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Enhancing Women's Land Ownership Rights in Eastern Sierra Leone**

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Disclaimer

The views expressed in this report are those of the evaluators. They do not represent those of UNDEF or of any of the institutions referred to in the report. All errors and omissions are the responsibility of the authors.

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Project Area

The evaluation was carried out in the three districts of eastern Sierra Leone where the project was implemented: Kenema, Kailahun and Kono



Executive Summary

This project, implemented by Humanist Watch Salone (HUWASAL), in partnership with Women's Centre for Human Rights and Progress (WOCERP), between 1st January 2016 and 31st December 2017 had a significant impact in not only raising awareness on the rights of women in the Eastern districts of Kailahun, Kenema and Kono in Sierra Leone have to inherit and own land, but in empowering them to reclaim land that was rightfully theirs. These are impressive initial gains given the deep rooted cultural biases that persist around land ownership for women in the country and the short timeframe of the intervention. However, whilst several of the nine chiefdoms targeted made remarkable progress in giving land to women, and one - Small Bo - had even begun including them in the land allocation decision making structures, in others, most notably in Kono, breaking down entrenched traditional structures has proved more difficult, even if women are now more aware of their rights.

The UNDEF funded intervention was both timely and relevant. The issue of land rights is not just a contentious local issue but is an area in need of national level reform, as set out by the draft National Land Policy (2015). Choosing to focus on women's land rights specifically and training women on their existing rights, which are documented by the Devolution of Estates Act (2007), but are widely unimplemented, made this a very relevant project. By including, not only women, but also local chieftaincy authorities and other key community stakeholders, the project improved the likelihood of the newly empowered and educated women being able to realize their rights. A key finding of this evaluation is that when chieftaincy authorities, and particularly those at the top - the Paramount Chief - are educated and willing to support women's land rights, the opportunities for women to own land are greatly increased.

This project was effectively implemented by HUWASAL. Their history of having worked on issues to promote women's rights, in Kenema and Kailahun in particular, enabled them to build sustainable relationships with key stakeholders. Both the training and messaging components of the intervention were grounded in local context and conveyed in local languages, increasing their relevance and coverage. Women-to-women networks, established as part of the project, were very effective and cost-efficient in spreading awareness.

The design and effective implementation of the project enabled it to have key impacts, not just in raising women's awareness, but in contributing to an environment more conducive to women realizing those rights. Over 100 women obtained access to land participated in the course of the project, with many others continuing to come forward. Improvements to the project design and implementation such as better engagement with elected parliamentarians, increased support to women once they accessed land, to enhance their economic and business skills and the use of an implementing partner in Kono could have enhanced the project even further. However, given that the subject was a taboo at its inception, the strides made against the set objectives are notable. The project offers lessons learned not just for future interventions in the region but for national initiatives aimed at improving women's awareness of their right to, and ability to access, land.

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I. OVERALL ASSESSMENT

Over a period of 24 months between 1st January 2016 and 31st December 2017, Humanist Watch Salone (HUWASAL), with the support of implementing partner the Women's Centre for Human Rights and Progress (WOCERP), delivered a project to enhance women's land ownership rights in eastern Sierra Leone. Funded by UNDEF, it aimed to better understand, raise public awareness and build the knowledge of communities on human rights and the legal framework in order to create a forum for communities to critically analyze the need to, and advocate for, enhanced gender fairness and social justice in the existing land tenure system of Sierra Leone. It was implemented in nine chiefdoms across three districts of Sierra Leone - Jawei, Kissi Tongi and Luawa in Kailahun district; Nongowa, Small Bo and Niawa in Kenema district and Tankoro, Gbense and Sandor in Kono district - at a total cost of US \$160,000, with US \$16,000 reserved for evaluation.

Activities included the production of a comprehensive report on the status of women in the existing land tenure system; training of women and other key stakeholders about their rights to land pertaining to the devolution of estates; sensitization of the wider community of these rights through local radio discussions and jingles; the creation of 30 women-to-women network advocacy groups; and dialogue sessions with key local authorities including chiefdom structures and elected local and national government officials. They were designed to deliver the projects overall objective - to improve the land tenure system and the impact on women's livelihood and dignity in the Eastern Province of Sierra Leone through evidence-based advocacy - through three specific outcomes:

1. A platform for sustained community-led advocacy on issues of women's land ownership rights created
2. Targeted women and influential community leaders gain knowledge and demonstrate leadership efforts to promote women's land ownership rights in their communities
3. Partnerships built among communities, civil society organizations and state actors to effectively collaborate and address women needs and interests on land ownership and control

This evaluation found the project to have made great strides in enhancing the discussion and realization of women's land rights in Eastern Sierra Leone. It was a particularly relevant project given the increasing focus on land in the country as a whole. This can be evidenced by the fact that in a period of two years over 100 women have gone from not only knowing their rights to land, to acquiring land. Giving women the knowledge to empower themselves was a core and vital component of this project, and in this regard the training was highly effective. However, the chiefdoms where it worked best saw buy-in from the Paramount Chief. The importance of establishing working relationships with traditional authorities were key in delivering the projects impacts. A key lesson learned by this project surrounds the importance of chiefs as both facilitators and barriers to women's land rights.

Public messaging and community engagement was an integral part of a strategy that sought to increase community awareness of the issue. The decision to use audio - through radio programming and jingles - and to convey messages in local languages, increased the reach and impact of the project as well as delivering a value for money component. The women-to-women network groups established as part of the project were very effective in spreading new knowledge and sharing their experiences of successes and challenges when seeking to access to land. However, the project failed to sufficiently think about how these types of resources could have been designed and distributed so that they continued to impact on communities after the project.

For all the successes of the project, and simply getting the discussion about women's land rights on the table given how much of a taboo subject it was, let alone having women successfully acquire land, should be seen as major step forward, the project could have been improved. The overall development goal spoke of "the advancement of women's socio-economic empowerment" through more gender equitable land tenure but this was more of an assumed impact than one driven by any project-related activities. A better risk mitigation strategy would have thought more about the impact of the likely high turnover of elected officials, in the March 2018 elections, on the trainings and workshops. Finally, greater thinking about sustainability might have found a solution to the challenge of the need for continuous, ongoing community education on this issue in order to prevent the significant gains made, being gradually eroded.

The evaluation presents a number of recommendations. Three are outlined below:

1. Strengthen partnerships with organizations such as the Legal Aid Board to develop clear referral pathways guidelines for women seeking legal redress on land issues and with agricultural colleges and microfinance lenders for those who acquire land but lack the skills and knowledge to benefit from it.
2. Design sensitization and educational materials in a way that they can be shared and used beyond the life-cycle of the project.
3. Produce a case study to assess why the project had such a significant impact in Small Bo, to support the development of further initiatives in the region and the country.

The evaluation also presents a number of lessons learned. Four are outlined below:

1. Chieftaincy authorities are key powerbrokers in local communities. Giving women the knowledge and understanding to advocate for their land rights will have the greatest impact when initiatives also work to change the attitudes of men and, in particular, those of traditional institutions.
2. Projects that seek to change attitudes towards long held cultural beliefs and practices need to develop long-term plans for ensuring that initial gains are sustained beyond the end of the project.
3. Women in Sierra Leone were not scared of speaking out against prevailing cultural norms in Eastern Sierra Leone, they were simply unaware that they had rights to access land in the first place.
4. Finding ways of spreading knowledge about women's rights either in person - through women to women community networks - or by using media in local languages, and in an audio form, allows the message to reach the widest audience possible and have the most effective impact.

II. PROJECT CONTEXT

(i) Development Context

Pillar 8 of the government of Sierra Leone's Agenda for Prosperity (2013-2018) focused on delivering gender and women's empowerment. It recognized that "institutionalized gender inequalities are exacerbated by discriminatory customs, particularly with relation to marriage, property rights and sexual offences". The result being that women and girls have limited access to education, justice, health care, employment, and decision making. Sierra Leone's 2005 Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper noted that the inability of women to accumulate and retain assets increased the likelihood of impoverishment. With limited access to formal sector employment, particularly in rural areas, the majority of women rely on the

land for food production to sustain a living for themselves and their dependents. These issues prevail over a decade later.

Women's access to, and control of, land, particularly in relation to inheritance and ownership rights, is another area where gender imbalances constrain women. The land tenure system, closely linked to a male dominated customary system, continues to exclude them from decision-making processes on land. Only among the Mende ethnic group, dominant in the eastern and southern districts of the country, do female Paramount Chiefs exist, but women's rights generally remain on the periphery.

The Government of Sierra Leone has committed to gender equality and women's empowerment, signing a range of policy declarations and enacting legislation including the Devolution of Estates Act 2007. This criminalizes the act of depriving a woman from inheriting her husband's property after his death and outlines how the inheritance should be shared among surviving family, with 35% going to the spouse, 35% to the surviving children, 15% to parents and 15% in line with any customary laws. Yet translating these laws from policy into practice has been difficult. The act only recognizes an individual's right to land, not a family's, and the vast majority of Sierra Leonean women live under traditional land tenure structures that do not recognize a woman's right to own property. Prevailing cultural norms, which see women as the property of their husband's family once married, and therefore not entitled to inherit land from their father persist. Many women, and men, are not even aware of the provisions within the Devolution of Estate Act 2007. HUWASAL identified this as a gap that needed to be bridged and the project aligned with one of the strategic areas identified by the Agenda for Prosperity, to "increase their [women's] participation in decision-making in public, private, and traditional institutions, and access to justice and economic opportunities". Land is however not the only area where women face a battle to be included in decision-making structures in Sierra Leone but their political participation. During the March 2018 presidential and parliamentary elections, less than 10% of successful legislative candidates were women, despite them comprising over half of the population. An indication of the scale of the challenge.

Land is an increasingly contentious issue in the country. Disputes between external investors, who have sought to consult traditional authorities for access to land, and communities, who have often not been consulted, before a decision is taken by the Paramount Chief, are leading to communities being forcibly evicted. Citizens are fighting against this exclusion. In the 2018 parliamentary elections, land was the key issue in deciding one seat in Pujehun district after local residents became embroiled in a dispute over land.

Government recognition of the contentious issues of access to, and ownership of land, led to the creation of a draft National Land Policy. First published in 2015, it is a well drafted document developed with a good level of community consultation across the country. On women's land rights the draft policy aims to "protect the rights of inheritance and ownership of land of women, including spouses, widows, unmarried daughters, divorcees, women in cohabitation and their children". The policy calls for women to be accorded the same land rights as men before, during and after marriage. It remains unimplemented. However, the newly elected government made promises that it would begin implementation during the campaign. Transforming policy into practice will require sustained education and information about the policy, and buy-in from chieftaincy authorities, if women's land rights are to be routinely recognized.

(ii) Project Objective and Intervention Rationale

Over a period of 24 months between 1st January 2016 and 31st December 2017, HUWASAL, with the support of implementing partner WOCERP, delivered a project to enhance women's land ownership rights in eastern Sierra Leone which was funded by UNDEF. It was implemented in nine chiefdoms across three districts of Sierra Leone - Jawei, Kissi Tongi and Luawa in Kailahun district; Nongowa, Small Bo and Niawa in Kenema district and Tankoro, Gbense and Sandor in Kono district - at a total cost of US\$160,000, with US\$16,000 reserved for evaluation.

This evaluation of the project aims to assess its impact in contributing towards a better understanding of land rights issues, increasing public awareness of the issue and in building the knowledge of communities on human rights and the legal framework in order to create a forum for communities to critically analyze the need to, and advocate for, enhanced gender fairness and social justice in the existing land tenure system of Sierra Leone. Specifically, the project had three intended outcomes:

- To create a platform for sustained community-led advocacy on issues of women's land ownership rights
- To ensure that targeted women and influential community leaders gained knowledge and made efforts to promote women's land ownership rights
- To build partnerships among communities, civil society organizations and state actors that could effectively collaborate on enhancing women's land ownership and control

To do this the project adopted an approach that would engender community-led advocacy on women's land rights. To that end, the project focused on building local structures, supporting community ownership and finding ways of ensuring long-term sustainability, that would allow the intervention to continue beyond the scope of the project. In developing the skills of community level advocates - in particular women-to-women networks - the intervention, through a series of training exercises, sought to employ an evidence-based approach to advocacy, using the findings of a comprehensive research it commissioned on women's land ownership rights in Eastern Sierra Leone to design context-specific training modules.

In achieving the outcomes of the project, it was hypothesized, that the project would begin to address the gender gaps in the land tenure system, and its socio-economic impact on the livelihood of women in the three districts targeted. This evaluation will seek to offer an analysis of how much impact the project was able to have in this regard. It will also seek to understand where and why challenges emerged and to offer some suggestions and recommendations for improving related interventions, in similar contexts in the future.

III. METHODOLOGY

The field visit component of the evaluation process was carried out in Sierra Leone from the 10th to the 16th of June 2018. Each of the three target districts were visited by the evaluator, allowing for key stakeholders from across the projects geographical scope to share insights and reflections. This was made possible despite the challenging road networks that connected Kono to Kenema district. Given the time constraints, it was not possible to visit all nine chiefdoms where the project took place. But by visiting four of the predominantly urban, or located close to urban areas, chiefdoms – namely (Small Bo, Tankoro,

Jawei and Nongowa) - and holding discussions in each of the main district towns, the evaluator was able to try and ascertain differences in project implementation that occurred across the Eastern region.

Semi-structured interviews were the main approach used for this evaluation. Questions drew on both the UNDEF Operation Manual guidance and context-specific queries developed by the evaluator (see Annex 1). Key stakeholders interviewed included traditional authorities, elected government officials, women beneficiaries, members of women-to-women networks, community leaders, civil society partners and staff working on the project for HUWASAL and WOCERP.

Sensitivity was taken when conducting interviews, particularly with women, to ensure that the discussions took place in an environment where they felt most comfortable. However, it is worth noting that most women interviewed did not feel constrained by the presence of men. Where it was not possible to interview individuals in person - for the most part this was because they had travelled to the capital Freetown - interviews were done by telephone. A full list of the interviews conducted is provided as Annex 3.

To complement the field visit, the evaluator conducted a desk review of relevant project documents. This included the mid-term and final narrative reports, the research paper delivered as part of Output 1.1 and the training manual developed for Output 2.1 as well as relevant contextual materials such as The Devolution of Estates Act (2007) and media coverage of women's land issues. However, there were some constraints and limitations to the evaluation process that should be acknowledged:

- Several of the interviewees, particularly in more remote, rural communities, preferred to answer the questions posed in Krio, the *lingua franca* of Sierra Leone. The evaluator can understand a good amount of Krio but also required occasional translation assistance. This was provided by staff members of HUWASAL whose presence might have changed how the respondents answered questions posed.
- One key stakeholder group for which no interviews took place were that of elected or recently serving Members of Parliament. This was in part due to the fact that project ended in December 2017 with parliamentary elections in March 2018 seeing a high turnover of elected officials. Those who had previously been MPs, and identified by HUWASAL as having attended the projects training sessions had travelled to the capital city of Freetown, and efforts to reach them by phone proved unsuccessful. Efforts to meet them in person in Freetown were also unsuccessful as the one day the evaluator was in the capital city it was a public holiday.
- A list of the type of stakeholders the evaluator sought to interview was shared with HUWASAL ahead of the visit, so that they could arrange for the relevant individuals to be interviewed. However, this approach opens up the possibility that there was bias in their selection process. Furthermore, respondents often wanted to present the project in a positive light because they felt as though a good evaluation would lead to more funding opportunities in this area in the future. The evaluator kept in mind these possible biases when carrying out the work.

IV. EVALUATION FINDINGS

i. Relevance

The project was a very relevant and timely intervention. Until the launch of the intervention, discussions related to women's land rights had not been taking place at the community level, where long-standing

cultural beliefs and practices, which allowed men to retain such rights, prevailed. Almost all of the women who benefited from the project spoke of not previously knowing that they were entitled to land under law - Devolution of Estates Act 2007 - until the project trainings started. They stressed that prior to the start of the project the discussion of women's land rights would have been a "taboo" and people would have stopped you speaking on the issue by saying "you are not a man". Since the intervention they feel much freer to discuss the issue and to demand their rights.

Given how much of a taboo the subject was prior to the intervention the design of the project, at just two years in length, was seen by several respondents as a very short period of time in which to ingrain not only a change in attitudes but also practice. In some chiefdoms major strides were made but several respondents spoke about the need for continuous education over a more sustained period of time for the intervention to embed the significant gains made so far.

"Land if life" in this part of Sierra Leone, was the view of one women beneficiary of the project who had successfully obtained land empowered by the knowledge she had learned from the training. The projects focus on land, despite it being a very contentious subject, was recognized as being particularly pertinent with the economic opportunities afforded to women who were landowners not just limited to individual impacts. Women are widely seen as better managers of money in Sierra Leone than men, and there was general acceptance from stakeholders interviewed that economically empowered women would be more likely to invest proceeds more wisely, with the payment of school fees for their children a regularly cited example.

However, the overall development goal of the project which aimed to "enhance the advancement of women's socio-economic empowerment, through strengthening gender equitable land tenure systems" was not matched by proportionate interventions towards economic development. Whilst it was a likely consequence that women with access to land were more likely to be economically empowered by the project, in both design and implementation, could have done more to think through the ways in which economic empowerment would be achieved. The provision of supportive mechanisms such as training in agricultural best practice or access to start-up loans and capital were cited by many female respondents as ways in which their economic empowerment could have been better realized.

The idea of having women in decision-making positions was seen as one way of advancing the rights of women in these areas for many of the respondents interviewed. But respondents also acknowledged that education on the issue of women's land rights should also include men, an approach that the project sought to follow. One respondent noted that in some instances "women who were trained but who were married to husbands who were part of the traditional authority structures, found it difficult to exercise these new rights, even in their own home, because of prevailing cultural attitudes".

The targeting of three districts in Eastern Sierra Leone for the project was very relevant in that it enabled HUWASAL to draw on community networks they had built up in working on previous projects. In the selection of the nine chiefdoms both rural and urban dynamics were captured. The projects efforts to work in both rural and urban settings was commendable according to one respondent who felt that too often these initiatives are limited to the empowerment of urban residents. Drawing on the experience of working in the districts on community issues HUWASAL was strategic in choosing chiefdoms where they had pre-existing connections to key stakeholders. They also sought to ensure an increased relevance for the project by choosing chiefdoms where land disputes - both between men and women, but also between communities and outside investors - were a major source of community debate, discussion and

tension. This selection criteria ensured that implementation areas under this project were as representative and relevant as possible.

The decision to target customary authorities in these chiefdoms was vitally important. Mende culture - the majority ethnic group in two of the three districts (Kenema and Kailahun) - has historically been more open to the rights of women in customary practice. In Kenema five of the 16 Paramount Chiefs are women but in Kailahun and in Kono - where the Kono ethnic group dominate - there are none. In Kono the challenges of having women's land rights realized at the chieftaincy level were more pronounced. One of the nine chiefdoms targeted by this intervention - Niawa - had a female Paramount Chief.

It was notable that where the intervention was most successful - Small Bo Chiefdom in Kenema district - a leading role was played by chieftaincy authorities in ensuring that women, empowered with knowledge from the trainings about their right to land, were able to access it. Paramount Chiefs continue to hold significant power at the community level in Sierra Leone and targeting them for the awareness raising training significantly increased the applicability of this project to the community context. As Paramount Chief Kallon of Jawei Chiefdom noted in the interview "sometimes projects on these local issues ignore us, and do not include us in their initiatives which is a mistake and so I applaud HUWASAL for including us in their work". The project also worked closely with local councils in its implementation. This partnership was appreciated by the local councillors in Kenema and Kono who believed that having civil society raise awareness on such contentious issues can get around accusations of the government politicizing the issue.

Language was another important tool employed by the project to ensure its relevance at the community level. Training was conducted predominantly in Krio, but radio jingles, that sought to raise awareness about women's legal right to own land, were played in three local languages - Mende, Kissi and Kono - in addition to Krio. The use of radio shows and jingles increased the accessibility of the important issues being raised to those who did not speak English, illiterate women - and with the World Bank estimates for female adult literacy in Sierra Leone at less than 25% this is vital for any awareness raising intervention - and reached those not targeted directly by the project, but who might have been listening to the programme.

ii. Effectiveness

The project delivered a highly effective intervention, targeting the key community stakeholders to ensure that it was able to deliver the outputs outlined in the project document. The project was particularly effective in empowering women with the knowledge about their right to access land. According to the final narrative report, it reached over 7,000 women through direct training, sensitization workshops and the creation of 30 women-to-women advocacy networks. It also emboldened women to take action. Over 100 cases were brought forward with regards to land and property rights for women within the project-cycle but interviews with HUWASAL staff, community members and partner organizations such as the Legal Aid Board suggested that number had grown significantly in the last few months, after the project's completion, as more women become aware of these successful cases. All of the women beneficiaries of the training interviewed were able to cite the Devolution of Estates Act of 2007 as the source of their right to equal land access suggesting that the training had been well targeted and resonated with those who engaged with it. Several women interviewed for the evaluation mentioned how they had previously lost out on land but having learnt about the provisions in the 2007 Act were able to reclaim what was rightfully theirs.

Training that enhanced women’s knowledge about their rights with regards to land was one effective strategy. Radio was also very important in enabling the project to reach beyond the chiefdoms it was targeting in a language and style that was understandable to poorly educated women. Many individuals interviewed had listened to the radio discussions and several cited the importance of having heard their Paramount Chief - at least two of the nine Paramount Chiefs in the targeted districts spoke on the radio in favour of women’s land rights - discussing the issue. Other awareness raising tools were less effective when compared to the use of radio. Calendars were produced but were for 2017 and so were already out of date. The billboards erected in each district headquarter town gave some visibility to the project. In Kono, the billboard was strategically placed on the road leading up to the local council and other pertinent government offices, offering a reminder to key stakeholders of the issue, but came at a higher cost.



However, two risks, identified by the project document, had an impact on the project’s effective implementation. “High material expectations” of community members, particularly representatives of chieftaincy authorities - identified as a low risk in the project document - meant that this key stakeholder group, who were instrumental in ensuring that women’s newly acquired knowledge of their right to land often sent representatives to attend the trainings and workshops. This had an impact on the effectiveness of the project, given the influence that the Paramount Chief has to sway opinion on the community.

Project billboard Koidu, Kono

The Paramount Chief in Jawei chiefdom acknowledged this tension by saying that “we have agreed to disagree with HUWASAL on some things [referring to the per diems for workshop attendance]”. This is not to say that the demands of the chieftaincy authorities, which sometimes were three times in excess of the budget with the further expectation that vehicles would be fuelled by HUWASAL, should be given in to, but that future interventions should engage as early as possible with these institutions to build a mutual understanding around financial expectations. Given their potentially transformative role in enhancing women’s land rights, a cost-benefit analysis of the value of their attendance to the achievement of the overall objectives of the project should be undertaken as part of the risk assessment.

The projects risk mitigation framework also identified as ‘medium’ the risks posed by political activities around the 2016 local council elections. This had a minimal impact on the projects effective implementation, but the 2018 parliamentary elections, although out of the scope of the project, were a risk that could have impacts on the effectiveness on the project’s outputs which aimed to train MPs on the issue of women’s land rights. The extremely high turnover of elected officials means that the vast majority of current parliamentary representatives for the Eastern region did not receive the training and are therefore less likely to have the knowledge needed to advance women’s land rights issues at the national political level moving forward.

The decision to engage with parliamentarians was an important part of the project’s advocacy led approach, given that a draft land bill has been with the government since 2015 and its implementation is likely to take place in the next five years. However, the project could have done more to think about the implications, and likelihood, of high turnover rates, a consistent feature of legislative elections in Sierra

Leone, and find ways to engage newly elected parliamentarians, either prior to their election or subsequently. Strategies could have included lobbying prospective candidates to commit to tackling the issue of women's land rights when in office or by designing advocacy tools - such as video stories or pamphlets detailing the key issues surrounding women's land rights - that could have been circulated to newly elected officials after the election.

iii. Efficiency

The project was able to deliver a high degree of financial and implementation efficiency. It was on budget and to the timeframes agreed in the project document. A significant overspend on bank fees was absorbed by other budget lines with no discernible impact to the projects implementation. Financial reporting and accountability provisions were affirmed by an external financial audit of the project which found no ineligible expenditure. WOCERP, the implementing partner, reported no delays in the disbursement of funds to run its women-to-women networks.

A reliance on effective and efficient partnerships was crucial for the project to function effectively. The women to women network groups, established by WOCERP, played a key role in continuing to push the message at the community level, this combined with the radio programmes, allowed for a continuation of the sensitization of hard to reach communities. The importance of women sharing their experiences and knowledge with other women was highlighted in several of the interviews with project beneficiaries. These personal testimonies were also effective advocacy tools when employed during the workshops with other key community stakeholders.

WOCERP, the implementing partner, based in Daru, Kailahun District had previously worked alongside HUWASAL and both organizations spoke of the positive working relationship that has been forged. The ability to work closely and collaboratively with so many key stakeholders working on women's land rights was in large part due to HUWASAL's National Coordinator. His personal rapport and connections appeared to have been crucial in building support for the project and sustaining its momentum.

In Kono, where visits were less frequent, given the logistical challenges, it would have made sense to have an implementing partner situated in the district. This would have ensured a more sustained presence capable of carrying out and to improve the efficiency and capability for monitoring and evaluation. A lack of a qualified partner was the reason offered for this by HUWASAL staff when interviewed, citing that there were no other civil society organizations working specifically on women's land rights.

This is to not to say that HUWASAL did not have a constant presence in the district. Three community engagement officers - one deployed in each district - were hired for the duration of the project implementation. They were each given a motorbike to enable them to travel within the district to target communities and had to provide monthly activity reports to HUWASAL. Constant community visits were an important feature to ensure that the project was implemented efficiently. But given the challenging road networks, in particularly the road and distance between Kenema and Koidu, costs were high. In Kono district there were occasionally challenges in carrying out monitoring visits to communities due to the costs of operating the motorbike allocated to the district. Whilst the project was implemented very efficiently and delivered a strong value for money component, Kono was neglected to a degree, perhaps because of logistical constraints and the lack of a local partner organization.

iv. Impact

The project was able to have a significant impact in select chiefdoms, where women have been able to claim land that is or was rightfully theirs. In other chiefdoms the cultural barriers proved harder to break down but even here the project had a positive impact in starting to break down social taboos about women's land rights, by starting a conversation on the issue. The project's final narrative report detailed 102 cases relating to women's land rights forwarded to key stakeholders for resolution, with a further 78 addressed by communities themselves. Speaking to some of these women as part of the evaluation it was clear that these numbers will continue to grow as other women, empowered by the training and gathering awareness of successful claims from their peers, take their cases up with the arbitrators of land disputes. Unintended negative impacts, such as an increase of reports of domestic violence, which were a possible consequence of empowering women to push for heightened economic independence were not reported by women interviewed for this evaluation.

The Paramount Chief of Jawei chiefdom spoke of how "women are now allowed to own land in Jawei chiefdom. The training has helped us to understand what we were doing previously to be wrong and so we have begun to change. In the chiefdom by-laws are a key enforcement tool and we are gradually moving to have laws that protect women's land rights." In Small Bo chiefdom, the project had a transformational impact not only on the approach to giving women access to land but on the chieftaincy decision-making structures with regards to land. Chiefdom by-laws, the most enforced regulations for most community members, were established to ensure the rights of women to land were enshrined by law and women were also given representation on the Chiefdom Land Committee; they now hold four of the 13 seats.

Whilst impact varied across the targeted chiefdoms, those with Paramount Chiefs who showed leadership on promoting women's land rights had much greater impact, than in areas where the local buy-in was harder to find. To have ensured a greater impact across the districts, and to have perhaps even reached more women outside of the targeted chiefdoms, the project might have been designed to have a more sizeable component in which the success stories, both individuals and communities, were documented and widely shared. There were some efforts to do this through the radio programming and at workshops with key stakeholders but a more systematic approach may have widened the impact of the project and contributed to its sustainability.

The project's impact in raising awareness of land rights among women - over 7,000 were educated about the provisions set forth by the Devolution of Estates Act 2007 - and the success of over 90 women gaining property rights through mediation should not be underplayed, given that in many communities it was a taboo subject to even talk about at the start of the project. However, in the design and implementation of the project more focus needed to be given to the expected overall development goal which stated that an impact of the project would be the "enhancement of women's socio-economic empowerment, through strengthening gender equitable land tenure". This socio-economic empowerment element was an expectation of improved access to land but in interviews for this evaluation women noted challenges to benefitting from their land such as a lack of access to finances, poor knowledge of how to grow crops efficiently and of being given land that was resource poor. For the socio-economic impact of the project to have been fully realized, more could have been designed to include a component of economic support for women beneficiaries either through access to agricultural training, microfinance or a combination of the two.

v. Sustainability



The establishment of women to women networks, with the skills and knowledge to pass on messages on a peer-to-peer basis played an impactful role in raising awareness and sustaining advocacy. They are a key component of the project achieving one of its outcomes with regards to building community advocacy capacity. In several communities, Women's Land Right Committees have been established aimed at continuing the advocacy started by the project in a sustainable community-led way.

**Women-to-women network members,
Daru, Kailahun District**

Although they lack power to adjudicate on land allocation or disputes, they are structures that can sustain the push for women's land rights at the community level beyond the project's life-cycle. In chiefdoms where by-laws have been created around women's land rights, the longevity of the projects impact will be significant.

HUWASAL's coordination and establishment of positive working relationships with the key stakeholders on women's land rights is an important sustainable element of the intervention, particular if the proposed National Land Policy is to be implemented. The work that HUWASAL has already begun, as the Eastern region coordinator for the Sierra Leone Network on the Right to Food, on its nationwide campaign on women's land rights is an example of how the skills, materials and experiences developed and gathered in the implementation of this project can be used to support other interventions across the country.

However, there is a concern that due to the high turnover of elected officials the long-term impacts of the training delivered to members of parliament, the majority of whom have since left office, will be limited and could impact the project's sustainability. Several respondents were also concerned that the significant strides made by the project in changing long-held views would in danger of reversing if continuous education, debate and discussion were not forthcoming at the community level. The design of print, audio and visual materials that could have been used by women to women networks after the project cycle would have been one way of ensuring that these vital discussions continued at all levels.

vi. UNDEF added value

The design of the project which empowered a local civil society organization, and its partner, with the tools to research and thus formulate a better understanding of women's land ownership that was context specific, and then to develop a response that was driven, and supported, by local actors offered a value-added function. It was the first intervention aimed specifically at addressing the issue of women's land rights in the Eastern region of Sierra Leone and therefore UNDEF, in funding the initiative, provided an enabling framework to tackle an under addressed issue using an approach that had a strong gender empowerment component.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions	Recommendations
The length of the project, given the deeply embedded attitudes it was trying to change, was too short.	In order to better sustain the project over time, the same financial input could have been allocated but over a longer period of time.
Paramount Chiefs are key local powerbrokers in improving women’s access to land but they can also be barriers to it.	At the project design stage make special efforts to dialogue with, and get, Paramount Chiefs on board. A discussion around the costs of doing so at this stage can better ensure they attend workshops and radio discussions which in turn can increase effectiveness and impact.
A lack on a strong presence or implementing partner in Kono, coupled with more robust cultural barriers and challenging logistics, limited the projects impact in the district.	Identify a community based organization in each of the districts working to promote women’s rights where the project is being implemented and partner with them.
Women, empowered and emboldened, by the training were able to secure access to land in their communities.	Use the established women-to-women network groups to tell these stories to women in other communities in the region. This can be done in person, through radio, audio and in print, using local languages to reach poorer communities. Testimony sharing is a particularly effective tool and could be used more widely.
Women who have gained access to land as a result of newly acquired knowledge have the potential to benefit economically from it but need further support in order to do so.	Develop a further component of the project, or a partnership with relevant stakeholders, which offers training in agri-business and a way of accessing microcredit for women who have recently acquired land.
Engaging members of parliament in the project was important but insufficient consideration was given to the risks of them losing political office to the sustainability of their engagement.	The production of sustainable advocacy tools - a short documentary or report - could have been launched/screened for MPs in 2017. The same material could have been used again after the election for engaging those elected in March 2018 to ensure continuity.
The use of local radio networks to discuss women’s land rights in local languages was an important way of reaching out to hard to reach communities, and those beyond the targeted chiefdoms.	Continue to ensure that as much of the material used to educate women about their land rights is produced in local languages and has an audio component to penetrate rural areas where literacy levels, particularly among women, remain low. To improve the sustainability of

	audio messaging materials could have been uploaded onto Meg-Sticks to allow for their use beyond the life-cycle of the project.
Significant strides were made during the project in Small Bo Chiefdom with regards to women’s land rights, establishing by-laws and bringing women into the decision-making structures at chiefdom level.	Document the successes achieved in individual chiefdoms in a case study to understand how, in their own words, attitudes changes and to draw out lessons learned which could be applied to future interventions in the region and the country.
HUWASAL continues to hear from women who believe they have been denied access to land. A residual barrier to women accessing their land rights where mediated solutions are not possible is access to justice mechanisms for redress.	Strengthen partnerships with organizations such as the Legal Aid Board to develop clear referral pathways guidelines for women seeking legal redress on land issues.
Much of the focus was on Devolution of Estates Act 2007, but more could have been done to raise awareness of the draft National Land Policy, particularly at the level of chieftaincy and local council engagement.	Better connect the higher-level advocacy component of the project to the national land policy drafting and implementation process.
The project has created the space and environment for growing cooperation between key stakeholders to ensure that women’s land rights are jointly addressed	Formalize this cooperation with the establishment of a technical working group that continues to hold discussions aimed at improving women’s land rights on a quarterly basis. This would help avoid any possible duplication of efforts.

VI. LESSONS LEARNED

- Chieftaincy authorities are key powerbrokers in local communities. Giving women the knowledge and understanding to advocate for their land rights will have the greatest impact when initiatives also work to change the attitudes of men and, in particular, that of traditional authorities. In short, chiefs can be a barrier to, or a facilitator of, women’s rights.
- Giving women who have successfully secured land a platform to share their experiences can inspire others as to what is possible and how they can also go about securing land that is rightfully theirs.
- Regardless of what national laws say, chieftaincy by-laws are the most applied legal framework in rural communities.
- The credibility and local connections of the implementing agency and its partners in the communities in which they work are vital in ensuring effective project implementation in more rural settings.
- Using local languages in an audio format allows educational material to reach the widest audience possible.

- Projects that seek to change attitudes towards long held cultural beliefs and practices need to develop robust and well thought out long-term sustainability plans for ensuring that gains made in the short-term are maintained beyond the end of the project.
- Direct support, or linkages with projects that offer support, in terms of agriculture or business training can help ensure that women landowners fully benefit, socio-economically, from access to land.
- Sizeable financial incentives are often required to ensure chiefs and elected officials attend trainings and workshops, but with chiefs this can have a value for money component.
- Allocating a portion of the budget to carry out a research component at the outset of the project is crucial in developing the best understanding possible of the key issues and barriers in the local context.
- Women in Sierra Leone were not scared of speaking out against prevailing cultural norms in Eastern Sierra Leone, they were simply unaware that they had rights to access land in the first place. Providing structures through which women can educate other women is important for the project relevance and impact.
- Local cultural context matters - what works in one district group, where one ethnic group dominates, will not necessarily work elsewhere in the country or region. Sierra Leone has 16 ethnic groups and the same number of districts so what has worked for this project may not do so elsewhere.

VII. ANNEXES

Annex 1: Evaluation Questions and Detailed Findings

In addition to using the broader questions for evaluation set out in the UNDEF evaluation manual further questions, specifically related to the project in Eastern Sierra Leone will be asked. Below are some examples that will be used. Different questions will be posed depending on who is being interviewed. This is not an exhaustive list.

Relevance

- How did you select the districts, the chiefdoms and finally the communities for the project?
- How was the training manual that was produced for Output 2.1 tailored to the local community dynamics?
- One of the major obstacles to the achievement of women's land right were men (particularly family members) was enough attention given to men in the design and implementation of the project? What more could have been done and what you some of the risks have been?
- What impact did the decisions of chiefs/government officials to send deputies have on the projects overall impact?
- How many MPs who attended the parliamentary workshop are still in elected office? What mechanisms were put in place to try and establish some continuity between elections given the high turnover rates?
- How much was this training needed in your community? How much of an obstacle is the lack of access to land to your livelihood? Did you hear the radio messages produced by this project?

Effectiveness

- What did you learn from attending the trainings/workshops and how have you used that new knowledge in your everyday actions in the community? What barriers persist?
- How easy was it to set up to the women-to-women networks? How did you do it? And how effective was the approach of using women to empower other women? What were the added benefits?
- If you are aware of the radio-phone in debates and discussions tell me about the discussions you heard.
- How were the numerous partnerships developed during the project sustained? Between grantee and partner, women groups and communities, chiefs and communities etc.

Efficiency

- How was the partnership between HUWASAL and WOCERP? Were there any challenges and if so how were they resolved?
- Did the women to women networks run without being too much of an administration burden?
- Did the lack of an implementing partner in Kono have any impact of the projects efficiency? If so how and what was done to mitigate against this?

Impact

- How have you used the knowledge acquired to advance women's land rights in your community/district/chiefdom? Have you observed a marked change in attitudes? If so what? And what, in particular, has driven this change in attitude?

- How do you see the mid/long term benefits of the project working out now that it has officially drawn to a close?
- How do you plan on sharing the knowledge you have acquired on the issue in the future with others?
- In the design of the project there seems to be a lack of activities relating to how this new knowledge will actually improve livelihoods and socioeconomic status of women. Was enough thought given to this component? What more could have been done?
- Have you experienced any negative impacts from the project? Particularly from men unwilling to change their patriarchal views. Is there frustration among beneficiaries that they are now aware of their rights but that they find it hard to have those rights realized through dispute resolution mechanisms (both formal and customary)?

Sustainability

- How can the women to women networks established by the project be sustained, or how are they being sustained?
- What measures were put in place to ensure that the acquired knowledge can be used to continue to advocate for change now the project is finished?
- Was the issue of women's land rights discussed and debate in the three districts during the 2018 parliamentary and local council elections?
- Is there evidence to show how the knowledge which was targeted to specific chiefdoms is being spread to communities outside the initial targeted ones. If so how?
- Traditional values and social structures remain heavily entrenched in this part of Sierra Leone is it possible to expect short term impacts? What would be a good measure of sustainable impact to follow moving forward?
- Any indications of national initiatives or policy developments that this awareness raising project has played a small part in contributing too?
- UNDEF value added: In the Eastern region what other complementary initiatives are being undertaken to address women's rights more broadly either by NGOs or government and how did this align with those?

Annex 2: Documents Reviewed

Project documents UDF-SIL-14-595:

- Project Document
- Mid-Term Project Report
- Narrative Final Report
- Milestone Verification Reports
- Financial Utilization Reports
- Evidence-based report on women's lack of land ownership rights and its socio-economic impact on their livelihoods

External sources:

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- Djurfeldt, A. 2018. *Owning land isn't enough to empower Africa's women farmers*. Sierra Leone Telegraph
- Government of Sierra Leone. 2005. *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper: A national programme for food security, job creation and good governance*. Sierra Leone
- Government of Sierra Leone. 2013. *The Agenda for Prosperity: The road to middle income status*. Sierra Leone
- Government of Sierra Leone. 2015. *Final National Land Policy of Sierra Leone: Version 6*. Ministry of Lands, County Planning and the Environment, Sierra Leone

Annex 3: Persons Interviewed

11 June 2018	
Christopher Caulker	Outreach Officer, Legal Aid Board
Sylvester Kallon	Deputy Director, Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (Eastern Region)
Satta M. Senesis	Program Manager, Defend for Children International
Fatmata Dassama	Project beneficiary, women landholder
Aminatta Koroma	Councilor, Kenema City Council
Miatta Jusu	Women's rights activist, Kenema
12 June 2018	
PC Musa Ngombukla Kallon II	Paramount Chief, Jawei Chiefdom, Kailahun district
Christiana Bemba/Representatives from 'women-to-women' networks	Program Coordinator, WOCERP/Members, Women to Women Networks
Satta Bockarie	Women-to-women Network Member
Baindu Konneh	Women-to-women Network Member
Mamatorma Kallon	Women-to-women Network Member
Baby Jenneh Dassama	Women-to-women Network Member
Christopher M. Briama	National Coordinator, Humanist Watch Salone
Alice Jeneba Koroma	Assistant Deputy Director, Ministry of Women, Gender and Social Affairs (Eastern region)
Francis Musa Kallon	Deputy Town Chief –Kenema
13 June 2018	
Ella Sheriff	Project beneficiary, women landholder
Briama M. Sheriff	Chieftaincy representatives, Small Bo Chiefdom
Mohammed Ngevaio	Former councilor, Kenema District Council
14 June 2018	
Representative	Network Movement for Justice and Development

Jacob Lebbie	Community Engagement Officer, Humanist Watch Salone
Erdima Favour Yorpoi	Coordinator, Women's Forum Kono/Training participant
15 June 2018	
Solomon Sahr	District Council Chairman, Kono District Council

Annex 4: Acronyms

HUWASAL	Humanist Watch Salone
UNDEF	UN Democracy Fund
WOCERP	Women's Centre for Human Rights and Progress