



Evaluation of Oxfam Women in Leadership (WIL) Project in Sierra Leone

Full Report

Oxfam GB Programme Evaluation

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GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

CSO – Community Based Organisation

DFID - Department for International Development, UK Government

ENCISS- Enhancing the Interaction and Interface between Civil Society and the State to Improve Poor People's Lives

FGD – Focus Group Discussion

FOMWASL- The Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Sierra Leone

GOSL – Government of Sierra Leone

INGO – International Non-Governmental Organisation

KTWN- Kailahun Tortoma Women's Network

NEC - National Election Council

NEW – National Election Watch

NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation

PRSP – Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

WF- The Women's Forum

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APPENDIX

SUMMARY

PROJECT COMPONENT 1: INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING WITH WOMEN'S NETWORK ORGANISATIONS

3.1 Assessment of partner selection process

KEY FINDINGS:

1. The selection process Oxfam used to identify its partner organisations for institutional strengthening was thorough and time consuming in marked contrast to its selection of 50/50 as the sole implementing partner for project component 2.
2. Oxfam belief that institutional strengthening could add significant value to the work of the women's networks selected and that the combination of partners would yield beneficial impact and learning has been partially realised. It would have been greater still had the two project components been better integrated.
3. In reaching different constituencies of women the participating organisations have significant combined out-reach capacity potential.
4. The Oxfam PACER project planned in partnership with 50/50 seeks to expand and develop project component 2. Oxfam is currently exiting from project component 1 and its formal partnerships with WF, FOMWASL and KTWN.

RECOMMENDATION TO OXFAM:

1. Given their combined outreach potential and emphasis on women's inclusion in decision-making it is recommended that Oxfam continues to work in partnership with all four women's network organisations supported under the WIL project. Considerable value added could be gained for PACER by maximising on their combined strengths; and a broader based project partnership would spread the risks Oxfam might otherwise incur through investing heavily in any one organisation.

3.2 Assessment: Types of capacity building provided

KEY FINDINGS:

1. The participating organisations have developed strategic plans. Their capacities to design and implement practical strategies to achieve objectives; demonstrate impact; and critically assess organisational strengths and weaknesses are weaker. Plan implementation is hindered by lack of funding.
2. With advisory support the networks have convened AGMs, established Governing Bodies and revised their Governing Documents which has promoted more democratic, transparent and accountable practice. The separation of roles and responsibilities for governance and operations are blurred and current arrangements are costly to maintain.
3. A marked disconnect exists between women leaders and women living in poverty at village level and although the responsiveness of the national leaders to the needs of their constituent women's groups has increased there are still issues, including local expectations of funding that need to be resolved through improved and more regular communication.

4. Training in financial management has not been prioritised by the participating organisations even though Oxfam views this as a priority. Mechanisms to improve financial transparency are needed, as is greater organisational awareness of the appropriate balance between recurrent costs and programme delivery expenditure.
5. Of the training Oxfam has provided, most enthusiasm is expressed about the women's leadership training.
6. Given the short life span of the WIL project and its emphasis on physical outputs there has been little investment in coalition building across women's networks or more broadly within civil society.
7. Short training events can yield a number of direct and less direct benefits. However, deficits in skills and awareness are not the only root cause of poor organisational performance.
8. Capacity building without supportive funding makes high impact programme delivery difficult and limits the benefits to be won from the links between learning and practice.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

Organisations implementing capacity building programmes are advised to consider:

1. Creating a small 'strategic programme initiatives grants fund' through which funds are allocated for specific programme activities with a built in allowance for directly associated recurrent costs. This can strengthen the interface between learning and doing and also encourage the growth of an organisational culture in which recurrent costs are carefully measured against costs which are essential for the achievement of programme impact.
2. The optimal balance of activities/inputs to up-grade specific skills through short training and strategies to strengthen issue based networking and coalition building; and to encourage learning and best practice exchange.

RECOMMENDATION TO OXFAM:

1. Oxfam's work with the KTWN in Kailahun, particularly the women's leadership programme is eminently replicable. It is recommended that it considers how best this might be up-scaled and further developed for expanded coverage in collaboration with other agencies working at village level.

3.3 Assessment: Appropriateness of strategies adopted

KEY FINDINGS:

1. Four defining features of project strategy are apparent: an emphasis on institutional strengthening as an end in itself; a focus on women's networks; an emphasis on strengthening individual institutional capacities; and the adoption of different approaches for the two project components.
2. The approach to component 1 has centred on the development of stronger institutions rather than orientating capacity building inputs towards specific programme aims.
3. Lack of cohesion and joined up working across the women's networks detract from their current impact and future development.

4. Women's leaders and others emphasise the need to include and engage men in the development of new approaches towards more inclusive decision-making roles.
5. The project focus on women's networks has not encouraged the mainstreaming of gender issues into broader civil society initiatives and platforms. Stakeholders point to the lack of engagement women's networks have with others in wider civil society.
6. Scope exists for broadening the concept of civil society out from the individual organisations comprising it towards more issue based coalitions for joint action.
7. The interface between the women's networks and decentralised institutions is weak. Experiences from elsewhere suggest that elected representatives can play key roles in advancing women's interests in the twin process of decentralisation and PRS delivery and monitoring.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. The findings of this review suggest that there is a need to design and implement a more comprehensive strategy to build the capacities of the women's networks and other civil society actors. Particular attention is warranted as regards the following:
 - a) Building the capacity of women's network to work more coherently together and within broader civil society;
 - b) Securing the engagement of men in initiatives to promote more inclusive decision making processes in which women play lead roles;
 - c) Encouraging civil society to mainstream gender into their on-going programmes and actions;
 - d) Building broader, issue based coalitions; and
 - e) Strengthening the interface between women's networks and decentralised institutions especially on processes of governance reform and PRS delivery.

PROJECT COMPONENT 2: INCREASING WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION ON LOCAL COUNCILS

4.2 Assessment of project component 2 achievements

KEY FINDINGS:

1. Full achievement of project component 1's objectives to meet the numerical targets set was constrained by a number of factors including: 50/50's decision to decentralise its coordination structures before commencing the short training courses; the delivery of TOT training immediately prior to the start of campaigning; the selection of women on a district rather than a ward basis; inclusion of women who were not aspirant local councillors in the training; the lack of time to incorporate awareness raising around the decentralisation process and the roles and responsibilities of a local councillor in the adapted Training Manual; inadequate time to prepare women's campaigning messages; and lower levels of nomination than had been anticipated.
2. The constraints are partly explained by the lack of time for advance planning and preparation. However, their impact might have been reduced through the more systematic prioritisation of activities.
3. Closer collaboration with other women's networks, supported under component 2 of the WIL project, would almost certainly have made achievement of some targets easier.
4. Omission of training material to explain the decentralisation process and what the role of local

councillor involves may have meant that some unsuitable candidates stood for election, were nominated and elected.

5. Feed back suggests that participants were satisfied with the quality of the training provided to TOTs and aspirant women.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE 2008 LOCAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS:

1. Timely advance planning, preparation and prioritisation in collaboration with other key civil society actors will be essential as will capturing relevant learning from the design and implementation of initiatives orientated to the 2007 Parliamentary elections.
2. Carefully designed and targeted training of aspirant women may be useful in building confidence and leadership skills (see assessment of project component 2) but should not be invested in at the expense of other priorities to reduce the structural constraints to women's full and equal participation (see below).
3. The relative costs and benefits of designing, delivering and implementing separate short courses for women aspirants as against the mainstreaming of gender sensitive training materials and messages into broader based programmes (such as the civic education and sensitisation work planned by the NEW Coalition) warrant further consideration. The NEW Coalition member organisations have significant outreach potential which if harnessed to that demonstrated by the four WIL participating organisations would enable far greater coverage than any one network operating in isolation could offer.
4. If a TOT method is to be used it is advised that training materials and methods developed in other African countries (e.g. South Africa) where achievements have been won for women's representation, participation and leadership on decentralised bodies. The creation by organisations funding/supporting TOT programmes of a small grant fund for use by accredited TOTs to enable them to conduct further training is also recommended.
5. Sensitisation and civic education programmes to enhance understanding of the following will be important:
 - a) The meaning of decentralisation processes, particularly for people living in poverty, in the context of PRS delivery and monitoring;
 - b) The roles of 'elected representative of decentralised bodies at different levels' entails; and
 - c) What women as citizens can realistically expect from their elected representatives.
6. Learning components and delivery methods from the WIL Project (including the draft training manual) could be further assessed for possible adaptation and incorporation into future strategies designed to increase women's electoral participation and effectiveness.

4.3 Structural constraints to women's participation in the 2004 local council elections

KEY FINDINGS:

1. A significant number of structural constraints impacted negatively on women's participation as candidates and voters in the 2004 local council elections including the following:
 - a) Most significant in terms of women's participation as voters was the lack of broad based civic education.
 - b) Constraints on women's participation as candidates included: NEC capacity weaknesses, the gender insensitivity and approach of some NEC officials; political party reluctance to give women candidates symbols; lack of clarity about the status of independent candidates; misconceptions about what 50/50 was trying to achieve; question marks about the impartiality and neutrality of 50/50 selection processes; women's lack of access to campaign funds; and their low levels of confidence, literacy and education, especially in the north.
 - c) Additional constraints concerned inequitable gender relations, men's attitudes towards women, and women's attitudes towards other women at individual and organisational levels. Men's hostility towards the idea of women in politics and women in leadership roles manifested itself in domestic violence. Male intimidation and threatening behaviour included penultimate threats about taking aspirant women to 'male secret societies'.
 - d) Many stakeholders consulted believe that a priority is to design new strategies that will help to secure the engagement rather than opposition of men.
 - e) A disconnect exists between women leaders and the majority of women at village level and is expressed in worries about the constituency system.
 - f) A priority finding is to enhance the voice of women living in poverty through working from the bottom up so that they can assume positions of leadership and challenge unrepresentative and unresponsive organisations and leaders.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE 2008 LOCAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS:

1. Since women's electoral participation was blocked by structural constraints these will need to be considered fully in the design and implementation of future strategies.
2. Advocacy priorities will need to be clearly identified for the design and implementation of a shared civil society strategy to remove some of the identified structural constraints identified by the review. Mainstreaming these into on-going initiatives is an option that warrants further exploration.
3. The design and delivery of gender sensitive civic education and sensitisation campaigns will be needed to encourage the engagement of men and challenge misconceptions about women's leadership roles and capabilities.

4.5 Support to elected women representatives on decentralised bodies

KEY FINDINGS:

1. Both male and female councillors are reported to be underperforming in their new roles.

2. Women's participation and leadership on local councils is complicated and coloured by gender relations and a range of constraints that are gender specific.
3. Women's multiple and conflicting responsibilities make it difficult for them to attend council meetings regularly.
4. Training provided to all women councillors by Oxfam and 50/50 on the Local Government Act Made Simple was found to be extremely useful.
5. On local councils where meetings are conducted in English, the participation of women councillors is particularly constrained. Many women councillors lack confidence due to their lower levels of literacy and education relative to men.
6. Male councillors are keen to confine women to follower-ship roles. Women tend to tow the male line. To date there is not a single discussion on women's issues recorded in local council minutes.
7. The constraints to women's full and effective participation on ward and village development committees are atypically acute. Participation on these bodies would significantly increase women's participation in decisions affecting their lives; and might encourage and qualify a number to stand for higher office.
8. There is also a pressing need to build women's capacities to facilitate their active participation in decision making around decentralisation and poverty reduction strategy processes at village and ward levels.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Continuing and on-going support to women councillors (and other elected representatives of decentralised bodies) is extremely important in order for them to perform effectively. Moreover, these women serve as a role model or mirror to potential aspirants.
2. Learning from the WIL project suggests that Oxfam is well placed to play a lead role in sensitisation campaigns around the LGA given that it has already developed and used a 'Local Government Act made Simple' sensitisation package.¹
3. Provided civic education and sensitisation programmes are designed well enough in advance they could realistically incorporate gender sensitive, rapid skills upgrading, 'literacy for adults' components. In addition, English for Adults learning components could be incorporated into women's leadership training programmes for use at Village, Ward and possibly district level

RECOMMENDATION TO DFID:

1. Additional inputs to the Decentralisation Secretariat to ensure that the identification of capacity gaps and the design and implementation of the five year capacity building strategy are gender sensitive would be helpful. A priority is to mainstream gender into on-going planning, implementation and monitoring systems and processes so that they are not marginalised within wider change processes. It will be important to establish on-going monitoring mechanisms in this regard.

¹ There are obvious advantages to be won by incorporating information about the role of Village and Ward Development Committees into this. Inclusion of related information on PRS delivery might also be included.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO OXFAM:

1. The specific constraints women councillors face warrant further consideration. Oxfam could undertake a case study of women elected to Kalahun local councils and then pilot various capacity building approaches and methods at district level. The results of on-going monitoring could usefully be fed into the Decentralisation Secretariat's capacity building programme.
2. In addition to the initiatives outlined in the PACER project proposal it is recommended that the following are considered:
 - a) The design, implementation and monitoring of a pilot project in collaboration with the KTWN to build the leadership capacities necessary for women to assume proactive roles on Ward and Village Development Committees.
 - b) Further exploration of local level initiatives to promote women's engagement with decentralised institutions on PRS delivery and monitoring.
 - c) Collaboration with other INGOs working at district and village levels in different parts of Sierra Leone to achieve expanded coverage through joint- programming.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS: THE WAY FORWARD

Some clear gains have been won through the twin efforts of the WIL Project to increase the number of women elected as local councillors; and to strengthen the institutional capacities of local NGO networks representing women.

5.1 The key challenge

The key challenge: The underlying rationale that drove the OGB WIL Project, namely that: '*women and girls are over-represented among the poor and under-represented in decision-making*' remains valid.

The findings of the review suggest that simply increasing women's numerical representation on national and decentralised decision making bodies will not, taken alone, be sufficient. A majority of women in Sierra Leone are confined to a life of poverty; marginalised within the chieftom system of governance; and at risk of continuing exclusion from decision-making within newly decentralising institutions as well as from full and equal participation in developing, democratic electoral processes and the still emergent civil society. In addition, male resistance to women's increased public participation at all levels and to tackling the issues they prioritise is entrenched.

5.2 A four pronged approach

A four pronged **approach** is recommended that is designed to:

1. **REDUCE and REMOVE:** the structural constraints that lie at the root of women's continuing lack of engagement with and representation, participation and leadership on public decision making bodies.
2. **PROMOTE:** women's decision-making roles by providing them with the support they need to take full advantage of new opportunities as they arise.
3. **MAINSTREAM:** initiatives to remove structural constraints and to promote women's decision making roles into on-going institutional and policy reform processes and civil society initiatives to influence these so that they are integral to the bigger picture rather than being confined to the margin.
4. **BUILD:** the capacities of institutions and specific groups to ensure realisation of the above.

5.3 Demand driven initiatives: Potential for integrated programme development

KEY FINDINGS:

1. To date the bulk of international aid and development cooperation has targeted supply driven initiatives to challenge the root causes of Sierra Leone's conflict ridden heritage. However, brief consideration of three existing programme initiatives (the proposed Oxfam PACER Project; New Coalition work on electoral reform and the forthcoming 2007/8 elections; and emergent ENCISS priorities around decentralisation, governance reform and PRS delivery and monitoring) suggest that a good base starting point exists for the development of a larger, more holistic programme to enhance women's engagement with decentralised bodies and their representation, participation and leadership in public decision making with a focus on good governance and poverty reduction.
2. There are a significant number of INGOs working at village, ward and district levels in different parts of the country. A number of them have worked, or are working, together, on initiatives around the PRS and governance reform processes. This suggests that there is potential for more joined up working on initiatives to encourage women's engagement with decentralised institutions and promote their representation, participation and leadership on these.
3. The above mentioned examples of demand driven initiatives could, if refined and joined up more, impact positively on women's roles in decision making around PRS delivery and governance reform particularly at local levels. To have maximum impact and in order to draw in other relevant initiatives, however, leadership would be needed.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. It is strongly recommended that Oxfam broadens the remit of its Phase II project, the PACER, towards a broader based approach that addresses the structural constraints to women's engagement with decentralised bodies and their representation, participation and leadership on these; and actively promotes their increased decision-making roles particularly at village and ward levels with a focus on PRS delivery and monitoring.
2. Currently most INGOs with a long term presence in the country are re-defining their country programmes in the transition from what were largely humanitarian initiatives to longer term development programming. Whilst their collective potential for joint programming around a demand driven initiative of the type recommended in this review may currently be constrained by internal change such transition demands, there is considerable scope for Oxfam to explore such future joint programming further.
3. There are various options that warrant further consideration in terms of identifying a possible lead organisation for the development of a more holistic and integrated programme.

5.4 Mainstreaming gender issues into supply driven reform initiatives

KEY FINDING:

1. On-going supply led initiatives to build institutional capacities for democratic, electoral processes; accountable, decentralised institutions and reform of the chieftom governance system; and maximisation of PRS 'drivers for change' are essential to the promotion of women's roles in decision-making.

KEY RECOMMENDATION:

1. To realise significant impact it is recommended that women's priorities and interests are mainstreamed more centrally and visibly into the components of supply led initiatives around decentralisation and good governance; electoral reform; and PRS delivery and monitoring.

1. PROJECT BACKGROUND

As summarised in the review terms of reference the project background was broadly as follows.

Sierra Leone is a country struggling to rebuild itself having recently emerged from a violent and turbulent past. The root causes of the ten-year civil conflict lie in bad governance, particularly the lack of civic engagement in political processes, the suppression of vulnerable and marginalized groups, and the abuse and misuse of power by successive governments. The gap between the government and civil society continues to be large with key sections of the population, particularly women and young people, excluded from governance processes and livelihood opportunities. Interaction between civil society and the government is weak, and there is a lack of government accountability to its citizens. It is becoming clear to policy makers and others that bringing about change from grass-roots upwards, through building the capacity of civil society is one of the ways of improving governance, sustaining the peace and reducing poverty in Sierra Leone.

Civil Society in Sierra Leone is weak and fragmented. Linkages and partnerships between elite civil society organisations in Freetown and community-based organisations in the provinces need to be strengthened. Civil Society organisations need to be more representative and accountable to their constituents. Women's groups are especially weak; they have little voice and influence in government policy. Freetown based women's organisations are perceived to be unrepresentative of women living at the grassroots and disconnected from village based issues.

1.1 The Oxfam Women in Leadership (WIL) Project

Oxfam's Women in Leadership (WIL) Project aims to improve the status and role of women in the development of Sierra Leone. It has sought to do this by building women's leadership capacity in politics and civil society with a two-fold remit:

1. To provide support for female candidates in the 2004 local council elections; and
2. To build the capacity of women's civil society organisations.

In project reporting to DFID the objectives contained in the original LOG frame have been synthesised to constitute the project purpose as described below.

Project component 1: The objective of the capacity building component is that *by July 2005, up to 10 women's organisations are effectively responding to their constituency/ client's needs through improved organisational development.* The proposed outcomes are that up to 10 women's organisations have greater institutional capacity and financial sustainability and that stronger and more sustainable coalitions of women's organisations are better able to advocate for issues affecting women and civil society in Sierra Leone.

Project component 2: The objective of this component is that *at least 1 woman from each ward had the skills and confidence to stand for election in the 2004 local council elections along with the necessary basic skills to be an effective representative if elected.* The proposed outcomes were that women hold positions of leadership in local councils having acquired the skills and support necessary for their election and to carry out their role and responsibilities effectively. This project component has been implemented by Oxfam in partnership with the national network or umbrella organisation of women, 'The 50/50 Group', established in 2001.

Against each of the project objectives and their respective outcomes a number of indicators were suggested some of which overlap. These are considered below.

The project has been funded almost exclusively by DFID (£174,462 for a period of eighteen months: March 2004 – August 2005) with contributions from Oxfam towards the costs of the consultation processes involved in this review and the evaluation of component 2 reported on in January 2005. Oxfam's no-cost extension will end in 2006.

Oxfam has decided that the institutional component (1) of the project will end on November 18 2005 and has prepared a follow on proposal (Promoting a Culture of Equal Representation) PACER in collaboration with 50/50.²

1.2 Oxfam's Programme in Sierra Leone

Oxfam Sierra Leone has its Country Programme Office in Freetown with a larger sub office in Kailahun. Its programme has until fairly recently centred on the global strategic aim which centres on humanitarian intervention, primarily public health programmes with rural communities and gender protection. Gradually it is making the transition to longer term development programming with an emphasis on governance and institutional accountability, sustainable livelihoods, and gender equity. Throughout the programme mainstreaming gender is emphasised.

The WIL project falls under Oxfam Sierra Leone's Gender Programme which aims to improve the status of women through awareness raising; capacity building; networking and coalition building; advocacy; and '*researching and documenting history, process and progress toward greater equality*'. This also '*seeks to increase the voice of women in positions of authority at local level in order to increase the profile of gender issues in the development process*'.³ In terms of Oxfam's global programme, the WIL Project is strategically linked to the right of marginalised people to be heard, to have a voice in decision-making that affects their lives. Women were identified as a key target group because of their under-representation on decision-making bodies.

Currently Oxfam SL is revising its strategic plan for 2005-2010. Its core business is defined as:

*Empowering the most excluded to achieve and sustain justice, equity and rights by promoting changes in policies, practices ideas and beliefs, and by leveraging innovation to ensure appropriate and sustainable change.*⁴

Central to this will be ensuring that communities are actively involved in local governance; with women, youth and marginalised groups proactively holding authorities accountable. In addition, civil society will be encouraged to play an active role in challenging injustice, discrimination and inequalities. The PACER Project is seen to be of central importance to Oxfam's new strategic focus in Sierra Leone.

2. THE REVIEW

2.1 Review Objectives

The review assesses both components of the project. Its objectives are:

1. To review progress achieved to date against the project objectives and draw out lesson learning to inform future planned activity by Oxfam and 50:50 in the run up to the next parliamentary (2007) and local council elections (2008). In doing this it will focus on elements to maintain, enhance or replicate in future activities, including an assessment of the partner selection process; partner action plans; and partner capacity needs.

² Project Proposal: Promoting a Culture of Equal Representation, Oxfam 2005.

³ Oxfam Proposal: Women in Leadership, Sierra Leone, 2003.

⁴ Oxfam Sierra Leone Strategy: 2005-2010.

2. To ensure that lessons learnt from Oxfam's experience of working with civil society in Sierra Leone are captured and fed into future programming, including ENCISS ongoing planning process. This will include exploring the selection of partner organisations; the type of capacity building provided; and analysis on the appropriateness of strategies adopted.
3. To provide recommendations for possible areas of support by DFID to the 2007 Parliamentary elections and the 2008 local council elections.
4. To function as Oxfam's end of project evaluation for the institutional strengthening component of the project. Oxfam have already undertaken an evaluation of the component providing support to female candidates standing for election.⁵ For the purpose of the PCR and in order to meet objective 3 above, this component has been reviewed. However, for Oxfam's required evaluation process, the emphasis is placed on an evaluation of the institutional strengthening component (component 1).

2.2 Review Process

The review team was led by Dr Caroline Roseveare an independent consultant, with DFID inputs from Anna Miles (Social Development Adviser) and Charlotte Duncan (Governance Adviser) as well as from the Oxfam Country Programme Team in Freetown, Sierra Leone. The consultant provided 14 days, 9 of which were based in Sierra Leone over which time a wide range of consultations and discussions were held with key stakeholders as summarised below.

A) FREETOWN:

- ❖ Oxfam's Capacity Building and Governance Advisors and other key Oxfam Sierra Leone staff individually and in briefing and debriefing sessions at the start and end of the visit.⁶
- ❖ Focus Group Discussion/ Mini-Workshop with members of the 50/50 Group Executive Committee.
- ❖ Focus Group Discussion/ Workshop with members of the FOMWASAL National Executive Board and District Branch Representatives.⁷
- ❖ Focus Group Discussion/ Mini-Workshop with members of the Women's Forum National Board.
- ❖ Focus Group Discussion/ Mini-Workshop with members of District branch representatives from the Women's Forum.
- ❖ Follow up meeting with national and district level leaders of the Women's Forum at their Freetown offices.
- ❖ Focus Group Discussion with members of The NEW (National Election Watch) Coalition.
- ❖ Focus Group Discussion with the Executive Officer and three Regional Commissioners of the NEC (National Election Commission).
- ❖ Interview with the Director of the Decentralisation Secretariat.
- ❖ Interview with the Director of ENCISS (Enhancing the Interaction Between Civil Society and the State to Improve Poor Peoples' Lives).

B) KAILAHUN (consultations and meetings over two days):

- ❖ Focus Group Discussion/ Mini-Workshop with the Steering Committee of the KTWN (Kailahun Tortona Women's Network).

⁵ Martha Harding, Oxfam GB Sierra Leone and the 50/50 Group: Evaluation Report of component two of the Women in Leadership project, January 2005.

⁶ The draft Project Completion Report (PCR) was presented at the closing de-briefing session, the consultant having discussed sections of this with relevant Oxfam project staff beforehand.

⁷ On the programme two FGDs had been planned consecutively, one with the FOMWASAL National Executive Board and the second with District branch representatives. However, as both groups arrived for the first FGD the two were merged into a larger workshop.

- ❖ Follow up evening meeting with the President and Secretary of the KTWN.
- ❖ Focus Group Discussion/ Mini-Workshop with district representatives of the Women's Forum, The 50/50 Group, female candidates (both elected and unelected) in the 2004 local council elections, other women's leaders and representatives of the Chiefdom Authorities.
- ❖ Focus Group Discussions/Workshops with four women member groups of KTWN (Sinava and Amutona; and Tongea and Intelligent) in two villages (Kpandebu and Sandeallu). Members of the Intelligent group were all younger women.

Most of the FGDs comprised 15 or more women. In most cases they were opened and closed with a brief round table discussion designed to elicit the participants' views about key achievements and constraints to women's leadership and participation in decision-making. Due to the number of women participating in the sessions and their language needs most of the discussions took place in small working groups. A number of the women who participated in the FGDs had stood as female candidates (both elected and unelected) in the 2004 local council elections.

In addition, to the above FGDs and interviews the consultant reviewed a significant body of documentation relating to the project much of it was made available during the field visit. The DFID PCR scoring exercise was completed in agreement with Oxfam (see completed template attached as Appendix 1).

3. PROJECT COMPONENT 1: KEY LESSONS INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING

Under project component 1 Oxfam has provided capacity building support, primarily training and advisory inputs, for institutional strengthening to three women's network organisations: the Women's Forum, the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Sierra Leone (FOMWASL); and the Kailahun Tortoma Women's Network (KTWN). Where appropriate the assessment also considers 50/50, Oxfam's implementing partner for project component 2.

3.1 Assessment of partner selection process

3.1.1 The selection of partner organisations

The selection process Oxfam used to identify partner organisations for institutional strengthening was thorough and time consuming in marked contrast to its selection of 50/50 as the sole implementing partner for project component 2 (described in the next section of the report). This is outlined in full in the quarterly interim project report presented to DFID for June– August 2004.⁸ Essentially, organisations were pre-selected according to their predominantly female leadership and membership and related factors; a detailed institutional capacity assessment process⁹ was then undertaken with different organisations by Oxfam's first Institutional Strengthening Advisor (ISA);¹⁰ a final selection was made of those Oxfam judged to demonstrate potential for longer term commitment to internal institutional reform. A number of stakeholders suggested that Oxfam's time investment (3 months plus) was misguided given the short project life span. It is difficult to judge whether more or less project impact would have been achieved had a more intuitive selection process been used.

⁸ Oxfam 6th Interim Narrative Report for DFID: 1st June – 31st August 2005

⁹ Capacity check lists were filled in manually with over 100 CSOs and are on file. The data has not been computerised.

¹⁰ Oxfam ISA, Handover Progress Report Dec 2004- Feb 2005.

Value added, impact and learning: Oxfam believed that institutional strengthening would add value to the work of the women's networks selected and that, in turn, the combination of partners would yield specific benefits in terms of impact and learning. By supporting the Women's Forum, one of the largest and best known women's NGOs in Sierra Leone, it was anticipated that the skills and influence of WF member groups could be harnessed for lobbying and advocacy at policy level. This has been realised to a lesser extent than the expectations Oxfam had of FOMWASL and the KTN. The former has provided a solid entry point for work with Muslim women and for leveraging the engagement of a broader cross-section of Islamic civil society for their empowerment.¹¹ Similarly through KTN Oxfam has been able to reach a significant number of women at village level; and to draw comparative learning from its work with national networks and a district level network. The decision to work intensively in Kailahun was well judged given that Oxfam's main operational base is located in the district and the organisation clearly enjoys an established reputation and solid relationship of trust within village communities.

Over the project duration 50/50, the Women's Forum and FOMWASL have managed (with varying degrees of success) to build strong, more decentralised membership bases at provincial and district levels. The KTN has established a young district network with a broad base of support among women at village level. In reaching different constituencies the participating organisations have significant combined **out-reach capacity potential**. The membership base of FOMWASL positions it well as a mouth piece for issues of specific concern to Muslim women, who make up over half Sierra Leone's female population and yet are, especially in the north, most highly excluded from decision-making at all levels. The extensive network of emergent women's groups at village level within Kailahun district makes KTN an eminently replicable model in any future effort to reach large numbers of predominantly non-literate, rural women. There are some current, and not necessarily disadvantageous, overlaps between the networks constituencies, but both the Women's Forum and 50/50 are devolving their membership bases out of Freetown and the provincial centres into remoter areas of the country, particularly in the north.

Future Oxfam partners: Under the PACER project Oxfam plans to continue an implementing partnership with 50/50. This second phase project seeks to expand and develop WIL project component 2 with a central focus on increasing women's representation at national and decentralised levels. The maintenance and development of strategic alliances with other women's networks and CSOs are envisaged and PACER plans specific interventions to build 50/50 capacity, particularly in advocacy. However, Oxfam is ending component 1 of the WIL project and the institutional strengthening support it has to date provided to the participating organisations: WF, FOMWASL and KTN. Given the combined outreach potential of these women's networks and their emphasis on increasing women's inclusion in decision-making, it will be important that Oxfam does not 'throw the baby out with the bath water'. Considerable value added could be gained for the PACER project by attempting to maximise on the combined strengths of the four organisations. In addition, a broader based project partnership would spread the risks to Oxfam that might possibly be incurred through investing heavily in any one organisation.

KEY FINDINGS:

1. The selection process Oxfam used to identify its partner organisations for institutional strengthening was thorough and time consuming in marked contrast to its selection of 50/50 as the sole implementing partner for project component 2.
2. Oxfam belief that institutional strengthening could add significant value to the work of the women's networks selected and that the combination of partners would yield beneficial impact and learning has been partially realised. It would have been greater still had the two project components been better integrated.

¹¹ A point emphasised in: Linden I, 'Islam, DFID and Poverty Reduction', Report to DFID, March 2004.

3. In reaching different constituencies of women the participating organisations have significant combined out-reach capacity potential.
4. The Oxfam PACER project planned in partnership with 50/50 seeks to expand and develop project component 2. Oxfam is currently exiting from project component 1 and its formal partnerships with WF, FOMWASL and KTWN.

RECOMMENDATION TO OXFAM:

1. Given their combined outreach potential and emphasis on women's inclusion in decision-making it is recommended that Oxfam continues to work in partnership with all four women's network organisations supported under the WIL project. Considerable value added could be gained for PACER by maximising on their combined strengths; and a broader based project partnership would spread the risks Oxfam might otherwise incur through investing heavily in any one organisation.

3.2 Assessment: Types of capacity building provided

Capacity building has comprised skills upgrading through training, provided largely through short and separate workshop events with individuals selected by the participating organisations. Oxfam's ISA has, in addition, provided advisory inputs for the development of improved organisational governance and strategic planning; support for the preparation, organisation and follow-up of Annual General Meetings (AGMs); and support for the formation of the KTWN in Kailahun. These activities are assessed in brief below (see Oxfam interim narrative project reports to DFID for full details and Appendix 1 PCR report).

3.2.1 Training and advisory support for organisational strategic planning

FOMWASL and KTWN completed their strategic plans over June to August 2005. The Women's Forum has a somewhat lengthy plan and accompanying budget, which are not yet available in electronic format.

Clarity of mission: It was apparent in the FGDs for this review that support for strategic planning has promoted broad based clarity among the women's network leadership of organisational mission and purpose. The 4 participating organisations also have clear perceptions of the major strategic challenges women in Sierra Leone face. They are less certain about HOW to address these; HOW to design and implement effective advocacy strategies; or WHAT capacities they need in order to be able to do this.¹²

The participating organisations have not, as yet, used their strategic plans as **fund raising tools**. All complain that **strategic plan implementation** continues to be severely hampered by financial constraints with implications for future sustainability and for the sustainability of their membership bases. Member groups expectation is that the networks leadership could be doing more to help them achieve their objectives. They complain that it is difficult for them even to convene meetings of the women's groups without funds let alone to undertake planned practical activities. Considerable

¹² The consultant was variously labelled as 'Mrs How' or 'Mrs what' by FGD participants because of repeated questioning on these issues.

anxiety exists about how the networks and their member groups will be able to continue to function once Oxfam exits from this project component after 18 November 2005.

Awareness of the need to **demonstrate positive impact** in terms of improving the lives of their constituencies or clients within the participating organisations is limited. There is a risk that low levels of programme/project activity, including advocacy, and inadequate funding will become a re-enforcing and vicious circle. Skills in **critical self-assessment** of organisational progress and challenges are not well developed with the possible exception of FOMWASL.

3.2.2 Project support for improved organisational governance

With support from the ISA the participating organisations have convened Annual General Meetings (AGMs), established Governing Bodies; and revised their Governing Documents (constitutions). Job descriptions have been developed for Governing Body members to define their roles and responsibilities more clearly.

Project inputs for **governance arrangements** have clearly helped to establish the development of an organisational culture rooted in more democratic, transparent and accountable practice. However, the participating organisations are governed, managed and administered largely by a small group of women in leadership roles, including founder members. The separation of powers between those responsible for governing the organisation and those responsible for coordinating its programmes, including advocacy, are blurred. This may have negative knock on implications for internal accountability and sustained member organisation engagement.

The **relative costs** of convening regular Executive Committee/ National Steering Group meetings are high given the number of committees and of individuals comprising them and their geographical spread. There is possibly a need for the organisations to re-balance the imperatives of democratic representation with the more pragmatic ones of cost-effectiveness and longer term financial sustainability.

3.2.3 Communications support

Oxfam recognises that internal organisational communications, particularly between the leadership and decentralised member groups is poor. A joint communication planning session was held with the Women's Forum and FOMWASL in July 2005 in an effort to strengthen communications with primary stakeholders. A key component of communications project support to date has been the design and development of organisational Newsletters with supporting training in desk top publishing.

Clients consulted during the review believe that there have been some improvements in internal organisational communications over past months. However, a clear need is voiced for all 4 organisations to further strengthen this. A major **disconnect between women's leaders and women living at village level** is widely perceived to exist and a shared priority is to close the gap between the minority of more highly educated, urban (largely Freetown) based women's leaders and the vast majority of largely non-literate and impoverished women at village level. Participants of a separate FGD convened with Women's Forum regional and district coordinators emphasised the need for the Freetown leadership to have more visibility at local levels. They gave examples of the initiatives they would like to carry out if they had the necessary small funds and logistical backup required to do this. However, their expectations of donor funding and, or financial support from the network, may not be realistic. Member groups of the KTWN are already requesting network leaders to increase their visibility at village levels.

3.2.4 Financial management procedures

Oxfam's training inputs have been planned and organised according to the priorities set by the networks leadership. Even though the ISA has worked hard to increase awareness of the importance of robust financial management, skills upgrading in this area has not been identified as a high priority.

The Women's Forum has successfully resisted the planned review of its financial procedures which is worrying given Oxfam's belief that its future development and fundraising will be severely constrained unless financial reporting is strengthened. Some WF member organisations have apparently already ceased payment of their organisational subscriptions due to concerns about **financial transparency and accountability**. These do not appear to be shared by FOMWASL members and its leadership have received some training in financial management although progress has been slowed by constraints on the finance lead's availability due to overseas travel. KTWN is not as yet managing funds on a significant scale, although all KTWN members have paid their initial registration fee and have agreed to pay small monthly subscriptions. It will be important to ensure from the start that these monies are properly managed; and that the leadership is able to demonstrate that they have been put to best use.

All three participating organisations are advised to think more about how best to ensure that all financial inputs (including voluntary contributions and subscriptions) are accounted for. Otherwise the door is left open to individual fund mismanagement and accusations of inadequate financial transparency. In addition, although the office and staff costs are currently relatively low in all 3 organisations due to their reliance on volunteers and voluntary contributions, awareness of the need to keep **recurrent costs** to a minimum and in balance with **project costs** needs to be instilled. A major pre-occupation for the networks leaders is to acquire more skills in proposal writing in the hope that this will guarantee external funding. Capacity to demonstrate robust financial management procedures and systems is critical if such proposals are to be successful.

3.2.5 Women's leadership training

Of all the training workshops provided by Oxfam, most enthusiasm was expressed, particularly by members of KTWN and FOMWASL, about the women's leadership training.

Intensive women's leadership training with KTWN member groups was conducted in June 2005, through four community-based sessions comprising three days each. 108 women from ten district divisions participated in the training which covered basic concepts of leadership, decision-making, communication and listening skills, and facilitation skills. Methods used included role-plays, visual aids, songs and skits given that a majority of participants are not fully literate. A draft **leadership training manual** was developed for future use by selected facilitators within the Network and is a potentially important resource for future adaptation and broader use. Following the initial training a series of follow up sessions were organised in five different areas of Kailahun District during which an **organisational profiling exercise** was started to gather information about KTWN member groups.

Huge potential would appear to exist for developing work of the above type at district level further. There is a glaring need to women to more meaningfully engage with **decentralised institutions** (Village Development Committee, to Ward Development Committee and local councils), as well as to include them in the decision making of these bodies. The Oxfam women's leadership training with KTWN is eminently replicable and could be up-scaled for expanded coverage if other INGOs with established programmes in different areas of Sierra Leone were to collaboratively join together for the design and implementation of joint initiatives.

3.2.6 Support for coalition building

Given the short life span of the WIL project and its emphasis on physical outputs (such as strategic plans) there has been little time to invest in meaningful coalition building across women's networks or more broadly within civil society as analysed below. However, a one-day largely internal coalition-building training exercise has been organised for the 15 members of the KTWN National Steering Committee and other village level members. The objective was to create a common understanding of why the KTWN network was formed; what the KTWN mission is; and introduce the leadership to the concept of coalition building to promote improved information-sharing at village level. In spite of past hostilities the network's leadership is receptive to the idea of working more closely with other Kailahun women's networks in future.¹³

3.2.7 Short training events as a capacity building tool

As illustrated above short training events have been the major capacity building tool used by Oxfam. Participation in these has allowed individuals within the participating organisations to acquire new skills; clarify their strategic aims and organisational purpose and structure; and to develop organisational systems and procedures. However, the extent to which these benefits have been passed on to others is unclear. A number of FGD participants emphasised the need to engage in more systematic training of trainers (TOTs) and to organise refresher courses to encourage more systematic interplay between learning and practice.

Over and above up-grading specific skills upgrading women participants have clearly benefited enormously from the **participative styles of working** that Oxfam encourages. This is important in itself given historical tendencies that reinforce hierarchical approaches and block the development of more transparent, democratic organisational practice. **Equalising effect:** An additional, major, and largely hidden bonus has been that the training events have allowed women from the participating organisations working at different levels and in different locations to come together to share learning and experience. However, women, particularly those who are not Freetown based, talked in depth about the constraints their **multiple responsibilities and negative male attitudes** place on participation in training events and women's group meetings. Oxfam project staff have been sensitive to these and have planned the training events well in advance with the networks. There may, however, have been hidden self selection processes at play in terms of the women who have benefited from training events which have mostly been conducted in Freetown.

A number of FGD participants emphasised the negative impact that INGOs and international funding agency practice has had on the 'spirit of voluntarism'. They argued that the payment of travel costs, accommodation, and in some cases per diems has raised the expectations of women, particularly at village level, and created **donor dependence** to a point where it is difficult to convene even women's group meetings unless a financial incentive is provided. However, this must be balanced by the fact that it is often husbands and male relatives who insist that women cannot participate in meetings unless they 'bring something home' which is an important factor, as women in Kailahun stressed.

As analysed in the following report section, a major difficulty associated with the reliance on short training events as the main capacity building tool is that organisational capacity weaknesses or gaps are not always caused by deficits in the skills or understanding and awareness of the individuals comprising them. The **root causes of organisational under-performance** or ineffectiveness are usually more complex and include structural barriers such as the lack of capacity to network effectively. Even when skills deficits exist rapid training may not be the most effective remedial method, more sustained one to one mentoring can, for example, sometimes have greater impact.

¹³ Evening discussion with President, KTWN National Steering Committee.

3.2.8 Capacity building and programme delivery

The National Executive of the Women's Forum say that they have had more capacity building than they need and that there is little they can do with what they have learnt from this unless some funds are provided. The frustration, bordering at times on real anger that they expressed on this issue was palpable and not unreasonable. Without some **supportive funding** the impact of capacity building and institutional strengthening on improved programme delivery is limited.

The provision of small grants can allow participating organisations to apply the new skills and capacities they are acquiring, and to test the efficacy of these through continuous practice. However, unless these are tied to programme delivery they may be used to cover the recurrent costs necessary to keep the ship afloat rather than to effect meaningful change in the lives of beneficiary or client groups against which organisational strength is ultimately measured. A small **'strategic programme initiatives grants fund'** through which funds are allocated for specific programme activities with a built in allowance for directly associated recurrent costs can encourage the growth of an organisational culture in which recurrent costs are carefully measured against those that are essential for the achievement of real impact.

3.2 Assessment: Types of capacity building provided

KEY FINDINGS:

1. The participating organisations have developed strategic plans. Their capacities to design and implement practical strategies to achieve objectives; demonstrate impact; and critically assess organisational strengths and weaknesses are weaker. Plan implementation is hindered by lack of funding.
2. With advisory support the networks have convened AGMs, established Governing Bodies and revised their Governing Documents which has promoted more democratic, transparent and accountable practice. The separation of roles and responsibilities for governance and operations are blurred and current arrangements are costly to maintain.
3. A marked disconnect exists between women leaders and women living in poverty at village level and although the responsiveness of the national leaders to the needs of their constituent women's groups has increased there are still issues, including local expectations of funding that need to be resolved through improved and more regular communication.
4. Training in financial management has not been prioritised by the participating organisations even though Oxfam views this as a priority. Mechanisms to improve financial transparency are needed, as is greater organisational awareness of the appropriate balance between recurrent costs and programme delivery expenditure.
5. Of the training Oxfam has provided, most enthusiasm is expressed about the women's leadership training.
6. Given the short life span of the WIL project and its emphasis on physical outputs there has been little investment in coalition building across women's networks or more broadly within civil society.
7. Short training events can yield a number of direct and less direct benefits. However, deficits in

skills and awareness are not the only root cause of poor organisational performance.

8. Capacity building without supportive funding makes high impact programme delivery difficult and limits the benefits to be won from the links between learning and practice.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

Organisations implementing capacity building programmes are advised to consider:

1. Creating a small 'strategic programme initiatives grants fund' through which funds are allocated for specific programme activities with a built in allowance for directly associated recurrent costs. This can strengthen the interface between learning and doing and also encourage the growth of an organisational culture in which recurrent costs are carefully measured against costs which are essential for the achievement of programme impact.
2. The optimal balance of activities/inputs to up-grade specific skills through short training and strategies to strengthen issue based networking and coalition building; and to encourage learning and best practice exchange.

RECOMMENDATION TO OXFAM:

1. Oxfam's work with the KTWN in Kailahun, particularly the women's leadership programme is eminently replicable. It is recommended that it considers how best this might be up-scaled and further developed for expanded coverage in collaboration with other agencies working at village level.

3.3 Assessment: The appropriateness of strategies adopted

Four defining features of project strategy are apparent:

- 1) An emphasis on institutional strengthening as an end in itself;
- 2) A focus on women's networks;
- 3) An emphasis on strengthening individual institutional capacities; and
- 4) The adoption of markedly different approaches for the two components comprising the WIL project.

3.3.1 Project emphasis on institutional strengthening as an end in itself

Component 1 of the WIL project has centred on capacity building for the development of stronger institutions. The benefits of this have not to date been clearly demonstrated through the participating organisation's improved capacity to deliver high impact programmes, including advocacy, due to the persistent shortage of funds they confront. An alternative approach is to design and implement capacity building strategies to support a specific programme aim, i.e. capacity building as a means to an end rather than as an end in itself.

3.3.2 Project focus on women's networks

As mentioned above Oxfam's decision to work exclusively with women's networks has clearly been positive in the sense that the individual participating organisations have been increasingly able to reach a significant number of women through their decentralising membership and coordination

structures. However, opportunities for combining the outreach potential and coverage of the four women's networks supported under the WIL project as a whole is constrained by the **lack of unity and cohesion across women's networks** that a large number of stakeholders, including some women's leaders themselves, point to. Competition for resources (financial and human) and lack of joined up working seriously detract from current impact and future development as well as from the voice these networks could give women in Sierra Leone on decentralising institutions and within civil society.

Although the goal of increasing women's public decision-making roles will be significantly influenced by the capacity of the women's movement to provide strong, representative and accountable leadership, it is imperative, as many women's leaders themselves recognise, to ensure the **inclusion and engagement of men**. During the FGDs a number of women noted that as they have started to demonstrate with increasing strength their capacities for leadership and self organisation they are encountering a back lash of growing opposition and resistance from men. However, participants at the Women's Forum FGD in Freetown unanimously emphasised their desire to enjoy their right to participate in public decision making processes without undermining the institution of the family. A broadly shared priority, of both men and women is to develop **new approaches** that will secure men's engagement in strategies to promote women's empowerment, participation and leadership.¹⁴ There is clear resistance to the idea of imposed 'western gender models'.

Oxfam's decision to target women's networks exclusively rather than working to build the capacities of a mix of civil society organisations was possibly well judged given women's lack of representation and self organisation. However, the project has not generated learning about the possible merits of **mainstreaming** gender issues into on-going policy reform and civil society initiatives. Opportunities for doing this warrant future exploration and are discussed in brief in section 5 below.

The focus on women's networks means that the project did not have obvious entry points through which to challenge the lack of **engagement of women's networks within civil society** which stakeholders also highlighted. Scope exists for broadening the concept of civil society out from the individual organisations comprising it towards more **issue based coalition building for joint action**.

As recognised by ENCISS and others, a stronger interface is needed between civil society and decentralised institutions. Experiences from countries as diverse as Indonesia and Uganda suggest that local councillors and other elected representatives of decentralised bodies can play lead roles in advancing women's interests within a broader platform of civil society action around institutional accountability and PRS delivery and monitoring processes.¹⁵

3.3.3 Emphasis on strengthening the institutional capacities of the individual participating organisations

The focus on strengthening the individual institutional structures of the participating organisations separately has meant that some opportunities, e.g. joint training sessions, for encouraging the leaders and members of the networks to work cooperatively together have been missed. Concerted future support for the development of a stronger, more united women's movement would give

¹⁴ The potential relevance of the developing 'men and masculinity' model to changing the perceptions of and relations between men and women in societies that have undergone major conflict and internal warfare warrant further exploration. As Oxfam's Policy Department played a lead role in the initial conceptualisation of this model the organisation is well placed to promote further discussion of its potential modification and use in Sierra Leone.

¹⁵ Oxfam's global record of impact achieved through working to promote institutional accountability in the context of PRSPs in different countries is a resource that could be well utilised.

women a louder voice in decision making processes. Considerable cross learning from emergent women's movements in other post conflict societies exists.

3.3.4 Different approaches for different project components

For all intents and purposes the project components have been implemented as two mini- projects with the result that cross-learning has been less than might have been the case had the project, from the start, been conceptualised in a more holistic way. A somewhat artificial divide appears to have been drawn between increasing women's representation on decentralised institutions (component 2), and increasing women's participation and leadership in civil society decision (component 1). As a result opportunities to build broader coalitions have not been fully exploited although women's inclusion in decision-making is a priority shared by the four participating organisations.

50/50 has assumed a lead role in efforts to promote women's representation on national and decentralised bodies, the Women's Forum and FOMWASL also fielded and supported women candidates for the 2004 local council elections and undertook sensitisation work around these. As the youngest of the four participating organisations the KTWN itself did not play a role in the 2004 local council elections although a number of its leaders and key activists were involved.

All four organisations have worked to develop women's leadership capacities and increase their opportunities for pro-active inclusion in decision-making processes, although none has to date prioritised work with decentralised Ward and Village Development Committees even in localities where there is an active member group presence. As a result women have not had the voice they might have had, to date, in the twin processes of decentralisation and PRS delivery.

3.4 Concluding comments

The above assessment suggests that in terms of meeting its objective the participating organisations are now more able to effectively respond to their clients needs through improved organisational development. However, the short time frame given to the project, which is explained by its uneasy marriage to the time bound project component 2 of the 2004 local council elections, has imposed artificial constraints. Most capacity building projects, including many of those funded by DFID, have a life span of at least five years, because it is widely recognised that meaningful impact cannot be achieved quickly. Expectations that this project could be different were optimistic as recognised by Oxfam. From conception it has viewed the project as a long term initiative although this is not explicitly stated in the project documents and was not adequately reflected in the original project design. Given the 18 month time frame, and with hind sight, more learning might have been generated had this project component been conceived as an exploratory 'pilot' used to test out different strategies and approaches.

The combined effect of the short time frame and the stress on physical outputs has afforded scant opportunity to reflect on some of the more qualitative and, arguably, essential activities that make for healthy and effective organisations such as coalition building around specific priority issues; carefully planned and targeted policy advocacy; and broad based learning from experience and ideas sharing. International NGOs, such as Oxfam, are particularly well positioned to both support and encourage these processes given that they operate at different levels, engage with a wide range of stakeholders, and have considerable experience from programmes in other countries to contribute and share.

3.3 Assessment: Appropriateness of strategies adopted

KEY FINDINGS:

1. Four defining features of project strategy are apparent: an emphasis on institutional strengthening as an end in itself; a focus on women's networks; an emphasis on strengthening individual institutional capacities; and the adoption of different approaches for the two project components.
2. The approach to component 1 has centred on the development of stronger institutions rather than orientating capacity building inputs towards specific programme aims.
3. Lack of cohesion and joined up working across the women's networks detract from their current impact and future development.
4. Women's leaders and others emphasise the need to include and engage men in the development of new approaches towards more inclusive decision-making roles.
5. The project focus on women's networks has not encouraged the mainstreaming of gender issues into broader civil society initiatives and platforms. Stakeholders point to the lack of engagement women's networks have with others in wider civil society.
6. Scope exists for broadening the concept of civil society out from the individual organisations comprising it towards more issue based coalitions for joint action.
7. The interface between the women's networks and decentralised institutions is weak. Experiences from elsewhere suggest that elected representatives can play key roles in advancing women's interests in the twin process of decentralisation and PRS delivery and monitoring.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. The findings of this review suggest that there is a need to design and implement a more comprehensive strategy to build the capacities of the women's networks and other civil society actors. Particular attention is warranted as regards the following:
 - a) Building the capacity of women's network to work more coherently together and within broader civil society;
 - b) Securing the engagement of men in initiatives to promote more inclusive decision making processes in which women play lead roles;
 - c) Encouraging civil society to mainstream gender into their on-going programmes and actions;
 - d) Building broader, issue based coalitions; and
 - e) Strengthening the interface between women's networks and decentralised institutions especially on processes of governance reform and PRS delivery.

4. PROJECT COMPONENT 2: REVIEW OF PROGRESS AND KEY LESSONS

The assessment in this section of the report relates to *Objective or Component 2* of the WIL Project implemented by Oxfam Sierra Leone under a Project Partnership Agreement with the 50/50 Group. 50/50 is a national membership based organisation established in early 2001 with the stated mission:

*To increase the level of female participation in politics and ensure parity in the local council, parliament, cabinet and other decision making institutions of the state.*¹⁶

Given its mandate 50/50 was well placed to drive project component 2, although with hindsight Oxfam might have done more encourage it to collaborate more closely and strategically with other women's networks which it was supporting under project component 1.

4.1 Assessment of partner selection process

It appears that DFID played a key role in encouraging Oxfam to incorporate the essence of component 2 into its project proposal to provide institutional strengthening to Sierra Leonean civil society organisations and to work in partnership with 50/50 for its implementation. The January 2005 evaluation report suggests that a member of 50/50, who was to become the organisation's Project Coordinator¹⁷ for the WIL project, had approached DFID with a funding proposal. Since DFID did not believe that 50/50 had the capacity to manage the project according to its strict reporting procedures it asked Oxfam to act as intermediary. This was agreed and Oxfam: *'integrated this component with one of capacity building for women's organisations as part of a two pronged Women in Leadership proposal'*.¹⁸ Some difficulties with the integration of the two components have been assessed above.

4.2 Assessment of project achievements

4.2.1 Project approach

As assessed below two features of Oxfam and 50/50's approach to project component 2 stand out:

1. A strong emphasis on increasing **women's numerical representation** on local councils by ensuring that a solid number (390) and geographical spread of women (1 candidate per ward) came forward, stood for election, and were eventually elected.
2. An equally strong emphasis on rapidly **up-grading the skills** of aspirant women councillors.

The emphasis on increasing women's numerical representation is understandable since one of 50/50's main lobbying strategies was for the introduction of a quota system. As pointed out in the January 2005 evaluation report, although there is evidence from around the world that positive discrimination can enable discriminated groups access to opportunities that have been closed to them, there are two potential risks associated with this approach: *'(firstly) In the push for meritocracy... it is critical that one system of discrimination is not replaced by another... Secondly, 'positive discrimination has the potential to promote those without the capacity into positions where they are likely to fail'*.¹⁹

However, as one male stakeholder consulted during this review stressed: *'it is imperative to create a critical mass of women, especially at community level, who are willing and able to come forward for election to decentralised bodies. Numbers are important'*.

¹⁶ Article 2 Constitution of the 50/50 Group.

¹⁷ The Project Coordinator was tragically killed in a helicopter accident.

¹⁸ Martha Harding, p:19.

¹⁹ Martha Harding, p:24.

Second, the emphasis given to rapid training and skills up-grading appears to have assumed that aspirant women local councillors who received training would be more likely to be elected than those who did not. It is far from clear as to whether such a causal link existed in practice and this has important implications for the inputs Oxfam selects in phase two of the project (PACER).

The seven indicators of achievement (against objective 1 and related outputs) outlined in the LOG frame for this component of the WIL project are more quantitative than those for project component 2. They relate entirely to the identification, training, participation in and election of women candidates in the 2004 local council elections; somewhat ambitiously aiming for one woman in each ward (390 women) to complete the campaigning process and 100 of them to be elected as local councillors.

4.2.2 Training aspirant women councillors

Regional and district coordinators: 50/50's decision to embark on a process to identify regional and district coordinators before delivering the training redirected some time and other resources from the project's main activities. However, decentralising the organisation's coordination mechanisms clearly won it some broader gains in terms of an expanded membership base and outreach capacity.

Training of Trainers: The trainers of trainers (TOTs) employed to provide the training were women whom 50/50 had trained in 2003 for the Parliamentary and Presidential elections, some of whom were elected Members of Parliament. TOT's were trained over a three day period in Freetown immediately prior to the start of campaigning which meant that some aspirant women who had already been nominated to stand and had been awarded symbols did not participate in the training they provided.²⁰

Ultimately **370 women received training**. In terms of their geographical representation training participants were selected by 50/50 from 14 districts rather than from each Ward as originally planned. This may have influenced the participation of women living in remoter, rural areas. Of these women less than a third (116) were aspirant local councillors, the majority were women's leaders, representatives and others. This may have had a positive impact on the development of women's leadership at district level and beneficial spin off implications for women's civil society organisation and participation. However, it meant that the number of women trained under the project who stood for election was significantly lower than planned.

Training on the decentralisation process and local councillor roles: The primary training resource was a quickly updated version of a Training Manual 50/50 had developed with the British Council for the General Election in 2002. Absent from it was essential advice about the Local Government Act and decentralisation process; and important detail about the specific responsibilities the roles and responsibilities being a district councillor entails. This meant that aspirants did not fully understand the political process, nor were they fully aware of what being a local councillor might involve. This gap is partly explained by the fact that the Local Government Act (LGA) did not get into the public domain until February 2004 thereby dramatically constraining 50/50's capacity to provide training on its content in readiness for the elections the following month. However, the generic aspects of decentralisation processes and local councillor roles could have been summarised had this been identified as a priority.

The January 2005 evaluation report does not assess in detail the **quality of the training** TOTs received or that which they provided to aspirant women. However, it points out that *'overall respondents stated that the training was a success in improving the quality of women candidates*

²⁰ Martha Harding, p:11.

who stood for election'. In addition, participants at the three evaluation workshops held in Kenema, Freetown and Kabala with women who had received training: *'all felt that their trainers were good and effective and the style of training was suitable'*.²¹

Achievement of progress against the development of **campaign plans** by women aspirants trained under the project is not considered in the January 2005 report and it is difficult to judge the extent to which the quality of the women aspirant's campaigns influenced their election. However, there was certainly very little time available for advance preparation.

The nomination and election of aspirant women: Of the 116 aspirants trained under the project, 30 were not nominated or stood down for a number of complex reasons discussed below. 86 women (just over half of the aspirants trained under the project) went on to stand for election. 53 of these women were elected out of a total of 475 councillors. No women candidates were fielded for Koinadugu which, together with Freetown East, is one of two districts without an elected woman councillor.

4.2 Assessment of project component 2 achievements

KEY FINDINGS:

1. Full achievement of project component 1's objectives to meet the numerical targets set was constrained by a number of factors including: 50/50's decision to decentralise its coordination structures before commencing the short training courses; the delivery of TOT training immediately prior to the start of campaigning; the selection of women on a district rather than a ward basis; inclusion of women who were not aspirant local councillors in the training; the lack of time to incorporate awareness raising around the decentralisation process and the roles and responsibilities of a local councillor in the adapted Training Manual; inadequate time to prepare women's campaigning messages; and lower levels of nomination than had been anticipated.
2. The constraints are partly explained by the lack of time for advance planning and preparation. However, their impact might have been reduced through the more systematic prioritisation of activities.
3. Closer collaboration with other women's networks, supported under component 2 of the WIL project, would almost certainly have made achievement of some targets easier.
4. Omission of training material to explain the decentralisation process and what the role of local councillor involves may have meant that some unsuitable candidates stood for election, were nominated and elected.
5. Feed back suggests that participants were satisfied with the quality of the training provided to TOTs and aspirant women.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE 2008 LOCAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS:

1. Timely advance planning, preparation and prioritisation in collaboration with other key civil society actors will be essential as will capturing relevant learning from the design and implementation of initiatives orientated to the 2007 Parliamentary elections.
2. Carefully designed and targeted training of aspirant women may be useful in building confidence and leadership skills (see assessment of project component 2) but should not be invested in at the expense of other priorities to reduce the structural constraints to women's full

²¹ Martha Harding, p: 13

and equal participation (see below).

3. The relative costs and benefits of designing, delivering and implementing separate short courses for women aspirants as against the mainstreaming of gender sensitive training materials and messages into broader based programmes (such as the civic education and sensitisation work planned by the NEW Coalition) warrant further consideration. The NEW Coalition member organisations have significant outreach potential which if harnessed to that demonstrated by the four WIL participating organisations would enable far greater coverage than any one network operating in isolation could offer.
4. If a TOT method is to be used it is advised that training materials and methods developed in other African countries (e.g. South Africa) where achievements have been won for women's representation, participation and leadership on decentralised bodies. The creation by organisations funding/supporting TOT programmes of a small grant fund for use by accredited TOTs to enable them to conduct further training is also recommended.
5. Sensitisation and civic education programmes to enhance understanding of the following will be important:
 - a) The meaning of decentralisation processes, particularly for people living in poverty, in the context of PRS delivery and monitoring;
 - b) The roles of 'elected representative of decentralised bodies at different levels' entails; and
 - c) What women as citizens can realistically expect from their elected representatives.
6. Learning components and delivery methods from the WIL Project (including the draft training manual) could be further assessed for possible adaptation and incorporation into future strategies designed to increase women's electoral participation and effectiveness.

4.3 Structural constraints to women's participation in the 2004 local council elections

The findings of both the January 2005 evaluation and this review suggest that there were a large number of factors un-related to the short training courses provided by 50/50 that influenced the numbers of women who stood for election, were nominated and elected in the 2004 local council elections. These are summarised below.

Role of the National Election Commission and lack of civic education: The January 2005 evaluation report points to the failure of some NEC (National Electoral Commission) officers to satisfy: *'their remit to conduct sensitisation and civic education impartially or to the full'*. This meant that some women were: *'unaware that they had the right to vote, let alone the right to stand'*.

Participants of the 50/50 National Executive Committee FGD in Freetown agreed that one of the main problems with the 2004 local council elections was that the **political parties** positioned women candidates low on their lists. As one described:

Political parties were an impediment. There were not enough tickets given to women. We aim to have 30% of women candidates in the 2007/8 elections. Parties should sign a contract supporting this strategy.

The review found general consensus about the need to develop a strategy to tackle this constraint. Few women, however, felt that the 'women's wings' of political parties are best placed to do this. Rather it was felt that a priority is to find ways of getting men to accept women's more equitable political party participation, so that they are fully included rather than being marginalised.

Women who stood as **independent candidates** faced additional constraints. Some 50/50 FGD participants felt that the option for women to stand as independent candidates is not a good one

since: *'people in Sierra Leone are used to political parties, so independent candidates will loose'*. In most cases women are said to have only stood as independent candidates because they were not given the party symbols they sought. Moreover, the January 2005 report notes reported cases of women who wanted to stand as independent candidates experienced incidents of political intimidation and: *'confusion spread by members and candidates of political parties'*. In addition, there were some reports of some NEC officials obfuscating the process for women who wished to stand as independent candidates, and failing to register some of their names.

The January 2005 report highlights a number of constraints that were internal to 50/50. For example, there were misconceptions about its role as being: *'specifically about women in leadership and not about being an explicit challenge to men in the home'*. More seriously some questions were raised about **50/50's political neutrality and impartiality**. For example, some people were found to have identified 50/50 *'as an organisation sympathetic to the SLPP'*.²² In addition, it has been suggested that some of 50/50's selection processes may have been open to personal and, or political influence, but there is no evidence from this review to verify this. The selection of TOT's and women trained appears to have been influenced largely by the stress on numbers and the short time between the actual project start and the actual elections as mentioned above.

The question of women's **lack of funds for campaigning** purposes was raised as a major obstacle to their increased representation by a large number of stakeholders consulted. 50/50's decision to give each woman aspirant an allowance of Le 200, 000 for campaigning expenses was one taken without consultation with Oxfam. However, the women who benefited now attribute this contribution very appreciatively to it. The 50/50 National Executive Committee is clear that the issue of campaigning expenses is one that has annoyed Oxfam as one said: *'finance is an important challenge. Oxfam frowns on financial support for women in politics but can support us in other ways through education and training'*.

Low levels of education and literacy, particularly among women at village level, carry a host of negative implications for: women's representation on decentralised institutions; possible voter disenfranchisement; the quality of women candidates campaigning messages; and their capacity to function effectively if elected

The January 2005 evaluation report suggests that the historical pattern of women's low educational levels, particularly in the north, was a major obstacle and explains their lack of participation in the 2004 elections. It argues that in order to fulfil the role of councillor a certain level of education and literacy is necessary which means that capable women leaders may be excluded simply because they do not have this.²³ This finding is borne out by the following views expressed by members of the KTWN Steering Committee (FGD, Kailahun) that many women who could have stood in the 2004 elections did not because they lacked confidence about their educational background, particularly their lack of literacy and numeracy skills.²⁴ They stressed: *'women need help to be educated so that we have the courage to contest elections and to talk in public'*. Another group pointed out that: *'there are not enough women on Ward Development Committees: women lack confidence because they are illiterate'*.

However, the question about the necessary **education and qualifications of women councillors** was hotly debated in the FGD with the 50/50 Executive Committee. Some participants felt that too much emphasis is put on promoting only qualified women. They argued that more educated women are often too busy in their professional lives to do a good job, and that women with low levels of education and literacy sometimes do better.

²² Martha Harding, p:15-17.

²³ Martha Harding: p17.

²⁴ By literacy many women means literacy in basic English which might be better described as 'English for Adults'.

Almost without exception women consulted during this review pointed to factors blocking their participation in decentralised institutions that are related to their **unequal relations with men**. As a district coordinator from the south for 50/50 described: *'It is a male dominated society. Men fear that women will start to challenge them within the home, so they don't support women in politics'*. Another 50/50 district coordinator from the north said: *'Most men do not like the idea of women coming up as leaders. Resistance is most marked among educated, professional men'*. Participants at the FOMWASL FGD made similar observations: *'Women are shy to come out as leaders. Men mock women who do speak out. ...Because women do not understand their rights they are left behind and always stay behind.....Women are sidelined and kept hidden especially in the north'*.

The combination of **negative male attitudes and women's lack of self confidence** clearly had a direct impact on whether or not aspirant women councillors stood in the 2004 elections, as a participant in the Kailahun FGD (50/50, Women's Forum and other women's leaders) said:

There was one woman candidate in each of the 14 Chiefdoms of Kailahun District. Men said they cannot vote for women so many of these women abandoned their candidacy. Our calls for 'the right to contest' met with considerable hostility.

Another participant at the KTWN FGD in Kailahun said:

We need to be trained to be more courageous and fear no threat. When we meet with men they sometimes use brutality, they threaten us with violence and dominate meetings. If women are not supported by powerful men in the community, they are sometimes forced to withdraw.

Specific reference was also made to the **threat of male Secret Societies**:

Men say they will take women who stand up in meetings to their (male) Secret Societies. This is a powerful threat even though women do not know what happens in men's Secret Societies, anything might happen to them in the bush.

The main problem is that if a woman is taken into a male Secret Society she will no longer be allowed to go to a woman's Secret Society. She is seen to have become a man and will be outcast by women in the community.

That little attention was devoted to forging and **working with strategic male allies** in the 2004 local elections and needs to be remedied next time around is a finding of the January 2005 evaluation that was strongly reinforced by stakeholders consulted for this review.

Another dominant theme repeated in many of the FGDs was that of **women not supporting other women**. As a FOMWASL FGD participant said: *'women do not support other women in politics'*. Participants at the Women's Forum FGD noted: *'We need to think more about how to manage the woman to woman relationship: how to build trust and work together'*. This statement is as true of the women's networks, which are more often in competition with each other than working together, as it is for individual women.

The disconnect between women's leaders and women at village levels is a feature of women's networks in Sierra Leone today that 50/50 are by no means immune to. The difficulties this presents to its efforts to increase women's representation manifest in different ways. For example, its leadership support the argument that the proportional representation system is more 'women friendly' than a **constituency system** on the grounds that the latter will create uncertainty about how candidates are nominated. At the Freetown FGD they argued that the system is not advantageous to women's increased representation because *'a political party may back a woman, but she needs to defend herself in the constituency and to do this successfully she will need funds, education and skills'*. In addition, the constituency system is seen to be open to the influence of Paramount Chiefs when it comes to the selection of candidates. An interesting alternative stakeholder view is that some women leaders do not like the constituency system because they have little contact with women at community level and fear that this will mean that they are not elected next time around.

A **priority finding**, echoed in the assessment of project component 1, is to enhance the voice of the majority of women in Sierra Leone who continue to live in poverty, confined to the margins of society, and excluded from participation in decisions affecting their lives. This will place them in a better position to assume positions of leadership and to challenge organisations and leaders that are not responsive to their needs and priorities. In this project there are obvious advantages to be gained through working from the bottom up.

In addition, clearly defined **advocacy priorities and strategy development** will be important for the future. At present there seems to be some debate, even within 50/50, about strategies to promote women's representation. These revolve around quota systems; political party codes of conduct that incorporate quotas; the role of 'women's wings'; and the issue of proportional representation (footnote). At the FGD in Freetown there was some debate about the question of a 30% quota for women in elections. Some participants felt that this approach is too rigid. Zambia was cited as an example of where party manifestos say 4 out of every 10 candidates must be women. Other participants felt that women should stand firmly by the 50/50 principle. It was recognised that constitutional amendment would be difficult and that a first priority is to persuade the political parties to incorporate a quota (percentage or number) into their manifestos possibly through lobbying the 'women's wings', although considerable scepticism was voiced about the value of these.

4.3 Structural constraints to women's participation in the 2004 local council elections

KEY FINDINGS:

1. A significant number of structural constraints impacted negatively on women's participation as candidates and voters in the 2004 local council elections including the following:
 - a) Most significant in terms of women's participation as voters was the lack of broad based civic education.
 - b) Constraints on women's participation as candidates included: NEC capacity weaknesses, the gender insensitivity and approach of some NEC officials; political party reluctance to give women candidates symbols; lack of clarity about the status of independent candidates; misconceptions about what 50/50 was trying to achieve; question marks about the impartiality and neutrality of 50/50 selection processes; women's lack of access to campaign funds; and their low levels of confidence, literacy and education, especially in the north.
 - c) Additional constraints concerned inequitable gender relations, men's attitudes towards women, and women's attitudes towards other women at individual and organisational levels. Men's hostility towards the idea of women in politics and women in leadership roles manifested itself in domestic violence. Male intimidation and threatening behaviour included penultimate threats about taking aspirant women to 'male secret societies'.
 - d) Many stakeholders consulted believe that a priority is to design new strategies that will help to secure the engagement rather than opposition of men.
 - e) A disconnect exists between women leaders and the majority of women at village level and is expressed in worries about the constituency system.
 - f) A priority finding is to enhance the voice of women living in poverty through working from the bottom up so that they can assume positions of leadership and challenge unrepresentative and unresponsive organisations and leaders.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE 2008 LOCAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS:

1. Since women's electoral participation was blocked by structural constraints these will need to be considered fully in the design and implementation of future strategies.
2. Advocacy priorities will need to be clearly identified for the design and implementation of a shared civil society strategy to remove some of the identified structural constraints identified by the review. Mainstreaming these into on-going initiatives is an option that warrants further exploration.
3. The design and delivery of gender sensitive civic education and sensitisation campaigns will be needed to encourage the engagement of men and challenge misconceptions about women's leadership roles and capabilities.

4.4 Support for elected women representatives on decentralised bodies

Most stakeholders consulted during this review suggest that women local councillors continue to grapple with a range of constraints in exercising their roles and responsibilities effectively. Oxfam and 50/50 have attempted to meet some of these, but there are a number of identifiable gaps remaining, as described below.

4.4.1 Constraints to the full and equal participation of women councillors

The informal assessment of the Decentralisation Secretariat is that many men and women local councillors are displaying **low competence levels and poor performance** and that a concerted push to build their capacity and those of future aspirants, particularly women, is needed. However, that one of two councillors currently judged to be performing most effectively in the role of Chair is a woman suggests that women councillors do not form a homogenous group with identical needs.

Many aspirant councillors, especially women were not sufficiently aware of the time commitment demanded by the assumption of what is a semi civic duty. Many of those elected are married women who were already **juggling multiple responsibilities**. They are reported to be finding it extremely difficult to attend council meetings regularly, including the annual statutory meeting. It will be imperative that some form of awareness raising is conducted around the LGA, especially that dealing with the roles and responsibilities of local councillors before women are elected in the 2008 local council elections.

In addition, women experience particular financial constraints and cannot afford transport to get to sub-committee meetings because these expenses are not reimbursable.

Following the 2004 elections Oxfam and 50/50 produced a simplified version of the LGA: **'the Local Government Act Made Simple'** which it used to train all women councillors. Members of the Executive Committee of 50/50 (FGD, Freetown) found this training extremely useful. Its coverage could be further expanded. Women in Kailahun, for example, emphasised that: *'the Local Government Act must be explained to more people'*. The need for more public education on the implications of the LGA; what the roles and responsibilities of being an elected representative at decentralised levels entails; and the relationship between local governance and the chieftdom system was stressed by a number of stakeholders. Considerable potential exists for this initiative to be up-scaled collaboratively with other organisations, especially those with on-going programmes in

remote rural communities.²⁵ Learning from both project components suggest that civic education/ community sensitisation sessions need to be planned and implemented in ways that fit best with women's multiple responsibilities. Obvious advantages could be won by engaging village level women's and other groups to organise and facilitate these. In addition, sensitisation components containing messages about women's rights and capacities might be more effective if they target men as well as women.

A break-out group (FGD KTNW Steering Committee) reported that the participation of women councillors in local council meetings is deterred **English language constraints** since these meetings are, on some councils, conducted in English.²⁶ Another group pointed out that: *'Some women are on local councils just to be seen. The minutes of these meetings are read out in English and they find it difficult to contribute'*.

When translated carefully it became apparent in consultations with women, including those living at village level, that when they talk about their lack of confidence in relation to non-literacy they often mean their lack of basic competency in English. For women's leaders and **potential aspirants** to positions on decentralised bodies this perceived deficit or disadvantage could be addressed by incorporating **English for Adults** components into future leadership training. An obvious initial pilot would be Kailahun where KTNW enthusiasm exists.

Male councillors resistance: It is reported that women councillors tend to assume, or to be forced into, passive roles on local councils. Male councillors have been quick to say to their women counterparts 'if you team up with us we will put you in visible committees'. Women councillors often fear that if they anger their male colleagues they will not be promoted even though the Decentralisation Secretariat and others are trying to instil the idea that all councillors are equal. As one stakeholder commented: *'the challenge is to find ways of breaking loose from outdated cultural trappings.... Women tend to tow the male line, only rarely do they take up their own position'*. Men are apparently keen to restrict women's leadership potential and confine them to 'following' roles. Not a single example is recorded in district council meeting minutes to date of a lively debate on women's issues. **Men over-ruling women** in council meetings was also emphasised by an FGD participant in Kailahun (FGD with 50/50, Women's Forum and other women's leaders) who said:

Of 18 women candidates in the end 10 were elected. Men are still not comfortable with their presence on the Council. They don't want to give them positions. Out of the 10 women not many are educated. They are dormant and inactive. Men constantly over-rule them.

4.4.2 Building the capacity of local councils

The Decentralisation Secretariat is currently developing a **five year capacity building strategy**. It aims to compile a skills or capacity inventory in order to be able meet identified gaps most effectively, but is being frustrated in this by poor response rates to the questionnaires it has sent out to local councils. There is every indication to suggest that the will exists at senior levels to ensure that the plan is gender sensitive and that it effectively targets women's priorities using tools and methods that best suit their needs. However, the Secretariat is grappling with a multitude of priorities and additional input would be helpful. There is receptivity, in particular, to learning from the experiences of other countries where gender issues have been successfully integrated into capacity building for decentralised institutions;²⁷ and for exploring 'men and masculinity' models.

²⁵ Partners might include 50/50 and other women's networks; civil society organisations represented on the NEW Coalition; and other civil society actors (e.g. Muslim faith groups could be targeted through FOMWASL links).

²⁶ It is up to individual local councils to decide which language they conduct meetings in according to the majority needs of the councillors.

²⁷ There are examples of good practice from South Africa and elsewhere.

Diverse constraints on women's local councillors performance: As detailed elsewhere a number of diverse factors contribute to the relative underperformance of women local councillors, including the negative behaviour and attitudes of male councillors; opposition from husbands and families; women's own lack of confidence and literacy, especially in English; and multiple, conflicting demands on their time.

That women rarely assume the lead in committee meetings and have not used these fora to discuss issues of concern to them may be indicative of a lack of leadership skills or to gender relations as played out on the committees and gender role stereotypes.

Training therefore does not represent the only tool or strategy that will be required to build capacity, although it may be an important one. Other tools such as: joint sessions convened with men and women councillors as part of regular council meetings; facilitation of cross council exchanges for women to spend time on-the-job with other women councillors; small funds to enable women councillors to undertake regular consultations with women at Ward and Village level or for established village level women's groups to host such consultations, could be piloted.

4.4.3 Women's participation on Ward and Village Development Committees

The constraints to women's full and effective participation on ward and village development committees appear to be atypically acute; a trend which some stakeholders attribute to the fact that these positions have not been marketed as well as those of local councillor and are perceived to attach less status to their bearers. Since women's participation on these bodies would significantly increase their access to decision-making and leadership; and might encourage a number to stand for higher office backed with more solid experience and confidence, the issue warrants more attention.

It was apparent from consultations with women at village level that awareness of the role and place of decentralised institutions is variable. In villages where there was an active Village Development Committee women displayed more awareness than in those where these were not functioning.²⁸ In both sites visited women indicated that their engagement in VDCs, as that of youth, is closely linked to their capacity to provide the necessary labour for village projects. Clearly the main purpose of such bodies is not to allocate labour nor is it by definition the role of either women or youth to supply this.

Given the potential significance for women of the decentralisation and poverty reduction strategy processes there is also a pressing need to build women's capacities to facilitate their active participation in decision making around these issues at village and ward levels. Oxfam's work with the KTWN models the achievements to be gained from building on relationships of trust and a solid reputation of working directly with communities consistently over a number of years. The model is potential eminently replicable.

4.5 Support to elected women representatives on decentralised bodies

KEY FINDINGS:

1. Both male and female councillors are reported to be underperforming in their new roles.
2. Women's participation and leadership on local councils is complicated and coloured by gender relations and a range of constraints that are gender specific.

²⁸ Women in village X decided during the FGD that they wished to re-activate the VDC that had collapsed due to mismanagement. On the spot they consulted the section Chief and it was agreed that a meeting to discuss this would be convened the following Friday.

3. Women's multiple and conflicting responsibilities make it difficult for them to attend council meetings regularly.
4. Training provided to all women councillors by Oxfam and 50/50 on the Local Government Act Made Simple was found to be extremely useful.
5. On local councils where meetings are conducted in English, the participation of women councillors is particularly constrained. Many women councillors lack confidence due to their lower levels of literacy and education relative to men.
6. Male councillors are keen to confine women to follower-ship roles. Women tend to tow the male line. To date there is not a single discussion on women's issues recorded in local council minutes.
7. The constraints to women's full and effective participation on ward and village development committees are atypically acute. Participation on these bodies would significantly increase women's participation in decisions affecting their lives; and might encourage and qualify a number to stand for higher office.
8. There is also a pressing need to build women's capacities to facilitate their active participation in decision making around decentralisation and poverty reduction strategy processes at village and ward levels.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Continuing and on-going support to women councillors (and other elected representatives of decentralised bodies) is extremely important in order for them to perform effectively. Moreover, these women serve as a role model or mirror to potential aspirants.
2. Learning from the WIL project suggests that Oxfam is well placed to play a lead role in sensitisation campaigns around the LGA given that it has already developed and used a 'Local Government Act made Simple' sensitisation package.²⁹
3. Provided civic education and sensitisation programmes are designed well enough in advance they could realistically incorporate gender sensitive, rapid skills upgrading, 'literacy for adults' components. In addition, English for Adults learning components could be incorporated into women's leadership training programmes for use at Village, Ward and possibly district level

RECOMMENDATION TO DFID:

1. Additional inputs to the Decentralisation Secretariat to ensure that the identification of capacity gaps and the design and implementation of the five year capacity building strategy are gender sensitive would be helpful. A priority is to mainstream gender into on-going planning, implementation and monitoring systems and processes so that they are not marginalised within wider change processes. It will be important to establish on-going monitoring mechanisms in this regard.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO OXFAM:

1. The specific constraints women councillors face warrant further consideration. Oxfam could

²⁹ There are obvious advantages to be won by incorporating information about the role of Village and Ward Development Committees into this. Inclusion of related information on PRS delivery might also be included.

undertake a case study of women elected to Kalahun local councils and then pilot various capacity building approaches and methods at district level. The results of on-going monitoring could usefully be fed into the Decentralisation Secretariat's capacity building programme.

2. In addition to the initiatives outlined in the PACER project proposal it is recommended that the following are considered:
 - a. The design, implementation and monitoring of a pilot project in collaboration with the KTWN to build the leadership capacities necessary for women to assume proactive roles on Ward and Village Development Committees.
 - b. Further exploration of local level initiatives to promote women's engagement with decentralised institutions on PRS delivery and monitoring.
 - c. Collaboration with other INGOs working at district and village levels in different parts of Sierra Leone to achieve expanded coverage through joint- programming.

4.5 Assessment of partner capacity needs

Oxfam's relationship with the 50/50 Group and its inputs were conceptualised differently from those to women's organisations under project component 1. Hence the 50/50 has not received the same organisational development training in terms of developing an updated constitution and five-year strategic plan. It is clear, however, that Oxfam has invested capacity building support in 50/50 through informal mentoring and the strategic guidance provided by its project staff.

It is difficult to judge whether weaknesses in 50/50's project management capacity, detailed in the January 2005 evaluation report, would have been reduced had Oxfam been able to invest more direct capacity building support. Some of these weaknesses were linked to the tight time frame in which 50/50 was expected to deliver on the outcomes of the project and its six specific activities.³⁰

Recently Oxfam has undertaken a self assessment of organisational capacity with 50/50 and has agreed with it a plan of action designed to meet shortfalls and gaps with a view to a continuing partnership on the PACER project.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS: THE WAY FORWARD

Some clear gains have been won through the twin efforts of the WIL Project to increase the number of women elected as local councillors; and to strengthen the institutional capacities of local NGO networks representing women.

5.1 The key challenge

The key challenge: The underlying rationale that drove the OGB WIL Project, namely that: '*women and girls are over-represented among the poor and under-represented in decision-making*' remains valid.

The findings of the review suggest that simply increasing women's numerical representation on national and decentralised decision making bodies will not, taken alone, be sufficient. A majority of women in Sierra Leone are confined to a life of poverty; marginalised within the chiefdom system of

³⁰ Martha Harding: p7 and 11.

governance; and at risk of continuing exclusion from decision-making within newly decentralising institutions as well as from full and equal participation in developing, democratic electoral processes and the still emergent civil society. In addition, male resistance to women's increased public participation at all levels and to tackling the issues they prioritise is entrenched.

5.2 A four pronged approach

A four pronged **approach** is recommended that is designed to:

5. **REDUCE and REMOVE:** the structural constraints that lie at the root of women's continuing lack of engagement with and representation, participation and leadership on public decision making bodies.
6. **PROMOTE:** women's decision-making roles by providing them with the support they need to take full advantage of new opportunities as they arise.
7. **MAINSTREAM:** initiatives to remove structural constraints and to promote women's decision making roles into on-going institutional and policy reform processes and civil society initiatives to influence these so that they are integral to the bigger picture rather than being confined to the margin.
8. **BUILD:** the capacities of institutions and specific groups to ensure realisation of the above.

5.3 Demand driven initiatives: Potential for integrated programme development

To date the bulk of international aid and development cooperation has targeted supply driven initiatives to challenge the root causes of Sierra Leone's conflict ridden heritage. Although civil society is still young, fragmented and defined almost exclusively in terms of non-governmental national and community based institutions, the potential would seem to exist for up-scaling a demand driven initiative. The TOR for this review did not include a sector wide assessment of either civil society potential capacity or possible future roles. However, in the course of review and learning consultations with stakeholders of the WIL project three, largely separate, demand driven initiatives were briefly considered:

- 1) Oxfam's own follow up project: **PACER** which incorporates many of the recommendations of the January 2005 evaluation report of project component 2, but was drafted in advance of this more holistic review of learning.
- 2) Formative reflection and planning by the **NEW Coalition** on initiatives around the Parliamentary and local councils scheduled for 2007 and 2008 respectively which is currently being consolidated into a proposal of planned activities.
- 3) **ENCISS** still embryonic programme of work to strengthen the civil society-state interface, particularly around the twin processes of the decentralisation and governance reform process and the PRS; to promote enhanced institutional accountability on all fronts; and to increase the participation of women and youth.

These three initiatives ³¹ suggest that a good base starting point exists for the development of a larger programme to increase women's engagement with decentralised bodies and their representation, participation and leadership in public decision making with a focus on good governance and poverty reduction.

³¹ There are others being developed by Campaign for Good Governance; a range of human and legal rights based organisations; and organisations coalescing around the major challenge of combating sexual violence to mention but a few.

5.3.1 INGO demand led initiatives and potential

THE OXFAM PACER PROJECT: Although the findings of this review suggest that primary emphasis needs to be given to mainstreaming initiatives designed to promote women's participation, representation and leadership in decision-making into on-going change processes, there is a continuing need to specifically support women's organisations and to target women in leadership roles in order to strengthen their capacities and voice. Here the Oxfam PACER project has an important role to play substantive experience acquired through the WIL Project.

The contextual and background analysis contained in the draft PACER project proposal suggests that the Oxfam's grasp of the challenges to gender equity and women's empowerment in contemporary Sierra Leone is well developed. However, the objectives in the accompanying draft LOG, whilst incorporating a number of the recommendations outlined in the January 2005 evaluation report, largely mirror those developed for component 2 of the WIL project.

The PACER emphasis remains centred on increasing women's numerical representation in Parliament and on decentralised institutions with scant reference to the more qualitative dimensions of women's decision-making roles. As currently formulated opportunities to increase women's broader based local engagement with and participation in decision making around poverty reduction and decentralisation and governance reform processes have not been elaborated on as much as they could have been. Moreover, whilst the PACER proposal emphasises the importance of developing strategic partnerships across Sierra Leonean civil society, it does not contain strategies for further developing those which Oxfam has already established through the implementation of component 1 of the WIL project. In particular, scant attention is given to the opportunities that clearly exist to up-scale and replicate the important work around women's participation and leadership in decision-making that has been started with the KTWN.

It is strongly recommended that Oxfam broadens the remit of its Phase II project, the PACER, towards a broader based approach that addresses the **structural constraints** to women's engagement with decentralised bodies and their representation, participation and leadership on these; and to **actively promote** their increased decision-making roles particularly at village and ward levels with a focus on PRS delivery and monitoring.

OTHER INGO PROGRAMMES: There are a significant number of INGOs with programmes in Sierra Leone. Many of these, like Oxfam, are working at village, ward and district levels in different parts of the country. A number of them have worked, or are working, together, on initiatives around the PRS and governance reform processes. This suggests that there is potential for more joined up working on initiatives to encourage women's engagement with decentralised institutions and promote their representation, participation and leadership on these.

Currently most INGOs with a long term presence in the country are re-defining their country programmes in the transition from what were largely humanitarian initiatives to longer term development programming. Whilst their collective potential for joint programming around a demand driven initiative of the type recommended in this review may currently be constrained by internal change such transition demands, there is considerable scope for Oxfam to explore such future joint programming further.

5.3.2 Sierra Leonean led demand driven initiatives and potential

THE NEW COALITION: appears to represent a model of good practice as an initiative to build an issue based civil society coalition across actors and groups with shared and overlapping goals. With the more coherent and sustained participation of the women's network organisations in it this body

could play a significant role in challenging some of the structural constraints to women's more equal participation within the electoral system; processes towards the democratic electoral reform; and a programme of activities to promote women's participation in the forthcoming 2007/8 elections. Oxfam and other INGOs as members of the coalition are well placed to influence the design, implementation and monitoring of these priorities in ways that encourage the robust mainstreaming of gender issues and a stronger voice for women.

ENCISS: The mandate and strategic priorities of ENCISS (**Enhancing the Interaction between Civil Society and the State to Improve Poor Peoples' Lives**)³² are broader than those of the NEW Coalition and include strengthening the interface between civil society and the state; enhancing institutional accountability and representation; building civil society capacities for proactive and constructive engagement in decision-making and policy monitoring; and giving more voice to CSOs that engage with and represent the interests of women and youth. Were gender issues to be strongly and centrally mainstreamed into these priorities, ENCISS could contribute significantly to strengthening women's engagement with decentralised bodies and promoting their representation, participation and leadership on these. Priorities might include:

1. The further exploration of mechanisms to ensure the full engagement of women's network organisations within broader civil society;
2. Capacity building with women's network organisations for and effective policy advocacy and dialogue at central and decentralised levels, including technical upgrading of advocacy, communications and monitoring skills; strategy development to promote stronger networking and issue based coalition building; and mechanisms to facilitate learning and experience exchange.
3. Support for the design, implementation and monitoring of strategies to ensure the effective mainstreaming into their core programmes to promote popular engagement in decision-making around PRS delivery and monitoring; and reform of the chiefdom and decentralised systems of governance of gender issues by civil society actors.
4. Capacity building with women's network organisations to strengthen their internal accountability mechanisms and their responsiveness to the needs and priorities of the women whom they represent, especially those living at village level.
5. Learning from the experience of other countries in Africa and elsewhere where women and other excluded groups (such as ethnic minorities, people with disabilities) have engaged with decision-making around decentralisation and poverty reduction; and where policy monitoring initiatives have been designed and implemented to specifically promote women's interests (e.g. gender budgeting and budget monitoring).³³

Emphasis in ENCISS developing programme is placed on CSOs that represent and engage with women and youth. The findings of this review suggest that younger women, such as those organised into the 'Intelligent women's group' in Kailahun have considerable leadership potential that warrants further investment.

5.3.3 Leadership for up-scaled demand driven initiatives

The above mentioned initiatives represent a few examples of demand driven work that is being planned or is already underway that could, if refined and joined up more, impact positively on women's roles in decision making around PRS delivery and governance reform particularly at local levels. To have maximum impact and in order to draw in other relevant initiatives, however, leadership is needed. One option would be to identify a Sierra Leonean organisation, such as ENCISS, to take on such a role possibly in partnership with an INGO or INGO consortium. This option is likely to require quite considerable additional capacity building support for the lead organisation itself but has much to recommend it in terms of creating a sense of ownership. An

³² ENCISS Strategic Focus Briefing Paper.

³³ Kenya and Uganda are good models.

alternative would be to identify an INGO, such as Oxfam, that is willing and able to provide programme leadership, management and coordination. It is recommended that these options are further explored.

5.3 Demand driven initiatives: Potential for integrated programme development

KEY FINDINGS:

4. To date the bulk of international aid and development cooperation has targeted supply driven initiatives to challenge the root causes of Sierra Leone's conflict ridden heritage. However, brief consideration of three existing programme initiatives (the proposed Oxfam PACER Project; New Coalition work on electoral reform and the forthcoming 2007/8 elections; and emergent ENCISS priorities around decentralisation, governance reform and PRS delivery and monitoring) suggest that a good base starting point exists for the development of a larger, more holistic programme to enhance women's engagement with decentralised bodies and their representation, participation and leadership in public decision making with a focus on good governance and poverty reduction.
5. There are a significant number of INGOs working at village, ward and district levels in different parts of the country. A number of them have worked, or are working, together, on initiatives around the PRS and governance reform processes. This suggests that there is potential for more joined up working on initiatives to encourage women's engagement with decentralised institutions and promote their representation, participation and leadership on these.
6. The above mentioned examples of demand driven initiatives could, if refined and joined up more, impact positively on women's roles in decision making around PRS delivery and governance reform particularly at local levels. To have maximum impact and in order to draw in other relevant initiatives, however, leadership would be needed.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

4. It is strongly recommended that Oxfam broadens the remit of its Phase II project, the PACER, towards a broader based approach that addresses the structural constraints to women's engagement with decentralised bodies and their representation, participation and leadership on these; and actively promotes their increased decision-making roles particularly at village and ward levels with a focus on PRS delivery and monitoring.
5. Currently most INGOs with a long term presence in the country are re-defining their country programmes in the transition from what were largely humanitarian initiatives to longer term development programming. Whilst their collective potential for joint programming around a demand driven initiative of the type recommended in this review may currently be constrained by internal change such transition demands, there is considerable scope for Oxfam to explore such future joint programming further.
6. There are various options that warrant further consideration in terms of identifying a possible lead organisation for the development of a more holistic and integrated programme.

5.4 Mainstreaming gender issues into supply driven reform initiatives

In addition to the above there are a number of largely supply driven initiatives underway or planned that are relevant to the development of a programme designed to enhance women's engagement with decentralised bodies and their decision-making roles on these. These are summarised below.

5.4.1 Support for Electoral reform and the National Electoral Commission

This project was initiated by the NEC with the participation of the GOSL, civil society and international donors and partners. It is not yet clear what type of civil society representation and involvement is envisaged. The NEW Coalition would seem to be well placed to play an active role as a 'focal point' for wider civil society participation and would be in a strong position to advocate for the mainstreaming of gender issues, particularly if the women's networks and others contribute proactively to this as coalition members.

'Basket Funds' for the project will be managed by the UNDP and DFID is likely to make a significant contribution. It is strongly recommended that the project which comprises seven pillars (NEC restructuring; staff capacity development; infrastructure development; setting up an IT system; review of electoral laws and regulations; boundary delimitation and voter registration; and sensitisation as a component that cross-cuts each) develops a more robust approach to the mainstreaming of gender issues. For example, implementation modalities could elaborate on how the electoral and institutional reform processes will address the structural constraints that impact negatively on women as electoral candidates and voters. Particularly important also is to mainstream gender issues into the review of electoral laws and regulations as well as into the design, implementation and monitoring of the following: cross cutting sensitisation programmes which are likely to fall to the 'restructured NEC staff led by the Citizens Outreach Unit'; strategies for staff capacity development; and voter registration programmes.

5.4.2 The Sierra Leone Decentralisation Capacity Building Project

DFID plans to allocate funding to a multi-donor trust fund administered by the World Bank under the Institutional Reform and Capacity Building Project (IRCBP) to support the GOSL's implementation of its decentralisation and chiefdom governance reform programme through the **Sierra Leone Decentralisation Capacity Building Project**

Specific support for women under the project is likely to include legal reform, training women councillors and the promotion of gender awareness which will be critical.³⁴ Promotion of greater social equality and of the role of women are emphasised in broad terms and could be more centrally and visibility mainstreamed into the project components including the following:

- ❖ **Support for the review of the legal framework and chiefdom governance:** The review findings (above) suggest that the relations women have with the chiefdom and decentralised governance systems differ significantly from those of men and warrant specific exploration.
- ❖ **Capacity building for central and local level institutions:** It will be essential to mainstream gender from the outset into initiatives aimed at building institutional capacities and to ensure that capacity building strategies are gender sensitive.
- ❖ **Strengthening of SL training institutions:** Incentives for the promotion of women's participation in decision making could be built into interventions to strengthen formal training institutions (e.g. Civil Service Training College). It will be important also to find an optimal mix of training, workshops and other capacity building interventions bearing in mind the particular

³⁴ Project also includes funds for office infrastructure construction and rehabilitation.

constraints women face. Support to bodies such as the Association of Local Councils in SL as well as the Association of Women Councillors (Kenema) deserves closer scrutiny since in other post conflict societies (e.g. South Africa, Namibia) these have assumed lead roles in gender sensitive capacity building programmes for decentralised bodies. In addition, the value of including CSOs in the design and delivery of appropriate capacity building interventions should not be underestimated.

- ❖ **Small local council grants for service delivery:** Women's participation in decisions concerning the choice of services, means to ensure that there reflect their majority priorities and needs, and in monitoring the grants will be essential.

5.4.3 The exploratory Poverty reduction Strategy: 'Drivers of Change' initiative

This initiative aims to enhance understanding of the context for pro-poor change in the country and to develop a pro-poor framework of action over the coming 5-10 years. It looks at how less formal, more traditional systems of decision-making could be influenced for broad based social organisation around public interest issues and pro-poor strategies; as well as at rural economies and the development of strategies to promote food security and small scale micro enterprise within these. The initial study is likely to contain a number of pointers that will be highly relevant to mainstreaming women's interests into future PRS delivery and defining where they need support if they are to participate fully and assume leadership roles in pro-poor social action.

5.4 Mainstreaming gender issues into supply driven reform initiatives

KEY FINDING:

2. On-going supply led initiatives to build institutional capacities for democratic, electoral processes; accountable, decentralised institutions and reform of the chieftom governance system; and maximisation of PRS 'drivers for change' are essential to the promotion of women's roles in decision-making.

KEY RECOMMENDATION:

2. To realise significant impact it is recommended that women's priorities and interests are mainstreamed more centrally and visibly into the components of supply led initiatives around decentralisation and good governance; electoral reform; and PRS delivery and monitoring.

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