

Final Review Report

For project: *Sierra Leone - 00061235 – Open Government Initiative (OGI)*

Period covered: April 2008 to December 2009 (allocation was given in 2008, and the project extension was approved until the end of 2009)

Section 1: Project contribution to CPAP outcomes

CPAP Sub outcome 1.1.1: The quality of national development policy and effectiveness of its implementation enhanced through the transformative leadership support capacity development

Intended Outcomes	Actual outcome	Intended outputs	Actual outputs	Reasons if progress below target	Partnership strategies	Recommendations and proposed action
Improved government accountability and transparency and enhanced citizen participation in the policy process through open and direct dialogue between the government and ordinary Sierra Leoneans	<p>Improved public perception for government accountability and transparency – 89% of the survey participants that attended town hall meetings with MPs said that the meeting contributed to improved transparency while 86% said it contributed to improved accountability</p> <p>Open channel of communication established between the Government and the people, and an important two-way communication fostered</p> <p>Over 6,000 ordinary Sierra Leoneans participated in democratic</p>	<p>Executive branch's strategy and actions regularly communicated and discussed with the general public</p> <p>Improved dialogue between Members of Parliament and their constituents</p> <p>Increased public knowledge of cases heard in court</p>	<p>The project contributed to improved government capacity for public information and democratic dialogue by assisting the Executive branch, Parliament and judiciary engage their public and receive feed-back on service delivery and influence development agenda through town hall meetings and other fora</p> <p>Over 2,000 people attended town hall meetings with the Executive arm of the government in four rural locations, creating a space for ordinary citizens to interact with the President and his cabinet</p> <p>Over 2,000 people took part in parliamentary town hall meetings in 3 locations, providing</p>		<p>OGI has strengthened partnership with CSOs in order to enhance the impact of its activities to the Sierra Leonean society. CSOs have been contributing to OGI in the areas of sensitization and mobilization as well as monitoring of the initiative's impact through the conduct of surveys after town hall meetings</p> <p>OGI utilizes available media and information technology, such as radio, phone and mobile SMS, to foster open dialogue. In addition, in order to ensure that the project</p>	<p>Following a successful closure of the pilot phase of the project, efforts are now under way to institutionalize the initiative as a full national initiative and mainstream OGI as public information and dialogue initiative within the 3 branches of the government</p>

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	dialogue, contributing to the policy making process		<p>community members with opportunities to provide feed-back to their elected representatives</p> <p>Over 2,000 people attended meetings with the Justice Sector in 3 district locations, addressing issues on access to justice, human rights and security</p> <p>The interactive radio/TV program received over 200 questions and comments sent in by SMS text messages and phone calls during the 12 programs and issues ranging from hydro dam and gender laws to land reform were addressed by public officials</p>		achievements are further disseminated to the general public, the print and electronic media are engaged	



Stakeholder and Beneficiary Contribution:

Civil Society - the project strengthened partnership with civil society organizations to improve understanding of grassroots realities for sensitization and community mobilization. This partnership has enabled the improved community participation and has contributed to successfully removing a political undertone at meetings.

Media - In Sierra Leone, radio is the most important means for public information, and therefore OGI invested heavily on the utilization of radio. OGI has also partnered with community radio stations for sensitization, communication of government policies and actions, and mobilization of female participation.

Judiciary – The members of the Judiciary, (such as a high court judge, master and registrar, and law reform commission), and the broader justice system including the police and prisons visited districts to meet and discuss with the people, and to visit facilities such as the police stations and prisons.

Parliament – Parliamentarians visited three districts for town hall meetings with community members, elaborating on their roles as parliamentarians, role of the opposition as well as gaining an understanding of daily issues that affect people.

SLBS/Ministry of Information & Communication – The Ministry supported OGI through the broadcast of a radio and TV program through Sierra Leone Broadcasting System (SLBS). The radio and TV program, “OGI Hour,” is a question, answer and discussion forum where government officials answer questions sent in from the audience by phone calls and SMS text messages.

Ministry of Presidential and Public Affairs – The Ministry, through the OGI Secretariat formed under the Ministry, was responsible for coordination of OGI activities. The Secretariat planned the project activities and ensured implementation.

Integration of crosscutting areas (Gender mainstreaming):

Gender Mainstreaming - During the first town hall meeting that took place in Bombali district, about 300 community members participated to have an open dialogue and ask questions to the Presidency and senior ministers. However, despite sensitization to mobilize women and youth, majority of participants were men. The project then embarked on a major sensitization and mobilization efforts in order to attract female and youth participation.

Songs and jingle were developed and broadcast intensively by radio encouraging especially women and youth to attend these town hall meetings and demand accountability to the government officials for the actions taken on their behalf. By the fourth town hall meeting, women`s participation had increased significantly. Further, the project ensured that equal number of men and women were able to ask questions and raise concerns during the town hall meetings.

Section 2: Project Implementation – Issues

Despite the initial success, one of the challenges was to ensure the political neutrality of the project so that the initiative is not perceived as a tool for political campaign in a country that is highly polarized along party lines. In order to ensure neutrality, it was crucial to mobilize participation of people from all walks of life regardless of party affiliation and including marginalized groups such as women, youth and the disabled. OGI carefully picked the locations of visits, and enabled the Presidency, cabinet members, and Parliamentarians to visit opposition communities to reassure that the government is for all Sierra Leoneans. In addition, the project strengthened partnership with civil society organizations with better understanding of grassroots realities for sensitization and community mobilization. This partnership has enabled the improved community participation and has contributed to stamp out political undertone.

Section 3: Project Performance and Achievement

Strengthened transparency and accountability

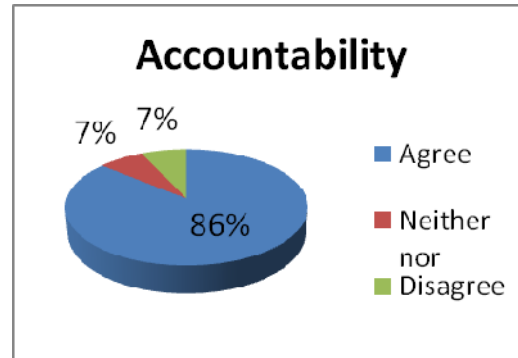
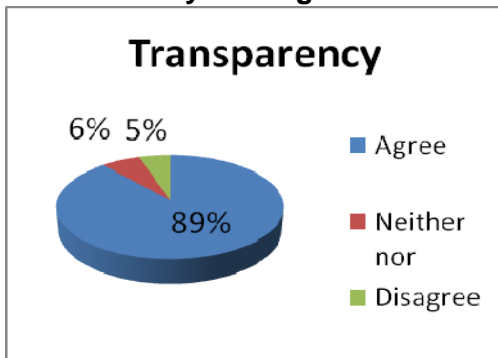
Through OGI town hall meetings, over 6,000 ordinary Sierra Leoneans participated in democratic dialogue – including over 2,000 people who attended meetings with the Executive arm of the Government in four rural locations; over 2,000 people who took part in parliamentary meetings in 3 locations, and over 2,000 people who attended meetings with the Justice Sector in 3 locations.

All members of the communities were welcome and encouraged to attend the meetings to dialogue directly with the government and address issues of their daily concerns including poverty, lack of access to public services, energy, health, education unemployment and gender based violence. The meetings also provided the government with direct feedbacks from ordinary Sierra Leoneans in order to adopt them in policy formulation and implementation.

After town hall meetings in districts, a perception surveys are implemented to collect views and perceptions of the participants on the event and governance in Sierra Leone.

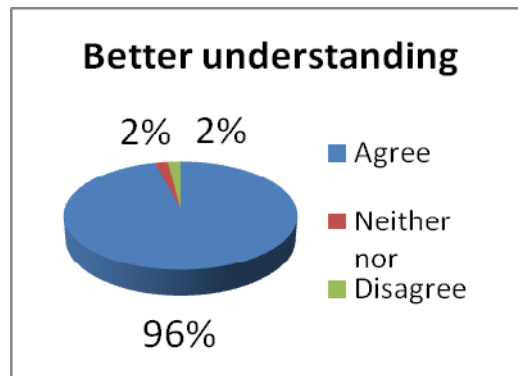
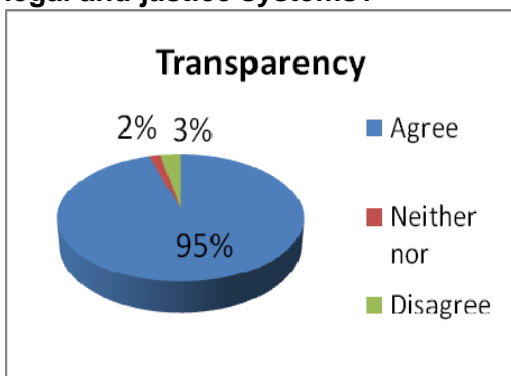
As the below tables summarize, according to the surveys, 89% of the survey participants that attended 3 parliamentarian town hall meetings said the meeting contributed to improved government transparency and 86% said it contributed to improved accountability. Moreover, 95% of the survey participants at 3 judiciary town hall meeting said it contributed to improved transparency of the Judiciary and 96% said it contributed to better understanding of the justice system.

***Has OGI parliamentary town hall meetings contributed to transparency and accountability in the government?**



The above graphs below show averages of responses from 3 town hall meetings (Kenema, Koinandugu and Pujehun)

***Has OGI judiciary town hall meetings contributed to transparency in the justice system and whether the OGI meetings improved peoples' understanding of the legal and justice systems?**



These graphs above show averages of responses from 3 town hall meetings (Kambia, Bonthe and Kailahun)

Helping people to make their voices reflected policy formulation

The OGI meetings created a space for ordinary citizens to scrutinize their Parliamentarians, address their Judiciary as equal citizens, and provide recommendations to the President and his cabinet. For example, a OGI town hall meeting enabled the people and the Ministers of Energy, Agriculture, and Commerce and Trade to address the issues of rapidly increasing rice and fuel prices and energy concerns in 2007. This discussion contributed to government policy measures to mitigate price increase through fiscal incentives to importers, private sector operators and Government of India on concessionary rice export terms.

OGI created a rare opportunity, contributed to the sense of ownership in governance, and has been valued by ordinary Sierra Leoneans. *"This is the first time I have seen the faces of all honorable Members of Parliament and a golden opportunity to hear them addressed the numerous questions asked and the answers supplied,"* said a Kenema Community member. In line with this, one community member stated, *"I benefited a lot from this meeting because it has provided us with an opportunity where we can stand before our leaders and express our direct constraints without a threat. OGI gives us hope that our rights will not be abused with the presence of this forum."*

Enhancing national unity and contributing to decentralization and peace building

Open Government Initiative established a unique and solid channel of communication between the Government and the people, and fostered an important two-way communication in rural areas, which has not been fully achieved by the challenging decentralization processes. This is significant in a country where alienation from government is considered a cause of the 10 year civil war. "If OGI was found before the war, there would be no war in the country," said one participant. By reaching out to rural area and, for the first time, bringing the key institutions of central, local and traditional (chiefdom) authorities under one roof, OGI complimented the ongoing decentralization efforts in Sierra Leone. This was the first time for many communities to receive the Presidency, and the first time for most people to have the opportunity to meet with the parliamentarians since campaigning for 2007 elections.

OGI opened up a constructive national dialogue between the people and centers of power in Sierra Leone. Apart from providing an opportunity for rural communities to learn about issues pertinent to their daily issues, they also gained insight into their role in development, and the relationship between the central and local authorities. During the town hall meetings local actors including Paramount Chiefs, Local Councilors, students, teachers, women, youth and other community members engaged in dialogue with the Presidency, Parliamentarians and members of the Judiciary.

Creating open channels of communication and promoting meaningful dialogue

Sierra Leone has been polarized along political party lines since the 2007 Presidential elections and there has been a strong perception from the opposition party that the Government is neglecting the interest of the opposition communities. In addition to helping to communicate key government priorities, policies and actions to communities in districts, OGI enabled the President and his cabinet to visit some of these opposition districts and reassure citizens that he is a President for all Sierra Leoneans.

The opportunities to visit districts to have face to face interactions with the people also increased confidence of Parliamentarians to conduct constituency outreach and provided them with information about constituent needs to strengthen their representation to citizens. Following success of the first three parliamentary town hall

meetings, there was a significant increase in demand from Parliamentarians to participate in similar initiatives. In addition, many people commented that the town hall meeting was an “eye opener”, very educative and important for the community as it contributed to information flow between the Parliamentarians and the people. As for judiciary town hall meetings, similar positive changes in attitude were recorded among participants of town hall meetings held in Kambia, Bonthe and Kailahun. One Kambia participant expressed, *“The meeting changed my perception towards the justice sector positively.”* A member of Bonthe community stated similarly, *“This meeting rebuilt my trust in the justice system in the country.”*

Furthermore, besides learning about various issues pertinent to the communities, the public strongly appreciated learning about the functions of parliamentarians in the Government, their role in development, or the relationship between the Parliament and the Local Council. These meetings were equally important for the MPs to acknowledge some of the most critical issues affecting lives of people in their constituencies. Participants of Judiciary town hall meetings mostly appreciated OGI forum for teaching them about their rights and responsibilities.

Section 4: Lessons Learned

Open and direct information flow through the media

During the initial stage of the project, most people in districts were still not aware of the initiative. In order to sensitize the population on the initiative and mobilize participation, OGI invested in collaboration with the media. In Sierra Leone, radio is the most important means for public information, and therefore OGI invested heavily on the utilization of radio. OGI partnered with community radio stations for sensitization, communication of government policies and actions, and mobilization of female participation. Further, in order to ensure that the project achievements are further disseminated to the general public, the print and electronic media are engaged. Following the Parliamentarian town hall meetings, press conference was held with the civil society and the media to evaluate the OGI activities and to emphasize the political impartiality of the Initiative.

Reaching the wider population through partnership with CSOs

Another measure taken in order to reach the wider population was to work with the civil society. OGI has strengthened partnership with CSOs in order to enhance the impact of its activities to the Sierra Leonean society. CSOs have been contributing to OGI in the areas of sensitization and mobilization as well as monitoring of the initiative’s impact through the conduct of survey after town hall meetings. In addition, the involvement of civil society in OGI contributed to political neutrality on the ground as no political slogans or other party undertones were noticed among the government officials or the general public despite the fact that some meetings took place in the opposition stronghold.

Improving the participation of the marginalized population including women

In a post-conflict country like Sierra Leone, there exists severe gender imbalance and OGI helped foster a better environment for women to take part in constructive national dialogue on issues impacting their lives.

To improve participation, OGI held two-hour women’s forum on radio in each district before town hall meetings to discuss and sensitize gender issues and promote women’s

participation in the meetings. During town hall meetings, a well-known women's rights advocate was chosen as the facilitator as an additional measure to encourage women to contribute to the dialogue. However, this has still been a challenge as only about 20% of participants to town hall meetings has been females, and more initiatives are needed to bring about inclusive participation.

In addition, marginalization of youth is one of the major issues in Sierra Leone. In order to mobilize participation of youth in the town hall meetings, jingles were developed by a popular Sierra Leonean artist, Innocent. Innocent also performed a song specially made for OGI at the beginning of every town hall meeting. Further, special measure was taken to invite physically challenged people who sat in the front seat to facilitate their easier interaction with the government representatives.

Section 5: Post Project Review

Following a successful closure of the pilot phase of the project, efforts are now under way to institutionalize the initiative as a full national initiative and mainstream OGI as public information and dialogue initiative within the 3 branches of the government. After the DGTTF funding was depleted, the Government has continued with OGI activities, such as the "OGI Hour – Have Your Say in Governance", the interactive radio/TV question, answer, discussion program using its own resources, while resource mobilization efforts are also under way to continue to support the initiative. Concurrently, effort to mainstream the project idea into our traditional support to parliament, judiciary and the executive is currently being explored.