentarians and councillors, fostered stronger collaborations with other women leaders and aspiring leaders, and enhanced her understanding of parliamentary procedures.

“ This project was a lighthouse, illuminating my path to effective governance and enriched my networking skills. ”



The knowledge and skills Catherine gained have strengthened her advocacy, enabling her to better represent her constituents. Her leadership in passing the Prohibition of Early Marriage Act of 2024 exemplifies her determination to address critical issues affecting women and children.

Catherine's story highlights the far-reaching impact of capacity-building initiatives. Her growth as a leader not only enhances her ability to drive change but also inspires other women to pursue leadership roles.

She passionately calls for the continuation of such programs, emphasizing their essential role in improving governance and fostering collaboration.

“

True peace is achievable with the inclusion of women's voices and participation in national decision-making processes.

”



KEY OUTCOMES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Enhancing Women's Political Participation and Leadership

04

Strengthened Women's Political Participation

573 women were trained and mentored as candidates, leading to 16 being elected to Parliament and 68 becoming councillors

05

Women's Leadership at Local Level

Women also gained representation in local court juries, a role historically reserved for men.

06

Community Engagement Initiatives

Advocacy campaigns on prevention of gender-based violence, hate speech, and election security reached thousands, fostering a safer electoral environment.



SUCCESS STORY

Gal pikin lapa nor dae lef na road.

Well known as Councilor Amzo P, Aminata challenges the male-dominated political sphere, inspired by the Krio saying, "Gal pikin lapa nor dae lef na road," meaning:

“
A girl or woman will not
break no matter the
circumstances she faces.
”

At 36, Councillor Aminata S. Bangura, a devoted mother of four daughters and expecting her fifth child, is transforming Sierra Leone's political landscape. Well known as Councilor Amzo P, Aminata challenges the male-dominated political sphere, inspired by the Krio saying, "Gal pikin lapa nor dae lef na road," meaning:

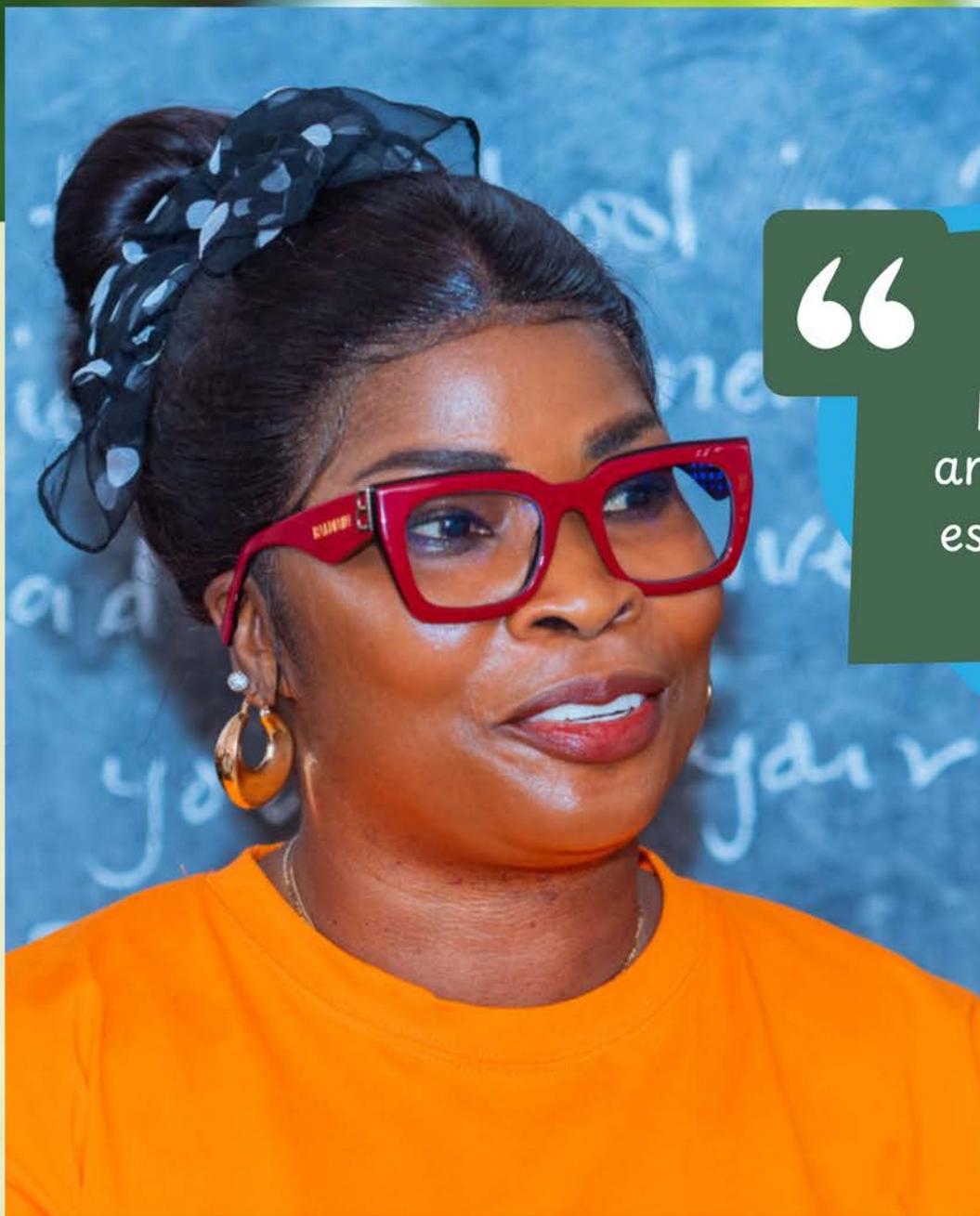
A first year student pursuing a graduate degree in Development Studies at the University of Makeni while serving Ward 127 in Bombali district, she epitomizes resilience.



Venturing into male-dominated spaces like 'Ataya Bases,' she overcame skepticism and secured a seat in the Bombali district council, and becoming the district's chairperson for the development committee.

Beyond politics, the UN Women-led Localizing WPS/PBF Project, implemented jointly with UNDP and World Vision International, inspired Aminata to pursue higher education, reinforcing her role in family decisions and fostering mutual respect.

Her success story is mirrored by the 84 women who, through PBF's support, have won parliamentary and council seats, challenging gender barriers.



“

Strengthening women's participation in governance and conflict resolution remains essential for national stability.

”

DR. ISATA BOI BENDU MAHOI,
Minister for Gender and Children's Affairs
Sierra Leone



KEY OUTCOMES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Impact on Peacebuilding

07

Crucial role in ensuring peaceful 2023 elections

Reached 211,064 people through social media, radio, and community forums. Peace marches, civic education, and voter mobilization efforts helped counter electoral violence.

08

Support to Law Enforcement

Partnerships with security forces and the judiciary enhanced mechanisms to address electoral violence and promote justice for survivors of gender-based violence.

09

Community Peacebuilding

60 ‘Peace Ambassadors’ were identified and trained to lead peacebuilding and conflict prevention within communities at local level across the five project implementation districts.



FEATURE STORY

Youth for peace

Across Sierra Leone, the Peacebuilding project has given rise to **60 youth peace ambassadors** tasked with transforming communities, one dialogue at a time dedicated to conflict resolution and social cohesion in their communities.

Among them is **Kingsling, 20** years, a university student. Through training provided by the PBF-supported CSO coalition member-WOFHRAD, Kingsling has become a key figure in grassroots peacebuilding.

With support from local leaders he organizes weekly community peace meetings, focusing on conflict resolution, youth engagement, and fostering a culture of non-violence.

These meetings have proven crucial, particularly for young people who are most vulnerable and prone to crime and violence exacerbated by increasing drug and harmful substance abuse.

Kingsling and his peers like **Mohamed**, **19** years, also take the peace awareness and advocacy messages to local youth gangs, urging them to abandon violence and focus on rebuilding their lives and community.

“As a result, many young men stopped using *kush* (a harmful illicit drug) and distanced themselves from gang-related activities. These peace messages saved us,” says Mohamed.

“But there are still many others who need to be reached with these messages.” he adds hoping for the initiative to spread to more communities.





For **Alice, 20** years, the peace dialogues have had a profound impact on her personal life.

“When we started these ‘peace talks,’ I didn’t realize how much they would change me. My partner and I struggled with conflicts at home, and domestic violence seemed like the only way out. But after attending the peace meetings, we learned how to communicate and resolve our problems differently.”

By applying the lessons from these meetings, Alice and her partner not only transformed their relationship but also became role models for others in their community.

“We now help other couples dealing with domestic conflicts,” she shared.

“
Sometimes, all we need is to
hear the truth from someone
else to recognize the problems
in our own families.
”



Mariama, a 50-year-old community resident, reflects on how Kingsling and his ‘peace mission’ have impacted their lives as a community.

“Before Kingsling started this peacebuilding work, our community was filled with conflicts—at home, on the streets, with neighbors...the youth were addicted to *kush* and we lived in fear. But since he brought these *peace talks* here, we have seen a great transformation.

Now, we can sit together—elders and youth alike—and discuss our issues with respect and find peaceful solutions.”

“The Peace Ambassadors have been a turning point in our lives and in our community. We have struggles always but we learn to choose peaceful means to find solutions.”

“Circumstances around the last elections threatened our peace and social cohesion. This peacebuilding intervention made a lot of changes in our community. It helped to transform our mindset to see things from a peaceful angle. In the recent elections community dialogues focused on how peace can prevail in our community and country Sierra Leone.”

Pa Alimamy,
Section Chief Gbanti
Bombali Distict





PROJECT RESULTS



ENHANCED WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

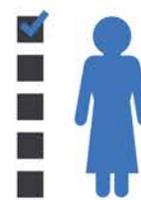
by **strengthening the leadership, advocacy, and campaign skills of 573 female aspirants ahead of the 2023 general elections.** As a direct result, women's representation in national parliament (excluding Paramount Chief Members of Parliament) increased from 14.5% in 2018 to 30.4% in 2023, while the proportion of female local councillors rose from 18.7% to 34% over the same period.



CONTRIBUTED TO A PEACEFUL AND INCLUSIVE GENERAL ELECTION

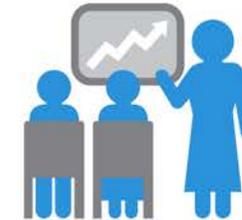
by creating a safe environment for **573 female candidates, and as well enhancing awareness of 1,296,234** citizens on peaceful elections, voting rights and security and safety protocols through community and social media outreaches.

BALLOT



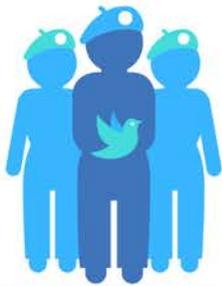
CONTRIBUTED TO INCREASED VOTER REGISTRATION

to **3,374,258 (1,614,729 Male, Female: 1,759,529 female & 22,385 PWDs)** during the 2023 general elections through widespread awareness on voting rights and peaceful electioneering using community and social media approach.



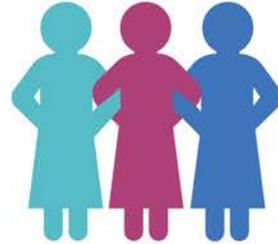
INFLUENCED GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE POLICIES

Through the **41 elected female parliamentarians, policies including the child marriage act** enacted and passed hence advancing the fight against gender-based violence to promote an inclusive and peaceful society.



CONTRIBUTED TO NATIONAL ACTION PLAN

Supported the development of the National Action Plan III (SLINAP third generation) for implementing the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 through broader stakeholder participation including the women-focused CSOs.



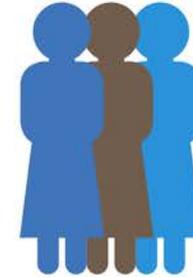
SUPPORTED THE FORMATION OF WOMEN'S-FOCUSED CSO COALITION

Convened a national and district-level coalition of Women-Focused Civil Society Organizations to promote peace and enhance the safety and security of women and girls.



CSO COALITION IMPACT

In Pujehun district, the CSO coalition jointly supported a safe home using their own-pooled resources that has accommodated 207 victims and facilitated the reunification of 102 survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, abuse, neglect, and other risk factors.



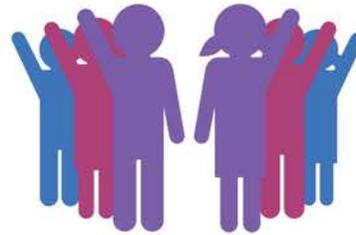
INFLUENCED ELECTION PEACEBUILDING AT COMMUNITY LEVEL

Across all districts implementing the project, 82% of young women including those with disabilities reported feeling safer in their communities following tensions during the general elections.



LED TO CSO'S COLLABORATION AND 'WORKING TOGETHER FOR PEACE'

A rapid monitoring conducted in 2024 found that **72.2% of women-focused civil society organisations reported improved collaboration**, joint advocacy, and networking among CSOs, up from 59% in 2022.



ENHANCED SKILLS OF WOMEN-FOCUSED CSOS

Skills and capabilities of **150 women-focused civil society organizations** were improved enabling them to advocate for gender-sensitive policies and programs and contribute to conflict prevention and dispute resolution.



STRENGTHENED RELEVANT LOCAL POLICIES

Changes in local policies and promoting women's involvement led to women becoming town chiefs and juries in local court, roles previously reserved for men.



LED TO INCREASED REPORTING IN (S)GBV CASES IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

A total of **162 cases were reported** and resolved through the women situation room supported by PBF during and after the elections.

ACHIEVEMENTS IN NUMBERS



573

Women trained in leadership and governance

16%

Increase in Women's representation in Parliament



15%

Rise in Female local council representation



3,374,258

Cumulative people reached with peacebuilding messages



150

Women's Groups formed CSO Coalition

70

Legal practitioners engaged on laws and policies to promote WPS



16

Women elected to Parliament



60

Youth Peace Ambassadors trained in six districts



68

Women became Local Councillors



30

national and international organizations reached through the mentorship program

“ Thanks to the peacebuilding project, we learnt to trust each other and overcame divisions. As women in my community we formed a women’s cooperative to sell our farm products together. With trust there is no fear, no violence, only profits.

”

Yainkain,
Market Trader





SUSTAINING PROGRESS

The project emphasizes the importance of securing long-term funding for women's peacebuilding initiatives, strengthening mentorship programs, and engaging traditional and religious leaders to shift societal attitudes towards women's leadership.

Expanding outreach to rural communities and improving digital advocacy efforts are further mechanisms that the project highlights to enhance women's participation in governance and conflict resolution.



LOOKING FORWARD

While celebrating these successes, the project stayed vigilant on the continuation of the gains made.

Collaborative efforts with various stakeholders have expanded, amplifying the impact and laying firm foundations for sustainability.

To sustain the progress, continued investment in CSO coalitions, inter-agency coordination, and community engagement is needed.





SERAPHINE WAKANA,
UN Resident Coordinator in Sierra Leone

“

The project focused on supporting local women-focused CSOs because they are closer to the community. They understand better the needs of the community, including the challenges affecting women. Continued support to the gains by local CSOs is crucial to sustaining inclusive peace in the community.

”

CONCLUSION

In summary, the Strengthening Women-Focused Civil Society Organizations for Peace and Security in Sierra Leone project has reinforced women's leadership in peacebuilding, governance, and political participation.

By fostering collaboration, advocacy, and grassroots mobilization, women are reclaiming their rightful place in decision-making processes.

In advancing peace and women's voices for sustainable development through the measurable impact of strategic collaborations and innovative approaches in Sierra Leone.

This momentum must continue to build a more inclusive, peaceful, and gender-equal Sierra Leone.

"With sustained efforts, women's voices will remain central in shaping the country's future."

Setcheme J.M Mongbo
UN Women Sierra Leone Head of Office



THANK YOU!

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