

YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL COUNCIL DECISION- MAKING IN SIERRA LEONE

**The successes and challenges of decentralised
participatory governance from a youth perspective**

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About Restless Development

Restless Development is Sierra Leone's foremost youth-led development agency. Our mission is to place young people at the forefront of change and development. We began working in Sierra Leone in 2005 at the invitation of the then Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. Our strategy focuses on the key goal areas that are most critical for unleashing the potential of young people as assets for development: livelihoods and employment; sexual and reproductive health and civic participation.

Today Restless Development works in every district of the country empowering young people to address the most urgent issues facing their communities and wider society. In the eight years it has been working in Sierra Leone, Restless Development has built a far-reaching reputation for its unique youth-led model and for achieving ambitious results.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“Young people have a fundamental right to determine how power and resources are used in their societies. By not including them in decision-making processes, either in the public or private sector, countries lose a crucial resource base. Young people can contribute a great deal through their perspectives and experiences; no governance structure can be truly successful without them.”

Commonwealth Governance, Development and Youth Networks www.thecommonwealth.org

Over the last decade or so, youth have gained increasing prominence on the global development agenda. In some African countries those under 35 comprise up to 70% of the population, making them a constituency difficult to ignore. Increasingly governments, donors and civil society are recognising both the specific needs and vulnerabilities of youth as well as their huge potential to contribute positively to development.

As more resources are channelled both towards tackling youth exclusion and disadvantage as well as towards harnessing young people's potential as partners in growth, the role of young people in deciding and managing the allocation of resources has been brought in to sharp relief. Globally there is increasing recognition that young people not only have a right to determine how resources are used, but that they bring unique and valuable experiences and viewpoints to the debate.

The issue of youth participation in governance and decision-making has particularly strong resonance in Sierra Leone because of the association between the political and social disenfranchisement of young people and the civil conflict of 1991-2002. In the years following the civil war, there have been strong efforts to introduce structures and programmes that serve the needs of young people including the establishment of a National Youth Commission focused on the promotion of youth issues. At the same time, there has been significant momentum in the post-war period to bring government closer to the people through the decentralisation of key government functions to re-established local councils.

While decentralisation has been rolled out with impressive speed since 2004, the realisation of full, meaningful participatory governance has been slower to progress. This research aims to gain a better understanding of the reality of participatory governance in local council structures from a youth perspective almost a decade after decentralisation began.



Through consultations with a range of council, civil society, and government stakeholders, it attempts to build up a picture of, on the one hand, how proactively councils bring young people in to decision-making and, on the other hand, how proactively youth take advantage of existing opportunities to engage with council. It also highlights the challenges to greater and more meaningful youth engagement and makes recommendations for improving the quality and level of youth engagement at council level.

Overall the research finds that while there are many positive signs that young people are increasingly engaging in decision-making at the council level, it is also clear that youth participation is not uniform and in some areas council-youth interaction is very weak. While there are some encouraging examples of strong, dynamic youth representatives participating effectively in council decision-making, more often youth engagement is low-level and sometimes tokenistic.

Making meaningful and effective youth participation in governance a reality requires the combined effort of local and national government, civil society and donors. It is hoped that this research will help stakeholders to understand the issues better so that they can develop effective strategies to bring in to realisation full participatory democracy as envisaged by the National Decentralisation Policy of 2010, in which all constituencies, including youth, can be meaningfully involved.

As Sierra Leone continues on an upward trajectory of social and economic development, and as democratic principles take root, ensuring young people are given a say in decision-making should be prioritised as an essential cornerstone of democratic consolidation, the importance of which, particularly given the historical context, cannot be exaggerated.



YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN CONTEXT

The rising prominence of youth participatory governance on the development agenda

In Sierra Leone, the issue of youth participation in governance has a powerful resonance because of its devastating association with the civil war of 1991-2002. In recognition that, on the one hand, youth political disenfranchisement had catalysed and exacerbated the conflict and, on the other hand, that the conflict had created a generation of excluded and disadvantaged young people, the post war years saw several important developments aimed at addressing the specific needs of young Sierra Leoneans. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports was established in 2003. This was later separated in to a dedicated Ministry of Youth, Employment and Sports and in 2013 further rationalised in to a Ministry of Youth Affairs. Two youth-specific legal instruments were also created:

The **National Youth Policy** of 2003 gives policy backing for the first time to the concept of youth as a national development priority. The policy outlines the roles and responsibilities of the youth themselves, the state and other actors and creates specific instruments for supporting and promoting youth issues at the district level through the creation of District Youth Councils (DYCs).

Six years later, the **National Youth Commission (NAYCOM) Act 2009**, established a Commission with responsibility for realising the provisions of the National Youth Policy. NAYCOM's responsibilities include, among other things, creating employment opportunities for youth, initiating

youth development programmes, developing a national youth development plan, creating a network through which young people can access information about beneficial services and coordinating the activities of youth groups.

These instruments concretise in law the country's commitment to its young people and their significance on the national development agenda. However, the specific area of youth participation in governance is given broad and somewhat loose treatment and there is a lack of clarity around the mechanisms through which it will actually be realised.

The legal and policy framework for decentralisation and participatory governance

The decentralisation programme was officially launched in 2004 with the passing of **the Local Government Act (LGA)** and corresponding statutory instruments. In addition to devolving considerable administrative, fiscal and political power to 19 newly established local councils, the LGA also institutes several principles of participatory governance such as the public display of development plans and budgets; the creation of a Ward Development Committees (WDCs) to act as a focal point for the discussion of local problems and needs and to be the council's earpiece to the community; and a participatory planning process.

The **National Decentralisation Policy** was launched in 2010 in order to widen and strengthen the scope of the LGA. The policy brings a high level clarity to the vision of participatory governance by specifying such principles as engendering people's ownership of their local development agenda; guaranteeing transparency and openness in the conduct of local council affairs; and promoting inclusiveness and equality of all citizens within any locality regardless of gender, origin, religion or political persuasion.

While the legislation and policy include fundamental tenets of participatory governance, neither specify any particular youth-focused or youth-friendly provision. Bodies such as the council committee on Youth and Sports, the District Youth Council or the District/Regional Youth Officer, all created under prior legislation, are not alluded to. Although gender is identified as a cross-cutting issue in the policy, there are no such provisions made for youth. All in all, the instruments do little to promote youth participation in local governance.

Citizens' participation in governance processes in practice

While decentralisation has been rolled out rapidly, evidence suggests that the realisation of participatory governance for all citizens has lagged behind. The Integrated National Public Services Survey (INPSS)¹ for 2012 reveals that, while 90% of respondents had heard of their local councillor and 28% had talked with them, only 7% had ever visited a council notice board, 9% a WDC noticeboard and only 27% had ever even heard of the WDC (although 25% had participated in a WDC meeting). There has been an almost 30% fall between 2008 and 2011 among those who think the government is responsive to their community's needs and similarly a 20% drop in those who think the community has influence over local government decisions.

In summary, while there are a number of laws and policies setting out, on the one hand, the promotion and mainstreaming of youth issues and, on the other hand, participatory democracy in decentralised government, nowhere are these two areas brought together to specifically promote or clarify the mechanisms through which young people can participate in local and national governance processes. Participatory governance for all citizens has been slow to emerge but there are encouraging signs that it is starting to take root in many areas. It is important that young people are able to take advantage of these opportunities.

¹ Government of Sierra Leone (2012) *Report on the Integrated National Public Survey: Public Services, Governance and Social Dynamics*

HOW WAS THE RESEARCH DEVELOPED?

Objectives

This purpose of this study was to understand the reality of youth participation in decision-making at the local council level.

The research aimed to answer the following questions:

- How proactively do councils engage with youth?
- What are the main challenges to council-youth engagement?
- How effective and capacitated are young people and youth organisations when it comes to engaging with council?
- What are the main challenges to youth-council engagement?
- How can these challenges to participation be overcome?

The research focused particularly on the role and contribution made by three groups of stakeholders: council representatives (including councillors, administrative staff and council committees); formal youth structures (Ministry of Youth/National Youth Commission structures including District Youth Councils, Chiefdom Youth Councils and District Youth Officers) and civil society organisations.

Approach

This field research was carried out between January and March 2013 by a research team from Restless Development. It comprised the following four stages:

Desk Research – An extensive review of the existing literature on participatory governance and decentralisation in Sierra Leone was undertaken. This was supplemented by preliminary interviews with a number of key informants. The desk

research was used to define the key research questions to be addressed by the research and to develop a research strategy for obtaining the information required.

Field Research - The field research consisted of undertaking Key Information Interviews (KIIs) with a total of 36 participants covering the councils of Bo City, Bo District, Kono District, Koidu City, Makeni City and Bombali District. This was supplemented by interviews with a further 16 Freetown-based stakeholders including representatives from the Decentralisation Secretariat, the Local Councils Association and other non-government and donor organisations supporting the decentralisation process. This range of stakeholders allowed information to be triangulated in order to give a more balanced and rounded view of the issues under consideration. The selected local councils in Bo, Kono and Makeni were chosen to represent different socio-economic and political environments, between north and south, urban and rural populations and areas with a history of mining compared to those with a history of small-holder farming.

Analysis – The research team processed the data gathered through the KIIs in a tabulated format and used this to conduct an analysis of the findings. These findings were then condensed in to a draft report which was validated by a cross-section of stakeholders.

Validation – The validation of the research findings was held on 2nd May involving stakeholders representing a wide cross-section of the key informants.





Limitations

The scope of the research was limited by the focus on six councils, and the fact that only 53 stakeholders were consulted in total. The data collection was a purely qualitative exercise, giving rise to the possibility of interpretation errors by the researchers.

To help mitigate the impact of the narrow sample size, wherever possible interviewees were selected to give as wide a representation of age, gender and educational background as possible. The three focal districts were selected for their contrasting political composition (Makeni/Bombali being APC-dominated councils, Bo SLPP-dominated and Kono/Koidu being one of the main swing districts although currently with an APC majority) and because

they also give a representative picture of the dominant economic activities in the country (mining, agriculture, services etc).

To mitigate issues of interpretation of the qualitative data, the researchers were briefed thoroughly on data interpretation and interviewing techniques before the research began. Focusing on the three core stakeholder groups: council representatives, formal youth structures and civil society organisations, allowed a purposeful triangulation of the information which was further compared with the Freetown-based organisations encompassing both government and civil society.

HOW PROACTIVELY DO COUNCILS ENGAGE WITH YOUTH?

"We align all our work with the Local Government Act. The Act sits here on my desk and is my bible. We follow the principles of accountability, transparency and inclusive participation to the letter."

Nyuma Maningo, Development Planning Officer, Makeni City Council

"I have no knowledge of the council consulting with youth. The NYC never attends council meetings or coordination meetings, only the Regional Youth Officer. The council doesn't invite us. Once we went to see the council chairman but he never attended us. They don't consider us important."

Alhaji Kandeh Kanu, District Youth Council member, Bo

A mixed picture emerged from the research in terms of the willingness and capacity of councils to engage with their youth constituency. While most councils display a good level of transparency and openness, the extent to which councils engage young people in, for example, the planning process, is largely contingent on how much funding is available to support the process. Most of the councils surveyed tend to have a narrow understanding of youth issues and no concerted attempt is currently being made by any council to mainstream youth in to the council's planning. The openness of the relationship between council and civil society varies considerably across locations but innovations such as council radio programmes or dedicated council-civil society fora appear to improve relations significantly.

Transparency and Openness

- All 6 councils examined declared they conduct open council and committee meetings in line with the Local Government Act (LGA) and this was confirmed by most CSOs interviewed.
- The degree to which council documents are made available to the public varies across councils but is generally stronger at headquarters and weaker at the ward level.
- Ward Development Committees (WDCs) meetings tend to be open to the public but are not always well attended.
- Generally, council administration and councillors are aware of what's expected in terms of transparency and openness and efforts appear to be being made in most areas, with some exceptions, to adhere to these principles.



Councillor Anthony V Amaro, 32 years old, Chair of Bo District Council Youth and Sports Committee

"Unfortunately there is only a very small budget allocated for youth and sports activities in the district which will constrain what we can do. When I move around the district I see that most of the problems affecting youth result from the issue of unemployment. If I had unlimited resources to invest in youth in the district, the priorities I would focus on are skills training and employment for unemployed youth, sports activities to engage unemployed youth, seminars with youth on non-violence and living together peacefully."



Involvement of Youth in Planning Process

- The extent to which council planning processes have been conducted in line with the Local Government Act's participatory requirements varies across the six councils studied but there seems to be a correlation between the breadth and depth of participatory planning and the amount of funding made available specifically to facilitate the planning process.
- Youth-focused activities were in most councils' plans but generally constituted a small part of the plan.

Role of Youth-focused Structures in Council

- Each council examined in this study has either a dedicated Youth and Sports Committee, or an amalgamated committee dealing with youth, sports and other issues such as education.
- In most cases, these committees have interpreted a narrow role for themselves focused primarily on managing the allocation of funds from the Ministry of Youth and Sports rather than championing youth issues more widely across council.
- Generally the District or Regional Youth Officer is consulted by the committee, but the District Youth Council more rarely or not at all.
- Individual councillors assigned to the Youth and Sports Committees vary considerably in their knowledge and understanding of youth and sport issues and this can impact on how active, effective, engaged and engaging the committee is able to be.

Responsiveness to Issues Raised

- Most respondents were able to give at least one example of when young people or youth representatives had brought to the council's attention an issue affecting them and in most cases, the council had taken steps to address the problem and in some areas the issue had been resolved.

Responsiveness to Monitoring and Feedback from Youths/CSOs

- All council representatives interviewed declared the council open to monitoring and feedback from civil society regarding its performance, and many were able to give examples of such monitoring activities.
- However, in reality the receptiveness of councils to civil society monitoring varies considerably. The six councils examined in this study each appeared to be at different stages in terms of their relationships with CSOs and their responsiveness to monitoring and feedback from CSOs.
- A key obstacle hindering good relations, according to many interviewees, are civil society organisations which take an aggressive and non-constructive approach to challenging council about its activities.

THE CHALLENGES TO COUNCIL-YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

"The challenges I had as a councillor came down to finances basically. We had no facility to accommodate public council meetings and if I didn't provide refreshments no one would come. The WDC members were not paid so they were hard to motivate. There was never enough money to cater for all these things."

Sembia Johnson, Technical Consultant, Local Councils Association of Sierra Leone

"We use to attend council meetings but it became clear that civil society doesn't get a chance to actually raise issues in those fora. This is why we don't attend those meetings any more and instead use other means such as council radio discussion programmes to have our voices heard."

Alex Nallo, Regional Chairman of the Civil Society Movement, Southern Region

A number of challenges to the capacity and motivation of councils to engage youth in planning, monitoring and other activities were identified by the stakeholders. The challenges are varied and span financial resources, attitudes, knowledge and capacity of councillors as well as factors such as partisan political allegiances which can have a skewing effect on which groups of youth are consulted and engaged in council planning.

Funding constraints

- Funding provided to local councils by central government is a fraction of total government expenditure and councils have struggled to raise more than a small proportion of their revenue through local taxation.
- Councils struggle to meet the needs of all interest groups, including youth, and this is a source of tension between council and civil society.
- Councillors receive only a small budget for their ward-level activities and for those who represent remote localities, regular travel to and from their ward to council may not be possible.
- The scope of participatory planning processes have been very much determined by the available budget.

A narrow vision of youth needs

- Youth issues are often envisioned in a narrow way at council, and few administrative or political council employees have grasped the concept of youth mainstreaming.
- There is little evidence that youth issues are being mainstreamed in to the councils' other budgets and plans in sectors such as health and agriculture.
- There is tendency for council staff and councillors to express stereotyped views of young people and their needs and this seems symptomatic of the more generally limited understanding of youth needs at council. Few council representatives seem willing to champion broader youth issues and promote a more mainstreamed vision.



The capacity of councillors

- Most newly-elected councillors have very little previous experience of the workings of council and a minimal understanding of the roles and responsibilities of their position.
- Orientation and training for new councillors is not always offered and many feel underequipped to carry out their role effectively.

Partisan Politics

- Partisan politics feature in many councils even those where there is a clear political majority.
- Political representatives including councillors often favour their party's youth representatives or supporters rather than wider non-political youth representation, both in terms of involving them in council processes/consultation and in terms of channelling resources.
- WDCs in particular, are considered to be vulnerable to political cronyism.

Phebian Philomina Davies, 25 years old, Vice Chair of the Bo District Youth Council



“I have found it quite frustrating being a member of the DYC because we are not given the chance to participate in decision-making in the councils. Neither the District nor the City Council have ever invited the DYC to participate in consultations or planning meetings. They consult with the Regional Youth Officer but not with us. I think the problem is they do not think young people are serious and they don't have confidence in us. At the same time they also worry we will expose their secrets. There is distrust on both sides.”

Alhaji Musa Conteh, 32 years old, Regional Coordinator for Community Empowerment for Rural Development (CEFORD)



“I believe councils are weak in consulting with young people and they have historically seen young people as a threat. NGOs are helping to bring councillors and young people together in open discussion fora and this is helping to change attitudes and overcome the suspicion on both sides. The radio is a useful tool for helping citizens know more about the affairs of council and hold council to account.”

HOW PROACTIVELY DO YOUTH ENGAGE WITH COUNCIL?

“It’s really important that youth engagement is not tokenistic, that youth are not going along to simply collect their DSAs, join the talking shop, but not actually have a meaningful role in planning and development. For this to happen they need to have their capacity built to be able to organise, consult and pull together their objectives and plans. This is currently only happening in some cases.”

Pious Bockarie, Local Governance and Economic Development Programme, UNDP

“Sometimes we receive letters inviting us to so-called ‘consultations’ but we don’t want to accept because we know they are just ticking boxes. We are not there just to be seen we are there to be heard.”

Ibrahim Jalloh, DYC Chair, Bombali

The research found that the motivation and capacity of civil society varies considerably in different locations but where it is strongest and most active, it also tends to be better organised. In a number of locations youth civil society has come together under an umbrella group and this has helped strengthen and unify the youth voice. The contribution of formal youth structures (for example District Youth Councils (DYCs) and District or Regional Youth Officers) is potentially significant, and in some cases these representatives are doing much to raise youth issues at council level. However, in all cases, they are under-resourced and underfunded and this limits their effectiveness.

Case study: Demonstrating how young people can contribute valuably to council activities - Bombali District Youth Council



In a number of locations, young people have participated in council-led projects such as waste management/refuse collection. These types of activities appear to play an important role in raising the profile of youth with the council and demonstrating their usefulness to the community, helping to break down the barriers of prejudice and mistrust.

For example, the dynamic Bombali District Youth Council (DYC) has been taking the initiative to demonstrate how useful young people can be to the local authorities. In the run up to the 2012 elections, the DYC organised a meeting with Makeni City Council, the police and the Office of National Security as well as 50 youth representatives to map strategies for controlling violence during the campaigning period. The initiative was greatly welcomed by the authorities and the campaigning period passed peacefully. More recently the DYC has been in discussion with Makeni City Council about engaging young people across the city to sensitise citizens about the importance of paying tax. Their proposed project would employ up to 50 young people as community educators and bring obvious benefits for the council. Through these initiatives, the DYC is helping to demonstrate how young people can contribute valuably to council priorities thereby helping to transform council attitudes towards the youth of the city.

BO CITY RATE



Civil society motivation and capacity

- There are some notable contrasts in each location with regard to both the level of organisation of youth civil society and the calibre and dynamism of individual youth representatives, suggesting these factors have a significant bearing on the extent and success with which youth representatives engage with local authorities.
- Youth-serving civil society in Kono, for example, appears to be particularly strong and well organised. The District Youth Coalition has been operating there for some time and a number of agencies have recently come together to revive the Forum for Youth Serving Agencies (FYSA) with the purpose of promoting youth issues.
- In Makeni, an umbrella youth group, the Makeni Union of Youth Groups (MUYOG), has been representing a cross-section of youth organisations, although it is apparently less active than in the past. The Bombali District Youth Council is notably well organised and dynamic with a strong leadership.

The contribution of formal youth structures

- The government-endorsed youth structures of the District/Regional Youth Officers and the District Youth Councils appear to vary in their effectiveness, but share a common challenge of being poorly resourced.
- All District or Regional Youth Officers interviewed have regular interaction with the council to give advice and contribute to planning. They are considered to a large degree to be the focal point for youth, and in some councils (e.g. Bo District) appear to be often the only youth representative regularly consulted by council.
- The ability of the Youth Officers to be effective in their role is constrained by the limited financial and logistical support from the Ministry of Youth/National Youth Commission (NAYCOM) and their mandate does not appear to be clearly defined. This situation may be further confounded by the introduction by NAYCOM of a new Regional Youth Coordinator post, the role of which and how it differentiates from the Youth Officer role is not yet clear.
- The DYCs are similarly poorly resourced and also have to contend in some locations with a lack of recognition at council level.
- The incomplete devolution of prescribed ministerial functions also presents a challenge to the functionality of these structures.

THE CHALLENGES TO YOUTH-COUNCIL ENGAGEMENT

“Rural areas often lack dynamic youth leaders because those who have an education and who are empowered and energetic tend to leave rural places and come to Freetown. There is effectively a brain drain of youth leaders at the local level.”

Floyd Davies, Coordinator, Centre for Local Government, Decentralisation and the Environment

“I think most youth groups and structures are splintered because they don't clearly understand one another's roles and responsibilities, because of greed, lack of understanding their roles, lack of transparent elections or structures. These factors keep groups splintered and they are not able to come together effectively to represent with one strong, clear voice or take a stance on issues.”

Husham M M Sesay, District Youth Officer, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Kono

A number of challenges impact on young people and youth-serving civil society's ability to engage effectively with local councils. These relate largely to the knowledge and capacity as well as attitudes of individuals and organisations. Several stakeholders indicated that council-youth relations can be damaged by youth taking an aggressive or confrontational approach to their engagement with council. On the other hand (as shown on p14) where young people have taken steps to demonstrate the positive contribution they can make, it has had a transformative affect on the council's willingness to engage with them.

Knowledge of council processes

- Many young people and youth organisations are simply not aware of the existing channels through which they can influence council or other layers of local decision-making. Civic education was at one time part of the school curriculum, although this has not been the case for many decades.

Quality and calibre of youth leaders and representatives

- Effective youth leaders not only require the education, training and experience to undertake effective and constructive lobbying and advocacy, but also need a visionary and developmental mindset to look beyond their own immediate priorities and be able to understand and promote the needs of the wider youth population.
- The emergence of such leaders is challenged by widespread illiteracy, poor education and the 'brain drain' of talented and educated youth away from rural areas. There are also attitudes among appointed leaders of short termism and self-interest and expectation of rewards for positions of authority.
- Other challenges include the traditional lack of voice for youth in rural societies meaning few young people have experience of contributing to decision-making or challenging decisions taken. It is also undermined by the occupation of youth representative roles by people over 35 years who do not have young people's interests at heart and are reluctant to make way for younger representatives.



- Given the importance of effective youth leadership and representation, the legitimacy of those holding formal youth representative roles, both those elected and appointed, should also be taken in to consideration and steps taken to ensure the process is transparent and ensures legitimacy.

Organisation and capacity of civil society and formal youth structures

- Where youth civil society is organised and united, it is better able to form a constructive relationship with councils and is taken more seriously by those authorities.
- There is a tradition of mistrust between civil society and councils, and this has been exacerbated in the minds of many council representatives by the confrontational way in which some youth have challenged the council in the past.

Frank Kanu, 35 years old, District Development and Planning Officer, Bombali District



“Bombali District Council has recently undergone a development planning exercise with support from ENCISS [a donor] that was entirely participatory and a great success. We included all wards in the district and conducted a needs assessment with the Ward Development Committees (WDCs) and the wider community. It does concern me that without the funding from ENCISS we would not have had funds to do this exercise.

I believe the District Council is responsive to the needs of youth in Bombali. We are also a young council. Almost all the administrative staff are under 35 and I would estimate more than half of the newly elected councillors are also under 35. There are many youth-focused elements in the District Development Plan including a vocational skills training centre.”



CONCLUSIONS

The research has revealed many positive signs that young people are increasingly engaging in decision-making at the council level. In the first place, there are many strong examples of youth representatives working effectively with council to address youth issues and other examples of where youth representatives have held council effectively to account. In the second place, there are clear indications in many quarters that councils are reaching out to youth, involving them in planning processes where the resources are available and consulting with them whenever they can. The widespread participation of young voters in the 2012 elections and the significant proportion of candidates under 35 years elected to office, is very encouraging evidence that young people are embracing democracy and have not only the will but the ability to play a central role in governance.

At the same time, it is also clear that youth participation is not uniform and in some areas council-youth interaction is far weaker than in others. There are a spectrum of challenges including council funding and capacity, the legal and policy framework, entrenched cultural attitudes towards youth, and the capacity of youth leaders, youth civil society and formal youth structures among other things. While there are some impressive examples of strong, dynamic youth representatives participating effectively in council decision-making, more often youth engagement is low-level and sometimes tokenistic.

Making meaningful and effective youth participation in governance a reality requires the combined effort of local and national government, civil society and donors. The importance of realising this, particularly given the historical context, cannot be underestimated. In the pages that follow, some key recommendations are made with regard to how different actors can intervene to increase the level and quality of youth participation in decision-making at local council and sub-council level.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Fostering participatory governance at the grassroots

- Strengthening grassroots decision-making structures
- Empowering citizens to engage with grassroots structures

Participatory governance involving all members of society is a relatively new concept in Sierra Leone, where traditionally decision-making has often been the exclusive realm of a few, male, older elites. An important mechanism for ensuring civic participation becomes normalised in society is to promote the concept from the grassroots so that people build experience and knowledge of participatory governance from a young age and from the lowest level of community decision-making. Structures such as School Boards or School Management Committees, Village Development Committees and Student Action Groups – are all potentially fora where citizens can be empowered to contribute on a local level to decision-making that has a direct effect on their lives and in doing so gain the experience and the confidence to contribute at other levels of governance.

Promoting civic education

- Community-level civic education and sensitisation programmes
- Re-introducing civic education to the school curriculum

While experiencing the reality of participatory governance in practice is essential for people to feel empowered to influence decision-making, education and sensitisation also have a role to play in promoting active citizenship. It is clear from local council surveys that most people have little knowledge of council processes, the provisions of the LGA or the mechanisms through which they, as citizens, can interact with local government. Community-level civic education and sensitisation programmes not only build knowledge about the processes of participatory governance but can also play a role in transforming cultural perceptions and attitudes towards, for example, the participation of women or youth in politics. Some decades ago civic education was taught in schools in Sierra Leone, and several commentators have suggested that it should be reincorporated in to the curriculum or introduced as an extra-curricular subject.

Strengthening councils' capacity to serve their youth

constituency

- Capacity building and training for councillors
- Strengthening youth-focused committees
- Strengthening fora for council-civil society interaction including Youth Advisory Committees
- Completing the devolution of the Ministry of Youth and Sports functions

Obstacles that exist at council level which prevent a more mainstreamed approach to meeting the needs of youth include: a narrow focus to council-led youth activities, reflecting both financial constraints and a limited view/understanding of youth needs; no dedicated champion for youth issues in the heart of council; and a lack of mainstreaming mentality.

Measures which could be implemented to address these obstacles include building the knowledge and understanding of individual councillors with regards to youth issues; strengthening the Youth and Sports Committees by developing clear Terms of Reference (TOR) and orientating the members of the committee on their roles and responsibilities as committee members; and strengthening fora for



council-civil society interaction such as dedicated council-civil society fora or council-focused radio programmes. There is also a strong argument for introducing a youth-specific council-civil society forum such as Youth Advisory Committees provided for by the National Youth Commission Act 2009 to be champions for the mainstreaming of youth issues at council. Some stakeholders also propose the creation of a dedicated youth desk officer in every council whose role it would be to champion the mainstreaming of youth issues.

Central government should strive to complete the devolution of all specified Ministry of Youth and Sports functions to council, so that these functions are fully owned by council and the issue of youth is brought right in to the council's heart. At the root of many of the existing constraints of council is the issue of funding. An ideal scenario is for the tax base at local level to contribute significantly to the council budget, thereby strengthening the social contract between the councils and tax-paying citizens, the fundamental basis on which the principle of participatory governance is built.

Strengthening formal youth representation

- Clarifying roles and responsibilities
- Ensuring recognition
- Enhancing legitimacy and accountability
- Resourcing and capacity building

Formal government-endorsed youth representation, including Chieftdom and District Youth Councils and District or Regional Youth Officers, currently face a number of resource and legitimacy challenges. To overcome these challenges, uniform Terms of Reference need to be drawn up to clarify roles and responsibilities of each of these structures. Sensitisation needs to be undertaken with councils to ensure DYCs are given the full recognition they require. For these structures to be legitimate representatives of the wider youth population the appointment/election of individuals needs to be undertaken in a transparent way and the wider youth population should be empowered and enabled to hold them to account. They also need to be better funded and resourced.

Reviewing the legislative framework

- Quotas for youth representation
- Recognising legal youth structures and their roles at council
- Youth mainstreaming in policy

The Local Government Act is currently under review and this presents a potential opportunity for addressing some of the legislative obstacles to greater youth participation in council level decision-making as well as introducing the means to enhance youth participation. Some of the issues that might be considered by the review committee are whether to include specific quotas (e.g. 10% as recommended by the TRC) for youth participation in WDCs alongside the specification for equal gender representation; and whether such quotas should be extended to other areas such as council administrative staff or even councillors themselves. A number of youth organisations are advocating for this.

Overall there is a need for synergy, coherence and effectiveness in legislation and policies and ministries such as the Ministry for Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD) and the Ministry of Youth Affairs need to communicate and coordinate effectively in performing their respective roles. It is the strong recommendation of this report that youth issues are treated as the same cross-cutting priority as gender in law and policy.

Building a strong civil society

- Training and capacity building
- Sharing best practice
- Coordination and joint advocacy
- Promoting joint projects

Civil society organisations (CSOs) have a central role to play both in demanding greater participatory governance opportunities and empowering and educating every day citizens to engage in participatory governance processes. The research has revealed many examples of strong engagement by CSOs with council and successful often innovative initiatives to enhance citizens' - including youth - participation in governance.

However, not all youth focused civil society has the capacity to work effectively with council. It is important that grassroots youth organisations are strengthened through training and capacity building to improve their lobbying and advocacy skills, as well as their ability to engage with and effectively represent their own youth constituents. Innovations and best practice in enhancing youth participation, many examples of which are given in this report, should be captured and shared widely among CSOs.

Initiatives such as the Forum for Youth Serving Agencies (FYSA) in Kono are an excellent way to promote sharing and learning between youth organisations. This body also plays a central role in coordinating youth civic participation activities and acting as a mouthpiece for advocacy in that area. A key role for civil society is to help overcome the negative stereotyping of youth by demonstrating the positive contribution they can make to society. Youth representative civil society organisations must therefore strive to demonstrate their credentials as valuable and constructive development partners. Being able to present a united front and show coordination and cooperation between organisations is central to this and requires a strong and educated youth civil society leadership.

INTERVIEWEES CONSULTED

Councillors and council administration

Tombo Allieu, Chief Administrator, Kono District Council
Charlie P.J. Kallon, Chief Administrator, Koidu City Council

Councillor BB Komba, Chair Youth and Sports Committee, Koidu City Council
Councillor Anthony V Amoro, Chair, Youth and Sports Committee, Bo District Council
Councillor Joseph P Foday, Chair, Youth and Sports Committee, Bo City Council
Councillor, Catherine J Kamara, Chair, Social Welfare Committee, Bo City Council
Councillor Suard Henrietta Koroma, Chair Social Welfare, Gender and Youth and Sports Committee, Makeni City Council
Councillor John DitoKamara, Deputy Chair, Bombali District Council
Councillor Santigie Dobson Kanu, Chair Education Committee, Bombali District Council

Thomas Brima, Development and Planning Officer, Bo City Council
Nyuma Maningo, Development and Planning Officer, Makeni City Council
Frank Kanu, Development and Planning Officer, Bombali District Council
Komba Mansa-Musa, Development and Planning Officer, Kono District Council
Edward Alpha, Development and Planning Officer, Koidu City Council
Julia Amara, Development and Planning Officer, Bo District Council

Civil Society Organisations

Simeone Sandi, Secretary, District Youth Coalition, Kono
Arthur Kargbo, Program Coordinator, Advocate of Vulnerable Aid (AVA)
Sahr Rodney Sourie, Youth and Accountable Governance Program, Network Movement for Justice and Development (NMJD)
Gladys Mbayo, Gender Desk Officer, Knowledge for Community Empowerment Organisation, (KoCEPO), Kono
Tamba B Gbenda, Project Coordinator, Movement of Concerned KonoYouth (MOCKY)
Ibrahim A S Bockarie, Programme Officer, Movement of Concerned KonoYouth (MOCKY)
Alex Nallo, Regional Chair of the Civil Society Movement, Southern Region
Amos Patricks, Programme Officer, Movement towards peace and Development Agency (MoPaDa)
Francis Kai-Katta, ENCISS, Bo
Aruna Ibrahim Jah, Project Coordinator, Community Empowerment Development Agency (CEDA)
Joseph Pokawa, Regional Programme Director, Network Movement for Justice and Development (NMJD)
Alhaji Musa Conteh, Regional Coordinator, Community Empowerment for Rural Development (CEFORD)
AbdulaiWalon-Jalloh, Governance and Decentralisation Coordinator, ENCISS
Emerson Kamara, Director, Peacelinks
Charles NachMback, Project Manager, Local Governance and Economic Development Project, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
Pious Bockarie, Local Governance and Economic Development Project, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
Floyd Davies, Director, Centre for Local Government, Decentralisation and the Environment (CLOGADE)
Michael Yamba, Managing Partner, Centre for Local Government, Decentralisation and the Environment (CLOGADE)
Mohamed Vayombo, Research Assistant, Centre for Local Government, Decentralisation and the Environment (CLOGADE)
FodayAbassSaccoh, Research Assistant, Centre for Local Government, Decentralisation and the Environment (CLOGADE)
Mohammed Alpha Jalloh, Knowledge for Community Empowerment Organization (KoCEPO)

National government

Alhassan Joseph Kanu, Director, Decentralisation Secretariat
Jonathan Kpakiwa, Capacity Building Manager, Decentralisation Secretariat
Colina Macauley, Monitoring and Evaluation Manager, Decentralisation Secretariat
Sullay B Sesay, Project Coordinator, Social Capital Project (GoBiFo), Decentralisation Secretariat
Sahr Moigwa, Executive Secretary, Local Councils Association of Sierra Leone
Sembia Johnson, Technical Consultant, Local Councils Association of Sierra Leone
Alison Sutherland, Local Government Advisor, Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development

Formal Youth Representatives

Mr Husham M M Sesay, District Youth Officer, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Kono district
Mr. Gebbie, Youth Commissioner for Eastern Region
Alhaji Kandeh Kanu, Public Relations Officer, Bo District Youth Council
Phebian Philomina Davies, Vice Chair, Bo District Youth Council
Peter G Amara, Youth Officer Southern Region
Abdul S A Koroma, Regional Youth Officer Northern Region
Gibril Hassam Koroma, Secretary, Bombali District Youth Council
Ibrahim Jalloh, Chair, Bombali District Youth Council
Anthony Koroma, Commissioner, National Youth Commission
Yusuf Kamara, Monitoring and Evaluation Manager, National Youth Commission





BO DISTRICT COUNCIL



Good Roads and
Good Transport



Good Drinking
Water



PROPERTY TAX FOR
DEVELOPMENT



Good Schools and
Good Teachers



Good
Health



Good
Electricity

Almost ten years after Sierra Leone began a bold programme of decentralisation aimed at bringing governance closer to the people, this research asks how effectively young people are able to participate meaningfully in local government processes and identifies some of the key obstacles which lie in the path of true participatory governance for the country's large and growing youth population.

**RESTLESS
DEVELOPMENT**
THE YOUTH-LED DEVELOPMENT AGENCY



Restless Development Sierra Leone,
16 Off Byrne Lane, Aberdeen Ferry Road,
Freetown, Sierra Leone
www.restlessdevelopment.org/sierra-leone