

NETWORK MOVEMENT FOR JUSTICE AND DEVELOPMENT (NMJD)

SUPPORT TO LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND INSTITUTIONS TO ENSURE SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS IN EASTERN AND SOUTHERN SIERRA LEONE

REPORT ON PRE-IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES

INTRODUCTION

This is a quick impact project intended to support local communities and institutions in the areas of agriculture and other income generation activities to ensure sustainable livelihoods in the eastern and southern regions of Sierra Leone. The lifespan of the project is short, lasting for only ten months starting April 2009. In the implementation of this project, NMJD is collaborating directly with the Eastern Radio in Kenema and Affected Property Owners Association in Kono. Both are local-based outfits, established and run by community people. They anchor project activities in seven of the sixteen chiefdoms covered by the project, whilst NMJD provides general supportive supervision to ensure that project objectives are met. This is in addition to NMJD facilitating the implementation of project activities in nine chiefdoms.

For this project to achieve its intended impacts, local communities hosting project activities should be fully involved in the planning and execution of those activities. This requires series of consultations and careful planning. This, perhaps, explains why the first phase of the project implementation has been focused more on engaging local communities with the view to creating a better understanding of the project, as well as to put in place structures and processes in readiness for proper activity implementation.

This project has two major components, namely support to agriculture and income generation. The agriculture component aims at creating seed banks, minimizing post-harvest losses, diversifying people's eating habits and improving food production at village level. The second component deals with institutional capacity building to ensure sustainability. Specifically, this component supports the establishment of skills training in tailoring and weaving for APOA in Kono, the construction of a multi-social centre by Eastern Radio in Kenema and a Leadership Training Centre for civil society activists in Kenema.

Because agricultural activities are seasonal, the first phase of the project implementation is designed to give preference to agriculture. This is not to say that some activities are not going on on the other front. This report therefore presents key highlights of activities so far carried out by NMJD and its partners and the challenges they faced in the process.

2.0 PRE-IMPLEMENTATION PLANNING AND COORDINATION MEETINGS

2.1 PLANNING AND CONSULTATION MEETINGS HELD IN FREETOWN

Since 1 April 2009, a series of meetings and consultations have been held in Freetown and in communities where the project is being implemented. Three meetings have so far been held in Freetown, one of which was between the Executive Director and staff of the Knowledge Management and Communications (KMC). The two have direct responsibility to ensure the successful implementation of the project. This meeting took a closer look at the project proposal and the Terms of

Agreement signed between NMJD and D&P to better understand what is involved and what is required of either party (donors and project implementers/recipients). It also came up with a work frame that will address issues of monitoring, management of project resources, coordination, communication and information sharing and reporting.

This meeting was followed by the hosting of two other meetings in Freetown in which Regional Directors (RDs) and the District Manager (DM) in the south and eastern regions participated. As heads of NMJD regional offices, the Regional Directors and District Manager have been tasked with the responsibility to coordinate and accompany the rolling out of project activities.

The meeting was used to present the project proposal together with the approved budget, as well as other relevant documents, to RDs and DM, so that they would appreciate the issues that led to the project, the rationale for it and what it wanted to achieve. The meeting reviewed the project activity schedule, unpack project activities and situate them within the overall work plan of the organization for the entire duration of the project. This is to ensure that the project is not seen by other programme staff as a stand alone activity, but as an integral component of NMJD's work. Once they are able to see it that way, all hands will be on deck to ensure the success of the project.

The meeting was also used to share information and experiences, since staff have different levels of knowledge, skills and experiences in implementing agricultural projects. From the experiences shared, lessons were drawn, which subsequently informed the best direction or approach to use to take the process forward. Further, the meeting came up with detail proposals on not only how to take the project to local communities, but also how to get them onboard, and ultimately get them to take ownership of it.

2.2 PLANNING, INFORMATION SHARING AND COORDINATION MEETING HELD IN BO

This meeting was held at NMJD office in Bo, and was attended by senior management staff of the Eastern Community Radio, senior programme staff of NMJD and the finance officer in Kenema. This meeting was generally a sequel to the ones held in Freetown. It allowed key project implementers to further review their plans, proposals for management and coordination, assign responsibilities, agree on deadlines, monitoring, information sharing, procurement and reporting procedures., whilst not-so-clear issues were also adequately discussed and clarified. This makes implementers to look at and engage the project from the same perspective and same understanding.

The meeting came up with key decisions that were considered critical to the effective implementation of the project:

- NMJD to facilitate and support communities to form farming associations of not more 50 family heads with leadership structures comprising people elected/appointed by the communities themselves. NMJD should work with these farming associations through their established leadership structures.
- NMJD to facilitate and support the farming associations to draw up by-laws that will guide and direct their internal operations.
- NMJD to develop and sign Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the leadership of each of the farming associations. The MoU should spell out clearly the roles and responsibilities of each party to the agreement, as well as how sticky issues should be addressed.
- NMJD Regional Directors and District Manager to prepare and submit monthly progress reports of project activities to ensure that everybody is kept in the loop.
- In addition to regular project monitoring, the programme implementers and selected beneficiaries should meet regularly, preferably a week before reporting deadline, to share information, review activity plans and further plan.

2.3 PLANNING, COORDINATION AND ASSESSMENT MEETINGS IN OPERATIONAL CHIEFDOMS

2.3.1 KONO DISTRICT

NMJD office in Kono under the leadership of the District Manager has hosted three general meetings in Koidu and organized five other meetings with individual farming communities in their own chiefdoms. These meetings were preceded by another meeting exclusively for NMJD staff in Kono district. In which the District Manager briefed and presented the proposal to his colleagues leading to the generation of discussions on how they could all come onboard the implementation process. A similar meeting was also held with the leadership of the Affected Property Owners Association (APOA).

Since then, five meetings have been held with individual farming communities in Tankoro, Nimikoro, Nimiya and Gorama Kono in Kono district and Lower Bambara chiefdom in Kenema district. During these meetings, local communities were able to identify and discuss their felt farming needs with NMJD staff and the type of farming they wanted to engage with. All the meetings were densely attended, and generated frank discussions with critical proposals and recommendations made by host communities. In fact, more people attended the meetings and showed more interest in the project than the implementers initially anticipated.

The farmers were encouraged to organize themselves into groups at chiefdom level. Two of the five chiefdoms already have functioning structures that can only be strengthened. They are APOA in Tankoro chiefdom and a Farmers Association in Lower Bambara chiefdom. The other three chiefdoms are now in the process of establishing their own structures.

KEY ISSUES AND CONCERNS RAISED BY COMMUNITIES AND STAFF

The communities and NMJD staff raised a number of issues during the meetings, all geared towards reshaping the and reviewing existing plans to maximize project impacts:

- Timeliness in the supply of seeds and farming implements was considered critical to the success of the project. The months of April and May are the most appropriate period for planting/farming; otherwise the seeds will not do well.
- The quality and viability of seeds is important as well. From previous experiences, the farmers explained how sometimes seeds bought from outside farming communities/regions are not viable, some cannot even germinate. To prevent this from happening, the services of extension workers from the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security should be sought. They will inspect and certify seeds and other implements before they are bought. Also, seeds can be purchased from within local farming communities or regions where they are available.
- APOA is requesting that an adult literacy component be included in the skills training project to improve the skills and knowledge of their members in literacy and numeracy.
- Some communities prefer monies given to them in addition to the rice as food for work over providing them the rice and cooking condiments as already indicated in the project. This request stems from their belief that they know what they want better than anybody else.
- Local communities are very much concerned about the continuity and further expansion of the project. In all the meetings, questions related to that were asked.
- For effective monitoring and coordination, especially in the first months of the project when farming activities will be in full gear, NMJD staff are suggesting that five Animators or volunteers be recruited to take responsibility for each of the five chiefdoms where the project is being implemented.

2.3.2 BO DISTRICT

This project is implemented in four chiefdoms in Bo district: Tikonko, Kakua, Bumpe Ngao and Sorogbeima. The responsibility to coordinate and supervise project activities in these chiefdoms rests with NMJD's regional office in Bo. It was against this background that the Regional Director, south, convened a meeting of all NMJD staff in the region, including programme managers, Animators and finance officers to share and discuss the project with them. This meeting was also intended to help staff position themselves adequately for effective implementation of project activities.

The Animators were put to work immediately after this orientation meeting. They were facilitated to go to the communities where the project is being implemented and organize meetings with

community people, especially farmers. These meetings did not only create a better understanding of the project by the intended beneficiaries, but also laid a strong foundation for the successful implementation of the project, as critical issues were discussed and potential sticky ones resolved through consensus.

Among other things, issues bordering on the need for farmers to form farming associations, set up leadership structures within these associations, develop by-laws, identify appropriate sites for construction of drying floors and grain stores, management of project funds and how to develop seed banks were discussed. The Animators were able to register farmers in these communities and the types of farming they are doing.

ISSUES RAISED BY COMMUNITIES

- All the targeted chiefdoms advised that inputs **MUST** be supplied to them as early as not later than 15 May 2009, as this is the most appropriate period for planting. The farmers in these chiefdoms even went ahead to say that they would not accept any seeds given to them after this period.
- They also revealed that there is some quantity of seed rice available in their communities, which can be utilized before looking elsewhere. However, there is no groundnut seeds good for planting in their communities.
- Also, since NMJD Kenema have already contracted Mr. Koroma, an agriculture extension worker based in Blama, to serve as a volunteer for the project in Small-Bo chiefdom, the Bo office is requesting for the go-ahead to recruit their own technical advisor. This is because one advisor only will find it near impossible to cover both districts effectively and efficiently.
- Communities are prepared to provide sand, stones and sticks for the construction of the drying floors and grain stores, but only where these materials are available. This means local contributions will vary from chiefdom to chiefdom depending on the available resources.

ISSUES AGREED ON

The local communities and staff of NMJD facilitating the implementation of the project agreed on the following issues:

- The membership of each association should range from 50-65 with gender consideration.
- Each association's membership is made up of three/four clustered communities to ensure that there is a spillover effect with many community people benefiting from the support. Each association will eventually elect an executive.
- No family members from a one family should dominate the membership of the farmers associations.
- Inputs will only be given to farmers who have prepared farm lands: Farmlands that are ready for planting in the case of those who want to engage in upland rice farming.
- Rice loans supplied to farmers will be repaid at the end of the harvesting period.
- A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) will be signed by farmers to ensure easy repayment of loans.
- All inputs should be supplied between 20 April and 15 May 2009 to avoid late supply and subsequent poor yield, which will eventually delay or impede repayment, as well as undermines efforts to achieve food security.
- Tools for farmers should also be given/supplied before the 15 May 2009.
- Any farmer who has a poor record of paying back loans should not be registered in the association.
- Seeds (rice) should be bought within the communities to ensure that the right varieties are available and are viable.

ACTION POINTS

- Farmers to identify places/people in the communities where seeds (rice and groundnuts) are available for sale.
- The executives of the farmers' associations to embark on a fact finding mission to ensure that registered upland rice farmers have already prepared their farm lands.

2.3.3 KENEMA DISTRICT

NMJD is implementing this project in two chiefdoms in Kenema district: Lower Bambara and Small Bo chiefdoms. Because of the location and topography of the region, it's a lot easier to access Lower Bambara chiefdom from Kono district than doing so from Kenema district. Therefore, in order to ensure effective coordination, supervision and monitoring, the implementation of this project in Lower Bambara chiefdom is facilitated by NMJD's Kono office. This leaves the Kenema office with only Small Bo chiefdom to anchor project activities.

The staff in Kenema have had preliminary visits in Small Bo Chiefdom and held consultations and planning meetings with stakeholders including chiefs, youths, farmers and women. These meetings were intended to create a better understanding of the project amongst beneficiary communities, and at the same time put mechanisms in place for proper coordination, management and monitoring.

Meanwhile, the community people, together with NMJD, have identified a trained and qualified agriculturist who has been working in the chiefdom as an agriculture extension worker for many years to serve as a Focal Person for the project. He is tasked with the responsibility to coordinate project activities, as well as to provide supportive technical supervision to the farming associations.

Together with the chiefdom youth coalition and community leaders, this focal person facilitated the identification of farm families who are primarily involved in agriculture and who use farming as their main source of livelihood. The Focal Person is serving as a volunteer to the project, but will be provided with a monthly stipend, and his movement facilitated. Already, those farmers identified for the project have been registered into farming associations. Active youth groups in the chiefdom that have also been solely involved in agriculture, and who are registered with the Chiefdom Youth Coalition were also given the opportunity to register.

Also, all registered farm families have been verified by NMJD staff to ascertain the authenticity of information supplied, as well as to find out the number and location of families doing upland rice farming and number and location of those doing inland rice (swamp) farming, as well as those engaging with groundnut, cassava and vegetable farming.

COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTIONS

- One of the registered farmers at Kpetema, Mr Ansumana Lahai, donated a piece of land to the community for the construction of the drying floor. The Focal Person has since visited the land to ascertain its suitability for the purpose, and also had talks with the Paramount Chief to solicit his support for the project, which he readily got.
- A local contractor within the community has also been identified by the people themselves and engaged for the construction of the drying floor. He's consented to offer his expertise and technical skills to the project for a minimal fee, though. Already, he's prepared and submitted to NMJD detail costings of the construction works.

ISSUES AND CONCERNS RAISED BY COMMUNITIES

- The community, especially farm families registered for the project, expressed delight at the project as it would help them increase their farm inputs, and ultimately their yields.
- Lack of a grain store is seen as an acute problem in the chiefdom. There is only one grain store in the community, and it is owned by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security. The community people are not allowed to use it.

2.3.4 EASTERN COMMUNITY RADIO

The Eastern Community Radio is responsible for the implementation, management and coordination of project activities in six chiefdoms in Kenema and Kailahun districts. The six chiefdoms are: Jaluahun, Jawei, Dama, Tunkia, Nongowa and Gaura. The Eastern Radio already has some experience working with some of these communities to improve food security in the eastern region. Last year, they supported some farming communities to make community farms with the main objective of creating seed banks in these communities. Even though the project was faced with some difficulties related

largely to inadequate resources, they were able to improve the food situation in the beneficiary communities. Lessons and experiences they learned from last year's agriculture project will be of immense benefit to this year's. Already, they have demonstrated it in many ways.

Like in other communities where this project is being implemented, the Eastern Community Radio has organized series of meetings and consultations with farming communities in the project area. These meetings were used to reflect on last year's work with the view to identifying weak areas that needed some improvements, creating better understanding of the present project and creating/strengthening structures to deliver the project effectively and efficiently.

ISSUES AGREED ON

- Registered farm families organized into farming associations at chiefdom level with an executive comprising the town chief, chairlady, youth leader and secretary. Eastern Radio will work with these farming associations in the execution of this project through these leaderships.
- Sites for the construction of four drying floors (Sesayla in Tunkia chiefdom, Kokoru in Gaura chiefdom, Majihun and Konia in Dama chiefdoms) and two grain stores (Sesayla in Tunkia chiefdom and Majihun in Dama chiefdom) identified, agreed on and cleared by host communities. Already, communities have started building/beating bricks for the construction of the grain stores.
- Developed a full list of registered farmers and the types of farming they are engaged in (i.e. upland, swamp, cassava, groundnut or vegetable) to facilitate the distribution of seeds and farming implements.
- The distribution of seeds to farming associations is already in progress with 140 bags of groundnut and 30 bags of husk groundnut supplied as of today, 7 May 2009.
- A building plan for the construction of the multi-purpose social centre for the Eastern Radio in Kenema has been drawn and a building license applied for as required by the laws of Sierra Leone.
- Public bidding for the hiring of a building contractor has been done, and bids will soon be opened by a special committee comprising members of the Board and management staff of Eastern Radio, as well as community people.

CHALLENGES

- The key challenge this year is on how the Eastern Radio can manage the interest, growing demand and expectations, which the project has generated amongst local beneficiary communities. A total of 35 communities have so far expressed great interest in the project, and are daily demanding that they be brought onboard.

3.0 GENERAL COORDINATION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE PROJECT

The Executive Director and the Director of Knowledge Management and Communications (KMC) have direct responsibility for the successful implementation of this project. They work directly with the Financial Controller and his staff. Because all of them are based in Freetown, whilst this project is being implemented in the regions, they are required to put in place processes and systems that will give overall direction to the entire project execution process, as well as to carry out close monitoring. In order to ensure that this happens, series of meetings have been held in Freetown and in the project areas upcountry, whilst information sharing has also improved significantly.

PROPOSALS FOR EFFECTIVE PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION AND COORDINATION

The Executive Director and his team in Freetown through meetings, consultations and using past experiences to inform the implementation of this project have come up with several measures, which they shared with project implementers and NMJD regional offices for implementation. Key amongst them are the following:

- Hold preliminary meetings with local communities to share project with them, identify activities to be carried out with achievable timelines, develop implementation strategies with the communities that will ensure the full realization of the project objectives. Regional Directors and District Manager to facilitate this.

- RDs and DM to provide comprehensive reports on these initial activities outlining issues they agreed upon with local communities, activity plans developed with farmers, local contributions, list of farming associations and addresses of their members, leadership structures, farming needs in terms of seeds, tools, implements, etc, resources that are available locally. The RDs, DM and farming associations can then use this information to develop operational budgets that they can use in the implementation of the project. They should complete this exercise and submit their reports before 15 May 2009.
- The Executive Director facilitated the development of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to be signed between NMJD and individual farming associations clearly spelling out the roles and responsibilities of either party, how information should be shared and channels of communication, management of project resources, monitoring and reporting progress of work.
- The Executive Director insisting on ensuring that farmers form farming associations/cooperatives with leadership structures established through an open, inclusive and participatory process, The associations/cooperatives should develop by-laws on which they operate. This is to make room for a coordinated and structured engagement between them and NMJD.
- Disbursement of funds for project activities is done through NMJD regional offices and in phases based on needs. The Regional Directors, working with their respective finance officers, should take full responsibility for ensuring that the project funds reach the intended project beneficiaries, and are utilized for the intended purpose. They should also ensure that retirements and progress/monitoring reports are made promptly to make room for the compilation and submission of reports to D&P within the stipulated timeframe.
- In that regard therefore, RDs and DM should prepare and submit monthly progress reports to the Executive Director, Director of KMC and Finance Controller. For this to be effective, RDs and DM are required to develop coordination and monitoring frame for each region.
- The utilization of available local resources MUST be encouraged. Resources, skills and expertise can be sourced from outside only if it is not available locally. For example, seeds, tools, labour (skilled and unskilled) and other implements should be obtained/purchased locally where they are available, unless where there is a comparative disadvantage for buying it locally. In this case, the items should be purchased elsewhere.
- The Executive Director identified agriculture/farming institutions and associations across the country that are in possession of large quantities of viable seeds and implements. This is to ensure that communities where there are not enough seeds and implements viable for agricultural purposes can be linked with these institutions and associations.