



Operating Environment

NMDHR'S OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

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Introduction

Several issues and circumstances outside the control of the organization affects and regulates our work and or does not promote democracy, human right, transparency or accountability. We see many of these issues/problems as potential opportunities that have we have strategically strive to solve over the years through effective community engagement, partnerships and collaborations.

Economic Environment

Sierra Leone is a country nurturing a young democracy with a weak economy which is beginning to rejuvenate. The per capital income levels and gross domestic products (GDP) are also low. Sierra Leone has one of the highest adult literacy rates in the sub region and the world. The country is rated as one of the poorest with poor infrastructural facilities.

There is a high rate of unemployment. The youths constitute a high percentage of the population a majority of whom are unemployed while commercial sex is on the increase. For the employed, salaries are low and often delayed. The percentage of low income earners is relatively high and very many people are poor and unemployed. The situation has led to increased migration of mainly the work force (youths) in search of greener pastures. A number of the youths have moved from rural communities to bigger cities and across the border into neighbouring countries (Liberia and Guinea) in search of employment. Because of the high unemployment, most people are not able to access proper/good housing, education and



Operating Environment

health which are relatively expensive although the government has introduced a free health care service for pregnant women, suckling mothers and under five children.

The standard of living of the people is low. The global economy, financial crisis, the rising food price and inflation are bound to affect development aid leading to further deterioration in the economic situation. A majority of the target beneficiaries are subsistent farmers. The situation is further worsened by the poor road network, a major factor that influences the low returns from their harvest. Furthermore; the prevailing economic situation poses implications for the future of the coalition.

Political Environment:

NMDHR was born, following the end of the civil war in 2002. Sierra Leone has since had two general and two local government elections. In the same period, we have envisaged political pluralism. Similarly, it has been observed that there is increase in intolerance among the different political parties. There is pluralism of the country on party lines accompanied by political violence. Peoples attitude towards politics is negative characterized by non political tolerance as the slogan goes “my area or strong hold” of a political party. Despite government has declared commitment to having 30% of women in politics, action is yet to be taken on this imperative recommendation. There remain low level of youth and women’s participation in politics (e.g. there are 14% of women in parliament) and decision making that affects them. The youths and young adults make up the greatest part of bread winners in our



Operating Environment

societies and constitute the work force of the population. A majority of them go out to ensure a livelihood for their families, either by farming, trading or working in some kind of employment. In times of political tension, they are often misused. When elections are over, there are very few jobs for them. As they have themselves and their families to support and job opportunities are few, crime rate is bound to increase.

Another crucial contributing factor to this situation is that the role of the media commission (IMC) and SLAJ are not very clear. The media houses are divided along political lines while the operational mandate is not respected by the parties. There is a lack of knowledge on human right acts and policies. Similarly, the human right organs including the parliamentary human rights committee, the parliamentarians for global action are dormant while the (HRC SL) has weak capacity and a lack of adequate mechanism to fight it.

The national court systems are slow characterized by frequent adjournments. Customary laws even though archaic, are still in use. Its method of implementation has resulted into cruelty and injustice to the beneficiaries and to a large extent promotes domestic violence. Similarly, it acts as a barrier to getting valuable information for NMDHR hence adding more pressure on our staff in the communities.

Health Situation

The Government of Sierra Leone is committed to the United Nations Millennium Development Goals with specific focus on goal 4



Operating Environment

(reducing child mortality) and 5 (Improving maternal health) as well as the strategies for each of the related goals. The government with support from international partners have renovated and constructed new health facilities including hospitals/health centers and proper storage facilities in communities' country wide. Sierra Leone has established a network of health centers and clinics throughout most parts of the country. Although these are numerous, they are not particularly providing quality service, services are inaccessible, and inadequately stocked with basic medicines, under staffed (e.g. in the 14 chiefdoms in the Kailahun District, there are only two trained and qualified medical doctors and one road worthy ambulance for the referral in the district while record keeping is poor or improper.

The situation has resulted into poor health management system and service delivery including late referral of cases. Communication between nurses and hospital management is poor. Drug distribution system is impossible, weak and does not benefit the actual targets. The poor nature of the roads network and the fact that some of the communities are inaccessible in the wet season makes the situation worse off. This situation has and continues to pose series of implications for the beneficiaries including the lack of drugs in the health centers or units. Record keeping for the drugs distributed is poor and access to information from the hospital set up is difficult while key hospital management personnel are difficult to access (example the DMO).



Operating Environment

Education Situation

In Sierra Leone, education is legally required for all children. However, there is a shortage of school infrastructure and teachers which has made its realization difficult. The civil war which was officially declared ended in 2002 resulted in the destruction of over one thousand primary schools mostly in the remote communities. Over 50 percent of the school-age children were out of school. The situation has improved considerably since then with primary school enrolment reportedly increasing by more than 50 percent and the reconstruction of many schools since the end of the war.

The population of Sierra Leone continues to increase with the youth population representing over 50 percent. Despite the rehabilitation, extension and or construction of more schools (facilities). Classrooms are often overcrowded with low teacher motivation. There are inadequate teaching and learning materials, while a high number of the teachers are untrained and unqualified. A majority of school management committees are not functional. Most of the management boards (e.g. in Kailahun district) do not have the requisite human resource. The school managements are weak and have no school development plans in place. There is a high rate of school drop-out, youth violations and unemployment, teenage pregnancy especially among rural girls resulting into high dropout rate among the girl child and poor performance in public examination. The high rate of teenage pregnancy has direct implication for NMDHRs work. In recent times, NMDHR received overwhelming teenage pregnancy cases in Kailahun district alone.



Operating Environment

Security Situation

The security situation in the target communities are generally sound, partially safe and supported by police community partnerships (community policing). The relationship between civilians and security personnel (police partnership board) is healthy. There are intermittent crime rates including domestic violence such as economic and physical abuses; sexual and gender based violence (SGBV), property inheritance right cases (e.g. cocoa plantations and household properties) etc. Court cases are delayed and justice strangled. There is no resident magistrate in some districts including the Kailahun district. The local court acts are not interpreted correctly. The borders are porous and communities on either side influence each other as well as share common characteristics. In Kailahun alone, there are over 50 known border crossing points to Guinea and Liberia.

The prevailing situation has implications for the targeted beneficiaries. It has contributed to increased poverty, disregard for the rule of law, increased domestic violence e.g. wife beating, rampant child abuse cases such as rape, early marriages and increased teenage pregnancy. On the other hand, NMDHR have to work under stringent security risks in porous border areas with unpredictable security apparatus (i.e. RSLAF, SLP, ONS, Guinean security etc). The implications are further compounded by the absence of the local court and or resident magistrate in our operational areas. Similarly, the trust or positive perception of the community people towards NMDHR, has left them relying on NMDHR staff (peace monitors) to resolve land and other property



Operating Environment

conflicts and domestic violence include bearing extra pressure on the organization.

Tradition and culture

Traditional beliefs and practices are respected in many communities including our target communities. This situation is affecting development in a number of ways. There are a number of polygamous marriages and homes. Gender discrimination is common. Youths and women are marginalized and have no voice in decision making in their communities.

The tradition and cultural practices in our operational districts influenced participation. Women are not involved in decision making. In some districts especially the Northern region, women are reportedly excluded from leading (e.g. contesting chieftaincy positions). Women are not allowed to speak freely in public hence limiting their participation. The culture and tradition, limits our access into the communities and are in conflict with our values, national and international legal standards (i.e. the constitution of Sierra Leone, Universal declaration of Human Rights etc) which we use to do our work.

References

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