

## **Supporting Governance Transformation in Sierra Leone Through Devolution and Strengthening Local Governance**

Sierra Leone is endowed with rich natural resources but is one of the poorest countries in the world. An eleven-year war during 1991-2002 destroyed the country's infrastructure and social fabric. **Centralization of political power and public resources in the capital city Freetown and marginalization of the provinces was seen as one of the root causes of the war.**

Since the end of the war, the country has embarked on a resettlement, reintegration, reconstruction and recovery program. **Although public spending on education, health, agriculture and infrastructure is significant, centralized and non-transparent management of the resource reduced its impact on service delivery and poverty.** Currently Sierra Leone ranked the lowest in the United Nation Human Development Indicators, and seventy percent of the population is under poverty.

Comprehensive governance diagnoses revealed other areas of governance failures, including a weak judiciary subject to political interference; a de-motivated and under-skilled bureaucracy and rampant rent-seeking behavior; a weak legislature unable to provide effective oversight of the executive. The civil society and the private sector are not sufficiently independent of the state and are not effectively organized to keep it accountable. Reform efforts spread across many fronts with varying degrees of political commitment and design and implementation capacity. How does IDA select the most promising entry points of governance transformation?

IDA support to GoSL during the war and immediately after the war focused mainly on strengthen and sustaining the government machinery, notably its core economic management capacity in the Ministry of Finance, National Revenue Authority, Statistics Sierra Leone. **Since 2003, IDA support has been unambiguously focusing on a governance transformation process, namely supporting fiscal decentralization and strengthening local governance to open political space for development-oriented local politicians to emerge and establish track record, and for communities to participate in decision-making processes, determine their own development priorities and undertake development initiatives.**

As soon as the war ended in 2002 and President Kabbah was reelected, the Government initiated a process of national consultation on the issue of decentralization. It received popular support, especially from the citizens outside Freetown who are crying out for political participation and fair share of public resources. In February 2004, GoSL enacted a progressive Local Government Act, establishing 19 local councils, which, over the period of 2004-2008, will take over a large set of responsibilities and resources related to primary education, primary health, agriculture, feeder roads, water and sanitation. The Local Councils Elections took place in May-June 2004.

To ensure equity and transparency in resource allocation across localities, the Local Government Act 2004 requires that the allocation of each service-related grant across

councils be determined by a formula using objective indicators of service delivery needs and revenue capacity. **Under IDA support over the past year, GoSL has put in place a nascent inter-government transfer system, which not only strives for equity and transparency but also rewards financial management accountability by the councils.**

To help GoSL maximize the development and peace dividend of the decentralization process, IDA is helping GoSL establish a functioning local government system, which adopts an inclusive, transparent and accountable local governance culture and is capable of discharging service delivery responsibilities. **The IDA-supported Decentralization and Capacity Building Program provided intensive training to the political and administrative wings of the councils over the past year. The newly elected councils have undertaken extensive community consultations, prepared three-year development plans and budget for 2005, fulfilled basic financial management transparency and accountability requirement.**

To encourage and reinforce the development orientation of local politicians, IDA encouraged and supported the councils to adopt the Rapid Results Approach in management of local development. Each council was provided with coaching and a small grant (on average \$30,000) to undertake a high-visibility and high-impact project within 100 days. **During the period of September 2004 and January 2005, all councils launched Rapid Results Initiatives and achieved their results in the areas of: water, sanitation, feeder roads, traffic, rice production, post- harvest loss, among others.**

Examples are:

- Travel time between Sewafe and Peya of Nimiyama Chiefdom of Kono District reduced from 1hr to 15 minutes and transportation cost reduced from Le 5,000 (\$1.75) to Le 2,000 (70 cents).
- Increase the availability of high-yield quick-harvest Inner Valley Swamp Rice seeds in Pujehun District by 4,000 bushels within 90 days.
- Ensure the availability of safe and potable drinking water in the mains and laterals and 25 public taps in the Moyamba Township within 90 days.
- Total volume of Garbage in two lorry parks and two markets in Kenema Township reduced by 90% within 95 days.

Currently the councils are pursuing their second-wave Rapid Results Initiatives, addressing a wider range of development priorities identified in the development plans. IDA is also helping the councils use the Rapid Results Approach to establish service-delivery improvement results in the next few months, as they take over some high-profile responsibilities, especially the District Education Committee Schools and primary health programs.

The experience of IDA's program in Sierra Leone shows that governance improvement is possible even in environment with pervasive governance failures. Democratic decentralization opens the door for long-term governance transformation. IDA should provide support at an early stage of devolution, so as to empower local players, strengthen inter-governmental system to support local empowerment and accountability. Above all, it should focus on encouraging and reinforcing the development orientation of

local politicians and public servants so as to preempt a process whereby local governance mirrors the failures of governance at the national level. It requires strong implementation support to help local government delivery results, conscious effort to motivate and empower through effective and simple monitoring and evaluation activities, deliberate communication efforts to publicize stories of good local governance as well as failures to create competitive pressures among local governments.