

Rural & Economic Development

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Sierra Leone

Livelihood Support for Ebola Survivors

The devastating Ebola epidemic in Sierra Leone left behind 59,000 individuals who had survived but were marginalized from society and unable to earn a living. With support from the United Nations Development Program and the Government of Sierra Leone, World Hope International (WHI) implemented a project in three districts to help meet the livelihood needs of Ebola survivors. The project provided monthly unconditional cash payments via mobile money, small grants to support business start-ups, and training in financial literacy, savings and loans, and modern agriculture techniques to 518 people (220 men, 298 women). Additionally, at the end of the program, program beneficiaries received final conditional payments as a start up grant to support their different choices for livelihood activities and vocational skills. WHI conducted follow-up visits and coaching sessions and connected individuals to various vocational skills trainings on topics in which they expressed interest.

Project beneficiaries are working as petty traders & farmers, and are starting small businesses and learning trades. A key measure of success is the 248 survivors who opted to open bank accounts with major banking institutions in addition to the traditional village savings and loan groups. All of the caregivers of the 124 children in the program have signed a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs agreeing to care for, protect, and educate the Ebola orphans in their care. The project hosted 11 panel discussions on the radio to help the general public have a better understanding of the project, reduce the stigma associated with surviving Ebola, and foster peace building in the communities.

Petty Traders Project

Ebola survivors weren't the only people affected economically by the epidemic. Many Sierra Leoneans earn money by petty trading activities such as making and selling food and drinks or



Mariatu Conteh, a 43-year-old woman from Tonkolili District, is one of the beneficiaries of the livelihood project. Before the Ebola outbreak, she operated a small business. With project support, she has been able to expand her business selling used clothes and shoes. She is very happy with the program as she can now take care of her children and pay their school fees. "I want thank the President, UNDP and WHI for such support."

small handcrafted items. During and after Ebola, petty traders were left in disarray, with very limited places to sell their goods and no place to get microcredit financing. Many of these people were already extremely vulnerable and needed each day's wages in order to eat. In 2016, WHI, with funding from UKAID, helped recapitalize microfinance institutions, resulting in loans to 3,441 petty traders, and provided business training to 984 petty traders.

Mobile Power for Off-Grid Communities

It is well-documented that consistent access to electricity is essential for sustainable economic growth. Unfortunately, energy poverty (lack of modern energy services) stunts the economic growth and productivity of a substantial portion of Sierra Leoneans who rely on generators and kerosene for their power needs. They end up paying a much higher price per kilowatt hour of power than do people in the United States. To address this issue, WHI and Mobile Power Ltd., a small UK start-up, are partnering to provide clean & affordable energy to the beyond-the-grid population in Sierra Leone. Mobile Power has designed a portable battery system, powered by solar energy, to deliver clean energy directly into customers' homes at an affordable price. This smart-battery rental system, available at local shops, provides users with sufficient clean energy to charge mobile phones and power bright LED lights. These are much safer than traditional kerosene lamps, which can burn children and cause accidental fires. The goal of the project is to strengthen a small, sustainable business that will eventually survive independent of any donor funding.

From a business perspective, the program provides a low-cost, highly scalable business model with a healthy return on investment for shop owners. The use of local shops as the point-of-rental result in additional savings for the customer, because customers no longer have to send their mobile phones with someone overnight to distant villages for charging. LED lights for use with the battery packs are sold at cost to shopkeepers, who can then either sell or rent the lights to customers — radios chargeable by USB cables are also being considered as a viable rental option.

In 2017, WHI and Mobile Power Ltd. launched the first Mobile Power Sierra Leone site in Pate Bana, a village heavily impacted by the recent





Ebola outbreak. The pilot was the first chance to test pricing and customer demand and to make sure the technology and business model would thrive in Sierra Leone. Early results are promising. Customers are willing and able to pay for the service, and their demand for chargeable lightbulbs quickly outstripped the supply. Mobile Power Ltd. and WHI plan to expand to more sites in early 2017, and will be seeking grant funding and investments with the aim of starting a separate private enterprise.

Village Partnerships

Village partnerships are a WHI community development strategy that pairs churches with needy communities to jointly undertake development and spiritual growth projects. WHI helps villages form committees to determine their own needs and priorities, and the resulting projects usually include church building, improved water, sanitation, and hygiene, improved food security at the household level, seed supplies, livestock multiplication, and agricultural training.

In 2016, WHI worked with 6 villages to construct 3 churches and undertake a number of economic development and health activities. A full 840 bushels of groundnuts and rice seed were distributed to 430 farmers. Increased yields from quality seeds brought income for families and enabled families to pay school fees for their children and to address other economic problems. WHI staff and partner villages constructed four drying floors for seeds and two grain stores to protect seeds and crops from weather, rodents, and theft. Livestock is also important to farmers, and the 110 goats distributed increased their income and were an important source of nutrition. Seventy-five farmers were trained in modern agricultural practices related to cultivating and processing groundnuts, rice, and cassava and combating common pests and crop diseases. Villages were also grateful to receive 14 latrines, important for preventing the spread of disease. To help combat malaria, WHI distributed 1,400 treated mosquito nets to 8 communities at the beginning of the rainy season.

Teams from the U.S. organized day camps in four of the villages. The trips were great for building relationships and learning about cultural practices. The churches were also able to help assess the needs of the people for future interventions. Day camps featured a lot of fun community activities, such as: parties, storytelling, soccer games and more!

In 2017, WHI plans to conduct additional hygiene training for all Village Partnership communities, construct a community center in one village, and procure rice seed for seed bank restocking.

Philippines

Through collaborative efforts with WHI, the Wesleyan Church started a partnership with the Agay Village in the Philippines in November 2015. In the Philippines, tribal communities, such as the Agay, are often left isolated in rural areas without access to education, safe water, adequate food, and the Gospel. WHI and the Wesleyan Church have been helping to meet the food security needs of the Agay through cultivation of corn and bananas and by raising cattle.

In 2016, the Agay community celebrated their first corn harvest from their 5 acre plot. From this harvest, they sold 64 bags of corn at the market and to private companies. A portion of the income generated from the corn business (\$230 USD), helped repair 13 houses which needed new foundations. During the year, 400 banana trees were planted and 95% of them have flourished. Some trees stand 3 feet tall and have already started to bear fruit! Program staff are contemplating planting an additional 25 acres of bananas.

In the cattle program, WHI provides cattle to family groups which can be used for plowing, milk, food security, or income. In return, the new cattle owner must agree to give one of the offspring to a neighbor or family member. Through this process, cattle multiplication continues and multiple parties benefit. Farmers highly value the security of having savings in the form of livestock, and only sell cows in time of exceptional need. Currently, sixteen families in the Agay village are taking care of 12 cows, 6 calves, and 6 carabaos (water buffalos) from the animal multiplication project. Not long ago, a bull was purchased for breeding.

In 2016, WHI also provided the materials and the beneficiary families contributed their labor to construct an 8X20 meter multipurpose drying floor. During the harvest season, rice, corn and other products are plucked and then dried by sunlight on a drying floor. This practice is important for reducing crop loss from insects and mold. Even a small amount of moisture can decrease the quantity and quality of the crop yield. Beyond its primary use of drying crops, local youth use the surface to play basketball and other games!



Cambodia

Sisters Rural Development Program

WHI's Sisters program focuses on advancing entire Cambodian communities through the empowerment of women with economic development opportunities, education and health care. In 2016, WHI worked directly with 139 women in five villages on agriculture and water projects, drilled 12 water wells, and mobilized 5,040 small loans and 2,847 savings accounts. Additionally, WHI provided dental care to Cambodian residents, many whom have never previously received any form of dental care!

The definitive highlight of 2016 was the mushroom project. Mushroom cultivation continues to be a big part of the Sisters project. Mushrooms are grown on agricultural waste from one annual planting of rice followed by an annual planting of mung beans. Farmers in the target communities average about 2.5 acres of rice paddy, which is enough to provide sufficient waste for one mushroom house year around. Several crops of mushrooms can be grown in a single year, and the mushrooms are sold at the local markets. Some of the early adopters of mushroom



Before her involvement with the Sisters program two years ago, May and her husband did not have access to safe water, struggled to buy food, and often went without. They borrowed money from a loan shark to plant seeds, but the interest was so high they could not repay him and they fell into deep despair. May and her husband's involvement with Sisters started out slow. They were unsure of whom to trust. After attending trainings on how to manage a start-up business and handle finances, both May and her husband became involved in the local savings group and began growing mushrooms to sell! Over the past two years, they have not only paid off their debt to the loan shark, but bought a cow, planted a flourishing garden of cassava and rice, and purchased a motorbike! May is now the women's group leader in her village. "My life feels full," May stated. She and her husband have enough food, send their children to school, and have hope for their future!

houses have gone on to build more mushroom houses and are buying agricultural waste from neighboring farms to supply their mushroom operations. Seven new mushroom houses were constructed for beneficiaries of the Sisters project.

The growth in mushroom cultivation is partly due to market linkages being developed by WHI. Fair and consistent demand and pricing are encouraging smallholder investment in the mushroom houses. Successful mushroom growers from Siem District are providing the training to the new community in Khaoh Nheak, from construction of the mushroom houses through supporting three growing cycles. This provides a boost in confidence for the existing smallholder group as well as evidence of their technical knowhow. Twenty-five farmers, including the original Sisters farmers, are now invested in Mushroom Houses.

Sok had been having panic attacks for months as she helped care for her parents and 10 nieces and nephews. Sok was devastated when her mother and father passed away, leaving her as the sole survivor to provide food and shelter for the 10 children. "I couldn't breathe or stop shaking. At one point, I couldn't speak." But two things brought her hope: a community women's group and an investment in a water project. The community women's group, established through the Sisters program, provided her and her family members with much needed rice. And when Sok learned that a woman named Laura from North Carolina was sponsoring her water and irrigation project, she was thrilled! Without the investment from Laura, the closest point to access safe water was an hour's walk away. Now there is a drilled well close by offering safe water, and preparations are being made for an irrigation system which will help ease the burden of collecting water for her crops!



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