YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL COUNCIL DECISION-MAKING IN SIERRA LEONE

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

### Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF ACRONYMS</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part One: Youth Participation in Context: A Review of the Literature</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 The rising prominence of youth participatory governance in development discourse</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 The wider legal and policy framework for decentralisation and participatory governance</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Citizens’ participation in governance processes in practice</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part Two: Methodology</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Purpose of the study and core research questions</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Definitions</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Research approach</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Limitations</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part Three: Findings: The Reality of Council-Youth Engagement</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 A mapping of opportunities for Council-Youth engagement</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Councils’ proactive engagement with youth</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Key challenges of council-to-youth engagement</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Youth proactive engagement with councils</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 Key challenges of youth-to-council engagement</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part Four: Conclusions and Recommendations</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Conclusions</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Recommendations</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF INTERVIEWEES</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABOUT RESTLESS DEVELOPMENT</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF ACRONYMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil Society Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CYC</td>
<td>Chiefdom Youth Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DECSEC</td>
<td>Decentralisation Secretariat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DPO</td>
<td>Development and Planning Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSA</td>
<td>Daily Subsistence Allowance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DYC</td>
<td>District Youth Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENCISS</td>
<td>Enhancing the Interaction and Interface between Civil Society and the State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FYSA</td>
<td>Forum for Youth Serving Organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOSL</td>
<td>Government of Sierra Leone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IIED</td>
<td>International Institute for the Environment and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INPPS</td>
<td>Integrated National Public Services Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KII</td>
<td>Key Informant Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUYOG</td>
<td>Makeni Union of Youth Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MYES</td>
<td>Ministry of Youth, Employment and Sport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAYCOM</td>
<td>National Youth Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non Governmental Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RUF</td>
<td>Revolutionary United Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOR</td>
<td>Terms of Reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRC</td>
<td>Truth and Reconciliation Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VDC</td>
<td>Village Development Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WDC</td>
<td>Ward Development Committee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

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

As young people have gained increasing prominence on the international development agenda, so too has the issue of their participation in decision-making. Globally, there is increasing recognition that young people not only have the right to decide how resources are allocated, but that they also have valuable knowledge and viewpoints to bring to governance processes.

The issue of youth participation in governance has particularly strong resonance in Sierra Leone because of the association between the political and social disenfranchisement of young people and the civil conflict of 1991-2002. In the years following the civil war, there have been strong efforts to introduce structures and programmes that serve the needs of young people including the establishment of a National Youth Commission focused on the promotion of youth issues.

At the same time, there has been significant momentum in the post-war period to bring government closer to the people through the decentralisation of key government functions to re-established local councils. The decentralisation process, which began in 2004, presents an unprecedented opportunity for all citizens, including young people, to engage more effectively with local governance at council and sub-council level.

While decentralisation is being rolled out with impressive speed, the realisation of full, meaningful participatory governance has been slower to progress. The purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of the reality of participatory governance in local council structures from a youth perspective. Looking at six different councils (three city councils and three district councils) and interviewing a wide range of local and national stakeholders, the research seeks to gain a rounded picture of the successes and challenges of youth participation in council-level decision-making almost a decade after decentralisation began.

It considers firstly the mechanisms and structures through which young people can engage with council. It then asks how proactively councils make use of these structures and processes to bring young people in to decision-making. Next it considers how proactively youth take advantage of existing opportunities to engage with council. Finally it identifies the key challenges to greater and more meaningful youth engagement and makes recommendations, most of them suggested by the stakeholders consulted, for improving the quality and level of youth engagement.

In terms of the mechanisms, processes and structures for youth participation in governance, the research finds that there are a number of different routes and levels through which young people can theoretically engage with council both directly and indirectly through intermediaries. The extent to which young people are able to take advantage of these opportunities in practice largely depend on the comparative strength and openness of those different structures as well as the capacity of young people to proactively engage with them.

In terms of the effectiveness and capacity of councils to proactively engage with youth, the councils surveyed appear for the most part to demonstrate a good level of transparency and openness. All meetings are open to the public and efforts are being made to display key planning and financial information. In terms of involving young people in the planning process, it seems the extent to which this happens is largely contingent on how much funding is available to support the planning.
process. Where more funding is available, more comprehensive consultation – including with youth civil society organisations – can take place. When it comes to mainstreaming youth issues the research finds that the councils surveyed tend to have a narrow understanding of youth issues, as embodied in the narrow focus of the Youth and Sports Committee or its equivalent, and no concerted attempt is currently being made by any council to mainstream youth in to the council’s planning. In some councils, stakeholders are able to give examples of where the council had responded to issues raised by youth, although not in all councils. When it comes to receiving and acting on monitoring and feedback, it seems that while most councils declare themselves open to receiving such information, in practice there are few organisations undertaking monitoring of this kind. The openness of the relationship between council and civil society varies considerably across locations but innovations such as council radio programmes or dedicated council-civil society fora appear to improve relations significantly.

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

The key challenges to youth participation in governance identified by this research include, at the level of council, legal and policy constraints, funding constraints, a narrow vision of youth needs, limited capacity of councillors and partisan politics. At the level of youth representation and civil society, key challenges include the quality and calibre of youth leaders and representatives and the organisation and capacity of civil society and formal youth structures.

Core recommendations for overcoming these challenges can be grouped under six headings as follows:

- **Fostering participatory governance at the grassroots** – Strengthening grassroots decision-making structures; empowering citizens to engage with grassroots structures.
- **Promoting civic education** – Community-level civic education and sensitisation programmes; re-introducing civic education to the school curriculum.
- **Strengthening councils’ capacity to serve their youth constituency** – Capacity building and training for councillors; strengthening youth-focused committees; strengthening fora for council-civil society interaction including Youth Advisory Committees; completing the devolution of the Ministry of Youth and Sports functions.
- **Strengthening formal youth representation** – Clarifying roles and responsibilities; ensuring recognition; enhancing legitimacy and accountability; resourcing and capacity building.
- **Reviewing the legislative framework** – Quotas for youth representation; recognising legal youth structures and their roles at council; youth mainstreaming in policy.
- **Building civil society** – Training and capacity building; sharing best practice; coordination and joint advocacy; promoting joint projects.

In conclusion, while there are many positive signs that young people are increasingly engaging in decision-making at the council level, it is also clear that youth participation is not uniform and in some areas council-youth interaction is very weak. While there are some encouraging examples of strong, dynamic youth representatives participating effectively in council decision-making, this tends to be the exception rather than the norm and more often youth engagement is low-level and sometimes tokenistic.
Making meaningful and effective youth participation in governance a reality requires the combined effort of local and national government, civil society and donors. As Sierra Leone continues on an upward trajectory of social and economic development, and as democratic principles take root, ensuring young people are given a say in decision-making should be prioritised as an essential cornerstone of democratic consolidation, the importance of which, particularly given the historical context, cannot be exaggerated.
Part One: Youth Participation in Context: A Review of the Literature

“No one is born a good citizen; no nation is born a democracy. Rather both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime. Young people must be included from birth. A society that cuts off from its youth severs its lifeline.”


1.1 The rising prominence of youth participatory governance in development discourse

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

As more resources are channelled towards both tackling youth exclusion and disadvantage, as well as towards harnessing young people’s potential as partners in growth, the role of young people in deciding and managing the allocation of resources has been brought into sharp relief. Globally there is increasing recognition that young people not only have a right to determine how resources are used, but that they bring unique and valuable experiences and viewpoints to the debate. The issue of youth participation in governance was first given global exposure in Agenda 21, the declaration following the Rio Summit of 1992. Since then, a number of international conferences have drawn attention to the issue’s importance and it has been highlighted in several prominent legal instruments including the African Youth Charter, which obliges states parties to, among other things, “facilitate the creation or strengthening of platforms for youth participation in decision-making at local, national, regional and continental levels of governance” (African Youth Charter, 2006).

In Sierra Leone, the issue of youth participation in governance has a particular powerful resonance because of its devastating association with the civil war of 1991-2002. Prior to the conflict, decades of political disenfranchisement, underinvestment and a traditional gerontocracy in rural areas had created a generation of frustrated, marginalised young people among which the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) found many willing recruits when it entered the country in 1991. As the war progressed, young people were further marginalised when they were rejected by their families and communities as a consequence of their active participation in the war. Even for youth not directly involved in the violence, forced migration, sporadic schooling and absent parents or family, interrupted normal social development putting them at a significant disadvantage. According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report, as a result of the conflict, “a whole generation lost its childhood and youth.” (TRC, 2004)

In recognition that, on the one hand, youth political disenfranchisement had catalysed and exacerbated the conflict and, on the other hand, that the conflict had created a generation of excluded and disadvantaged young people, the post war years saw several important developments aimed at addressing the specific needs of young Sierra Leoneans. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports was established in 2003. This was later separated in to a dedicated Ministry of Youth, Employment and Sports and, in 2013, further rationalised in to a Ministry of Youth Affairs. The country’s first National Youth Policy was ratified in 2003 and was followed some years later by the National Youth Commission Act of 2009.

National Youth Policy 2003
The National Youth Policy of 2003 gives policy backing for the first time to the concept of youth as a national development priority. The policy is designed to ‘mainstream youth activities and contributions

1Agenda 21 is a non-binding, voluntary global action plan for sustainable development.http://www.unep.org/documents.multilingual/default.asp?documentid=52
and to highlight youth concern as critical input in the development process’ (GoSL, 2003). The policy outlines the roles and responsibilities of the youth themselves, the state and other actors in ‘reinvent[ing] the time-honoured notion of dignity in labour, instill[ing] national consciousness and patriotism in our young citizens, so as to lay the foundation for the emergence of a responsible citizenry.’ The policy creates specific instruments for supporting and promoting youth issues at the district level through the creation of District Youth Councils (DYCs). DYCs are tasked with, inter alia, identifying major youth concerns, needs and opportunities in their district and identifying projects/programmes that can be recommended for funding and support.

National Youth Commission Act 2009
Six years later, an Act of Parliament established the National Youth Commission (NAYCOM) with responsibility for realising the provisions of the National Youth Policy. NAYCOM’s responsibilities include, among other things, creating employment opportunities for youth, initiating youth development programmes, developing a national youth development plan, creating a network through which young people can access information about beneficial services and coordinating the activities of youth groups. The act also makes provision for Youth Advisory Committees to be established in all local councils with the purpose of assisting the Commission in the performance of its functions; sensitising the youth on the objectives of the Commission and submitting recommendations on measures to be adopted.

These two instruments concretise in law the country’s commitment to its young people and their significance on the national development agenda. However, the specific area of youth participation in governance is given broad and somewhat loose treatment and there is a lack of clarity around the mechanisms through which it will be actually realised. The National Youth Policy defines among other rights for young people, the right to participate in all decision-making processes relating to youth and the right to participate in governance issues. It defines among youth responsibilities to promote and defend democracy through active participation in the democratic process at all levels.

However neither the National Youth Policy nor the National Youth Commission Act specify mechanisms or processes through which active participation in governance, decision-making and democratic processes should be realised. It is not clarified how, for example, the District Youth Councils or any other structure created by these instruments, should interact with local councils, ministries or other decision-making bodies when it comes to drawing localised youth issues to their attention, participating in planning processes or holding those bodies to account. Neither does it clarify how to avoid duplication with existing structures, for example whether the Youth Advisory Committees created under the National Youth Commission Act should interact with or supersede the Youth and Sports Committees which already exist at local council level.

Unfortunately, as discussed below, the wider legal policy framework around participatory governance brings no further clarity to these specific issues, nor does it promote youth participation in governance processes more broadly.

1.2 The wider legal and policy framework for decentralisation and participatory governance
At the same time as raising youth issues to greater prominence on the development agenda, the civil war also served as a catalyst for increasing citizens’ participation in governance processes. Decentralisation had been under discussion for over a decade and was promoted by both civilian and military governments during the war, but it was only in the post-war period that the political will and popular demand was sufficiently strong to turn it in to reality.

Several analyses of the civil war highlight how the decades of over-concentration of political, economic and administrative power in Freetown greatly exacerbated rural poverty and were a major catalyst to the war itself (Fanthorpe et al., 2011). Therefore, a key rationale for accelerating the process of decentralisation in the post war period was to address two fundamental causes of the war: political exclusion and economic deprivation of the rural population (Yongmei and Ye, 2009). This was to be achieved by reincorporating alienated populations into localised decision-making processes, increasing the accountability of government and improving development planning and service delivery.
The Local Government Act, 2004

The decentralisation programme was officially launched in 2004 with the passing of the Local Government Act (LGA) and corresponding statutory instruments. The LGA re-establishes 18 local councils (12 district councils, 5 city councils and 1 municipal council) that had existed prior to 1972 and creates a new council for Western Area Rural District. The 19 local councils are empowered to take on around 80 functions devolved from central government primarily in the areas of health, education, agricultural extension services, water and sanitation, youth and sport activities. They are also granted the power to raise revenues from local taxes, property rates, licences, fees and charges, although other tax-levying powers remain in the hands of the traditional authorities.

In addition to devolving considerable administrative, fiscal and political power to local councils, the LGA also institutes several principles of participatory governance. Firstly, local councils must adhere to principles of transparency and accountability by ensuring all council and committee meetings are open to the public and by displaying development plans and budgets, financial accounts and meeting minutes in public places. A local council’s compliance with the disclosure request is one of the conditions for it to receive untied grants from the central government (Zhou et al., 2009). Secondly, the act establishes a new grassroots forum, the Ward Development Committee (WDC) – composed of not more than ten people (five of whom must be women) elected by local residents plus the councillor for the ward and the paramount chief – to act as a “local point for the discussion of local problems and needs and take remedial action where necessary or make recommendations to the local council accordingly” (GoSL, 2004). Finally, the LGA specifies that the council must consult residents of the locality, agencies of government and non-governmental and international organisations that have interest in working in the locality before or approving or reviewing a development plan.

National Decentralisation Policy, 2010

The National Decentralisation Policy was launched in 2010 in order to widen and strengthen the scope of the LGA. The policy clearly sets out the goals of decentralisation in detail and introduces some innovative new principles including gender mainstreaming, capacity building of councils and working with partners including the private sector and NGOs. In terms of participatory governance, the policy brings a high level clarity to the vision by specifying such principles as engendering people’s ownership of their local development agenda; guaranteeing transparency and openness in the conduct of local council affairs; creating an environment for participatory democracy that will enable greater involvement of the people and their representatives in planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluation of development projects and local economic development in their localities and promoting inclusiveness and equality of all citizens within any locality regardless of gender, origin, religion or political persuasion. (GosL, 2010).

While the legislation and policy include fundamental tenets of participatory governance, they also leave some important details unspecified and some scope for ambiguity. For example, while they specify that council and committee meetings must be open to the public, it is not clarified as to whether the public will have the right to raise issues or even speak in those forums as is often specified in the constitution of councils in the UK for example. The WDCs are the key unit for participatory governance at the grassroots, but their membership of ten is very small, especially since some wards contain many thousands of people. Similarly the means of election ‘by ward residents in a public meeting’ (GoSL, 2004) leaves quite a lot of scope for favouritism and cronyism on the part of the councillor. Nowhere does the legislation specify a process or structure through which a citizen can hold the council to account over an issue that concerns them.

In terms of specific provision for youth engagement in governance or decision-making, neither the LGA nor the National Decentralisation Policy specify any particular youth-focused or youth-friendly provision. Bodies such as the council committee on Youth and Sports, the District Youth Council or the District/Regional Youth Officer are not alluded to. Although gender is identified as a cross-cutting issue in the policy, there are no such provisions made for youth. The lack of detail arguably undermines the effectiveness of these instruments in instituting meaningful participatory governance.
1.3 Citizens’ participation in governance processes in practice

The roll out of the 2004 LGA was rapid in the early years. By 2007, decentralisation had progressed to an extent that Sierra Leone had a fully functional tier of local councils, a new and well-regulated system of fiscal transfers from central to local government and increased investment in local services (Fanthorpe et al., 2011). Local council elections in 2004, 2008 and 2012 were successfully undertaken and there was a significant turnover in councillors each time indicating that the electorate are embracing the principles of political accountability among their chosen leaders. On closer examination however, some of the high turnover can also be seen as a consequence of councillors not standing for a second term because they felt underequipped to hold office or because they consider the remuneration to be inadequate.

While decentralisation has progressed quickly, there have also been some limitations to the extent that it has been fully realised. For example, there have been delays in devolving all scheduled central government functions. In June 2011, the Director of the Decentralisation Secretariat (DecSec) announced that only 30 of the 80 functions scheduled for devolution had actually been devolved (Fanthorpe et al., 2011). There are also some limitations in the legislation itself, for example, the LGA maintained many of the powers of the traditional chiefdom authorities and, in particular, their tax levying powers. The National Decentralisation Policy reinstates the District Officer post, which is seen by many as a reassertion of control by central government over local affairs (Fanthorpe et al., 2011). These factors all have the effect of limiting or containing the full realisation of decentralisation.

In terms of the experience of participatory governance, the latest Integrated National Public Services Survey (INPSS) reveals quite a mixed picture. While 90% of respondents had heard of their local councillor and 28% had talked with them, only 7% had ever visited a council notice board, 9% a WDC noticeboard and only 27% had ever even heard of the WDC (although 25% had participated in a WDC meeting). Interesting trends also emerge with regard to perceptions of local councils’ responsiveness to need and trust with money. There appears to have been an almost 30% fall between 2008 and 2011 among those who think the government is responsive to their community’s needs and similarly a 20% drop in those who think the community has influence over local government decisions (INPSS, 2012).

The INPSS does not look specifically at youth participation in governance, however, Restless Development’s own research undertaken in 2011 revealed that only 23% of young people were aware of a policy that influences their wellbeing, only 38% were aware of community decision-making committees with young people’s representation, 17% of young people in rural areas had ever been invited to participate in national level policy/decision-making meetings and only 6% had ever attended. On the other hand, the 2012 elections were particularly encouraging for youth participation, not only because of the high proportion of young people who registered and voted, but also because of the large number of youth candidates – particularly at councillor level – who were elected. In many councils, up to a third of new councillors are under 35 with some, such as the new mayor of Koidu City, achieving high office.

Overall the literature indicates that while there are a number of laws and policies setting out, on one hand, the promotion and mainstreaming of youth issues and, on the other hand, there remains a lack of clarity throughout the law and policy regarding the mechanisms and processes through which youth can engage in local and national governance processes. Overall participatory governance has been slow to emerge but that there are encouraging signs that it is starting to take root in many areas, an opportunity that young people should be able to take advantage of.

---

2 Restless Development Sierra Leone (2011) Five Years Strategy Baseline Evaluation Report
Part Two: Methodology

“Sierra Leone can only hope for a brighter future if she prepares the youth for responsible leadership and positive result-oriented activities.”

National Youth Policy, 2003

In 2012, Restless Development undertook a youth led research project and produced the Youth Manifesto for the 2012 Elections which highlights what young people thought about the upcoming elections, politics and the future of Sierra Leone. While conducting the research, Restless Development noted that there was a lack of available information and resources clearly outlining how young people participate in local government. Thus, this research project focuses on capturing the reality of how young people actively interact with local governance structures, many of which are mandated to be participatory processes.

2.1 Purpose of the study and core research questions

This purpose of this study was to understand the reality of youth participation in decision-making at the local council level. It focused on five core research questions:

1. What are the mechanisms, processes and structures through which young people can participate in governance in local councils?
2. How effective and capacitated are councils when it comes to engaging with youth particularly in relation to:
   - Transparency and openness?
   - Involving young people in the planning process?
   - Mainstreaming youth issues including the role of dedicated youth structures?
   - Responding to issues raised by youth (outside the planning process)?
   - Receiving and acting on monitoring and feedback from youth representatives?
3. How effective and capacitated are young people and youth organisations when it comes to engaging with council, with particular reference to:
   - The capacity and motivation of civil society?
   - The role of formal (government endorsed) youth structures?
4. What are the key challenges to youth participation in council level governance?
5. How can these challenges to participation be overcome?

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

2.2 Definitions

“Participatory Governance” – Participatory governance can be defined as the ‘sphere of public debate, partnership, interaction, dialogue and conflict entered into by local citizens and organisations and by local government’ (IIED, 2011). This research focuses particularly on three activities as a yardstick to measure the level and quality of participatory governance: ability of citizens to contribute to planning processes, ability to raise issues of concern with council and ability to monitor and provide feedback to council on its performance.

“Youth” are defined according to the National Youth Policy definition of 15-35 years.
2.3 Research approach

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

Desk Research – An extensive review of the existing literature on youth participatory governance and decentralisation and participatory governance in Sierra Leone was undertaken. This was supplemented by preliminary interviews with a number of key informants. A summary of the literature review can be found in Part One of this report.

Development of tools and field research – The desk research was used to define the key research questions to be addressed by the research and to develop a research strategy for obtaining the information required. The research tools consisted of a series of qualitative interview questionnaires tailored to each stakeholder group. The field research consisted of undertaking key informant interviews (KIIs) with a total of 36 participants covering the councils of Bo City, Bo District, Kono District, Koidu City, Makeni City and Bombali District. This was supplemented by interviews with a further 16 Freetown-based stakeholders including representatives from the Decentralisation Secretariat, the Local Councils Association and other non-government and donor organisations supporting the decentralisation process. This range of stakeholders allowed information to be triangulated in order to give a more balanced and rounded view of the issues under consideration. The selected local councils in Bo, Kono and Makeni were chosen to represent different socio-economic and political environments, between north and south, urban and rural populations and areas with a history of mining compared to those with a history of small-holder farming.

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

Validation – The validation of the research findings was held on 2nd of May involving a total of 16 stakeholders representing a wide cross-section of the key informants. Feedback from the validation participants was incorporated into the final report. The research was launched in early June at the British High Commission residence.

2.4 Limitations

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

To help mitigate the impact of the narrow sample size, wherever possible interviewees were selected to give as wide a representation of age, gender and educational background as possible. The three focal districts were selected for their contrasting political composition (Makeni/Bombali being APC-dominated councils, BoSLPP-dominated and Kono/Koidu being one of the main swing districts although currently with an APC majority) and because they also give a representative picture of the dominant economic activities in the country (mining, agriculture, services etc).

To mitigate issues of interpretation of the qualitative data, the researchers were briefed thoroughly on data interpretation and interviewing techniques before the research began. Focusing on the three core stakeholder groups – council representatives, formal youth structures and civil society organisations – allowed a purposeful comparison of the information which was further triangulated with the Freetown-based organisations encompassing both government and civil society.
Part Three: Findings: The Reality of Council-Youth Engagement

“Africa’s greatest resource is its youthful population and through their active and full participation, Africans can surmount the difficulties that lie ahead.”

African Youth Charter 2006

This chapter details the findings of the research based on information provided by stakeholders as well as the researchers own observations where relevant. Firstly it maps the structures and channels through which youth-council engagement can, in theory, take place. It then looks at the reality of council engagement with youth as described by the stakeholders interviewed, and draws out some of the key challenges they identified which hinder better and more meaningful council proactivity in this regard. The second half of the chapter looks at the capacity, effectiveness and willingness of youth and youth representatives to proactively engage with councils and explores some of the key challenges which impede this engagement.

3.1 A mapping of opportunities for Council-Youth engagement

Figure 1: Council-Youth Engagement Mapping

Figure 1 summarises the key relationships between the different actors involved in local level decision-making and the “ideal” paths of engagement at the different levels as revealed by the research. The black upwards arrows illustrate where each actor/body primarily seeks to influence decision-making while the red arrows illustrate the direction in which downwards consultation takes place.

This map is an idealised scenario depicting the standard paths of influence/consultation. How far these paths are actually followed, as the research has revealed, varies considerably according to the functionality of the different structures.
For a young person seeking to raise an issue of concern with the local authorities, they may in theory have access to four different routes: they could appeal to civil society to take the issue up for them either directly with council or through a council-civil society forum; they could appeal to their ward committee or their local councillor; they could turn to their state-sanctioned youth representative body either the Chiefdom or District Youth Council (CYC or DYC) or they could turn to their local or section chief or, in some cases if the issue is significant enough, their paramount chief. Each of these routes according to the theoretical structures, will eventually link them to the council itself.

In practice, where one of the layers is weak, young people may bypass that layer and target the layer above (eg. If the CYC is weak they may appeal directly to the DYC or even the District Youth Officer if the DYC is not cooperative).

In terms of councils’ proactive consultation and engagement with youth and youth representing bodies, the tendency seems very much for them to keep to the higher layers of representation (civil society organisations, chiefs, youth officers and sometimes DYC’s as well as ward committees) and this, as described in more detail below, varies considerably from council to council.

The extent to which these pathways actually function in reality and the reasons behind their varying degree of functionality forms the topic of the remainder of this chapter.

3.2 Councils’ proactive engagement with youth

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

Nyuma Maningo, Development Planning Officer, Makeni City Council

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

Alhaji Kandeh Kanu, District Youth Council member, Bo

Transparency and openness
All six councils examined in this study declared that they conduct open council and committee meetings in line with the Local Government Act, and this was confirmed by most civil society stakeholders interviewed.

The degree to which council documents (budgets, plans, meeting minutes, central government transfers etc) are made available to the public varies across councils but is generally strong at council headquarters, and weaker at ward level. Development Planning Officers and councillors in all four councils in Bo and Makeni/Bombali were confident that all available information was displayed or could be accessed from their offices, although several development plans were still in the drafting process so not yet publically available. The research team observed notice boards in Bo and Makeni city and district council offices containing some, if not complete, financial and planning information. However the team did not observe notice boards in Kono District and Koidu City Council offices, despite assurances from the Development Planning Officers that all relevant information was publically available. Ward notice boards were not visited by the research team but feedback from interviewees suggested they do not always exist and/or do not have relevant or up to date information displayed. Feedback also suggested that Ward Development Committee meetings, where they take place, do tend to be open to the public but are not always well attended.

Generally council administrative staff and more experienced councillors are aware of what is expected of the council in terms of openness and transparency and efforts appear to be being made in most quarters, with some exceptions, to adhere to these principles.
Involvement of youth in planning processes

The extent to which council planning processes have been conducted in line with the LGA’s participatory requirements varies across the six councils studied. Several interviewees in different councils explained that planning has not been particularly participatory in the past, but in recent years funding has been made available (e.g. through ENCISS) specifically to support participatory planning activities and this has impacted positively on the level of participation in planning.

The LGA does not stipulate which civil society representatives should be consulted beyond the WDCs and interpretations clearly vary as to what constitutes adequate representation, including youth representation. All six Development and Planning Officers interviewed were adamant that the last planning process to take place in their council was participatory. However, this viewpoint was not always echoed by civil society organisations, many of whom either did not know that the process had taken place or expressed the view that consultation had been conducted with a restricted and not necessarily representative group. In Bo District, for example, the planning process engaged only with the WDCs, while in Bombali District an ENCISS grant allowed consultations with a far wider cross-section of community members and civil society organisations in each ward.

In terms of specifically targeting youth representatives for engagement in the planning process, some councils, for example Bo City, made it clear that they considered the WDCs – which often have youth members – to be enough to guarantee a sufficient ‘youth quota’ in planning consultation. Others, however, notably Koidu/Kono, deliberately involved both government youth representatives (i.e. Regional Youth Officer and District Youth Council Chair) and youth CSOs in planning discussions and other consultations.

Interviewees were also asked how many youth-focused activities had been incorporated into the development plan and to what extent those activities had been identified by youth themselves. A number of councils have included vocational training centres in the development plan in response to the requests of youth representatives, and in Koidu a development partner has actually funded the construction of a youth resource centre. In Bombali District, the Development Planning Officer mentioned that school-based career guidance had been incorporated in to the development plan after a number of youth organisations had lobbied for its inclusion. Sporting activities and facilities for youth also feature regularly in council development plans usually funded by the Ministry of Youth and Sports’ modest council budget. No interviewee mentioned youth-focused agriculture or health projects in the plan, although these sectors tend to make up the largest part of the council budget. Overall, it appeared that - in the opinion of the interviewees - youth-focused activities were in most plans but generally constituted a small part of the plan.

Role of youth-focused structures within the council

Each council examined in this study has either a dedicated Youth and Sports Committee, or an amalgamated committee dealing with youth, sports and other issues such as education and social welfare. In many cases, the committee appears to have interpreted a very narrow role for itself focused primarily on managing the allocation of funds from the Ministry of Youth and Sports rather than championing youth issues more widely across council. The budget allocated to councils from the Ministry of Youth and Sports is the smallest of all ministry transfers and generally the funds tend to be channelled in to a small number of sport-related activities. Several councillors involved in Youth and Sports Committees considered the small budget to be the main hindrance to the work of the committee.

The extent to which these committees, and individual councillors, engage with wider youth representation varies across councils. Generally the District or Regional Youth Officer is consulted by the committee, but the District Youth Council more rarely or not at all. Few committees appear to reach out to civil society organisations to collaborate over their activities. The calibre and dynamism of individual councillors assigned to the Youth and Sports Committees can make a significant difference as to how active, effective, engaged and engaging the committee actually is. Some non-council stakeholders cited dynamic committee chairs who were taking the initiative to promote youth issues more widely.

Responsiveness to issues raised

All interviewees were asked to give examples of where young people or youth representatives had brought to the council’s attention an issue affecting them, outside the planning process, which the
council had then acted on. Most respondents were able to give at least one example and many could give several. Examples given included young employers going to the council to complain about poor work conditions (Makeni, Koidu); young people raising concerns about the timber industry destroying transport infrastructure (Makeni); young people raising concerns about increasing unemployment in their area (e.g. Vallonia, Bo District); and young people drawing attention to poorly managed youth-focused NGO projects (Bombali). In each case, according to the respondent, the council had taken steps to address the problem and in some cases the issue had been resolved.

Receptiveness to monitoring and feedback from (youth) civil society

In terms of receptiveness to performance monitoring, all council representatives interviewed declared the council open to monitoring and feedback from civil society regarding its performance, and many were able to give examples of such activities. However, it was clear from discussions with non-council stakeholders that in reality the receptiveness of councils to civil society monitoring varies considerably. In the worst scenarios described by interviewees, councils view civil society organisations as interfering troublemakers who are more interested in disrupting council business than legitimately holding them to account. In such cases, mistrust and mutual suspicion characterise council-civil society relations. Unfortunately in the minds of many, youth have historically been at the forefront of such aggressive confrontations between civil society and council. In the best cases, councils and civil society organisations engage in mutual monitoring of each other’s activities in an atmosphere of cooperation and openness and feedback from both sides is both welcomed and taken seriously.

The six councils examined in this study each appeared to be at different stages of evolution along this spectrum of relations, with some clearly more advanced than others. Factors or initiatives which appear to improve council-civil society relations are a willingness on the part of civil society to have their activities monitored by council as well as vice versa; the establishment of special fora (e.g. civil society coordination meetings or radio discussion programmes) dedicated to open discussions, feedback and coordination of activities; a vibrant and organised civil society able to undertake sophisticated and informed advocacy and lobbying; and availability and transparency of information on both council and civil society activities. A key obstacle hindering good relations, according to many interviewees, are civil society organisations which take an aggressive and non-constructive approach to challenging council about its activities.
3.3 Key challenges of council-to-youth engagement

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

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

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

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

“Some people who are elected as councillors are not up to standard. They don’t know their responsibilities and are not even sure of their role. It is very important for the councillors to be upgraded to know their functions. The council needs to provide training, orientation and capacity building for all new councillors.”

John Dito Kamara, Deputy Chair, Bombali District Council

Funding constraints
Almost all interviewees made reference to the lack of available funds at council level. The funding provided to local councils by central government is a fraction of total government expenditure and councils have struggled to raise more than a small proportion of their revenue through local taxation. The ability, therefore, of councils to meet the needs of all interest groups, including youth, is limited and this in itself is a source of tension between council and civil society. Several councillors expressed exasperation at being unable to meet the expectations of youth, while many youth representatives expressed frustration at being continually let down by councillors who make promises they never fulfil.

Meaningful participatory governance also has cost implications and this appears to be a major constraint to its realisation. Councillors receive only a small budget for their ward-level activities and for those who represent remote localities, regular travel to and from their ward to council may not be possible. This is particularly true when WDC members require refreshments or other incentives to attend meetings. As mentioned above, the scope of participatory planning processes have been very much determined by the available budget.

A narrow vision of youth needs
It became clear from interactions with councillors and planning officers that youth issues are often envisioned in a narrow way at council, and that few administrative or political council employees have grasped the concept of youth mainstreaming.

Both the narrow focus of the Youth and Sports Committees (with its primary emphasis on sport), and the limited interpretation of youth needs as reflected in development plans, suggest councils are unable/unwilling to consider the diverse needs of young people. The very modest budget from the Ministry of Youth and Sports seems to satisfy many councils that youth issues are being sufficiently addressed and there is little evidence that youth issues are being mainstreamed in to the council’s other budgets and plans including health and agriculture.

A number of individual council administrative staff and councillors surveyed demonstrated a worrying tendency to express stereotyped views of young people and their needs and this seems symptomatic of the more generally limited understanding of youth needs at council. For example, there was a common view that youth are primarily interested in sport, perhaps because many councillors receive requests from youth in their wards for footballs and other sports equipment. Other views included that
youth are prone to violence or that they are idle and unwilling to work. On the other hand, other
council staff appeared to have a more balanced view of the needs of youth and certainly the need for
job creation and skills building were commonly cited as priorities for youth. Generally, though, few
council representatives seem willing to champion broader youth issues and promote a more
mainstreamed vision.

Capacity of councillors
This study was conducted a few months after the 2012 local council elections so many of the
councillors interviewed were new to their role. It was clear that many of the new councillors had very
little previous experience of the workings of council and a minimal understanding of the roles and
responsibilities of their position. Those appointed to chair or sit on committees, such as the Youth and
Sports Committee, were often unclear of the terms of reference of the committee (which in some
cases did not exist) and seemed to have a variable understanding of the needs and challenges of
young people.

The capacity of councillors is integral to the effectiveness of the council. While councillors may be
voted in for their popular appeal, they do not necessarily always have the skills, education or
experience to be effective in their roles. In some of the councils examined, orientation and training for
councillors had been undertaken or planned but this was not the case in all councils. Many
interviewees highlighted the need for targeted training and capacity building of councillors to
strengthen their ability to fulfil their mandated role.

Legal and policy constraints
As described in Part One above, the somewhat loose framework for participatory governance laid out
in the LGA and National Decentralisation Policy could arguably be seen as an obstacle to effective
council-youth engagement. Nowhere in the legislation is there any prescription for youth
representation in council meetings, committees, in the WDCs or other structures. Neither is there any
formal requirement for councils to engage with legislated youth representing structures such as the
DYCs or the District/Regional Youth Officers. It is therefore largely down to the discretion of the
councils how they interact with youth representatives and, and notably, the quality and scale of this
interaction varies widely in practice.

The legislation does not go in to detail about whether the public has the right to speak in council or
committee meetings, however many interviewees indicated that non-councillor participants do not
have speaking rights. This was given as a reason by a number of civil society representatives for why
they do not attend council meetings and may explain why, across the board, attendance is poor.

Partisan politics
Several civil society representatives made reference to the politicisation of council politics and the
challenge this presents for participatory governance. Although partisan politics clearly feature much
more in councils where party political competition is strong (e.g. Kono/Koidu) it was also raised as an
issue of concern in councils dominated by a single party. This is because political representatives
including councillors often favour their party’s youth representatives or supporters rather than wider
non-political youth representation, both in terms of involving them in council processes/consultation
and in terms of channelling resources. WDCs in particular, are considered to be vulnerable to political
cronyism.
3.4 Youth proactive engagement with councils

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

Pious Bockarie, Local Governance and Economic Development Programme, UNDP

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

Ibrahim Jalloh, DYC Chair, Bombali

“The youths need to know that the local council is working for them. There needs to be more sensitization for youths about what the local councils do and how they can participate actively.”

Edward Alpha, Development Planning Officer at Koidu City Council, Kono

Civil society motivation and capacity to engage with council
From the perspective of youth representing organisations and individual youths, there is a mixed picture emerging from the research both in terms of their motivation and their capacity to engage in council processes. In Bo, for example, the civil society representatives and District Youth Council members interviewed seemed to share the view that the council was hard to influence and that they were frustrated with the lack of consultation. As a consequence, they were doing little to proactively engage with council. In Makeni/Bombali and Koidu/Kono on the other hand, there appeared to be a lot of proactivity from youth representatives and the councils appeared more receptive to engage with them.

There were some notable contrasts in each location with regard to both the level of organisation of youth civil society and the calibre and dynamism of individual youth representatives, suggesting these factors have a significant bearing on the extent and success with which youth representatives engage with local authorities. Youth-serving civil society in Kono, for example, appears to be particularly strong and well organised. The District Youth Coalition has been operating there for some time and a number of agencies have recently come together to revive the Forum for Youth Serving Agencies (FYSA) with the purpose of promoting youth issues. One of the priorities of the forum is to present a paper to the chiefdoms and councils outlining their vision for youth development in the district.

In Makeni, an umbrella youth group, the Makeni Union of Youth Groups (MUYOG), has been representing a cross-section of youth organisations, although it is apparently less active than in the past. The Bombali District Youth Council is notably well organised and dynamic with a strong leadership and it has taken some impressive steps to engage positively with council (see case study below). In contrast, in Bo, youth-serving civil society appears to be poorly organised and not very proactive or dynamic.

In a number of locations (notably Bo City), young people have participated in council-led projects such as waste management/refuse collection. These types of activities appear to play an important role in raising the profile of youth with the council and demonstrating their usefulness to the community. The Bombali District Youth Council (see case study below) have been similarly proactive in focusing on projects that align with council interests and priorities. These example approaches seem to contribute to the breakdown of the barriers of prejudice and mistrust between youth and council.

The contribution of formal youth structures
The government-endorsed youth structures of the District/Regional Youth Officers and the District Youth Councils appear to vary in their effectiveness, but share a common challenge of being poorly resourced.
All District or Regional Youth Officers interviewed during the study stated that they have regular interaction with the council to give advice, and contribute to the planning and management of the Ministry of Youth and Sport budget and to liaise with other youth representatives including the DYC and civil society organisations. They are considered to a large degree to be the focal point for youth, and in some councils (e.g. Bo District) appear to be often the only youth representative regularly consulted by council.

However, it is clear that the ability of the Youth Officers to be effective in their role is constrained by a number of factors. Firstly, they receive limited financial and logistical support from the Ministry of Youth/National Youth Commission (NAYCOM). One officer interviewed during this research was using part of his own house as an office, another was camping out in a new, unfinished council building without electricity or indeed much furniture. Many are covering several districts but have few resources to enable them to travel. Secondly, their mandate does not appear to be clearly defined. This situation may be further confounded by the introduction by NAYCOM of a new Regional Youth Coordinator post, the role of which and how it differentiates from the Youth Officer role is not yet clear. It is not clear either what changes, if any, may come as the result of the recent creation of a separate Ministry of Youth which may or may not have a separate budget for supporting specifically youth activities.

The DYCs are similarly poorly resourced and also have to contend in some locations with a lack of recognition at council level. In the Bo councils, for example, many administrative and political representatives were not even aware of the existence of the DYC. In Makeni/Bomboal, the DYC was consulted on selected issues but not regularly engaged by council. Only in Kono/Koidu, did the DYC Chair seem to engage regularly with council. Faced by these challenges, and given the fact that DYC members are volunteers and most have full time jobs elsewhere, it seems to come down very much to the dynamism and proactivity of individuals within the DYC as to how active and effective they actually are.

The incomplete devolution of prescribed ministerial functions also presents a challenge to the functionality of these structures. Under the LGA, many functions of the Ministry of Youth and Sports were meant to be devolved to the councils but in practice, this process has not yet been fully achieved. Consequently the District Youth Officer, who would be the natural champion for youth issues at council, still reports to the Ministry of Youth and Sport and not directly to the council, and the DYCs similarly report to the National Youth Commission not the council. This may also explain the varying degrees to which those bodies are engaged with by council.

Case Study 1: Demonstrating how young people can contribute valuably to council activities Bombali District Youth Council

The dynamic Bombali District Youth Council (DYC) has been taking the initiative to demonstrate what a useful contribution young people can make to the work of local authorities. In the run up to the 2012 elections, the DYC organised a meeting with Makeni City Council, the police and the Office of National Security as well as 50 youth representatives to map strategies for controlling violence during the campaigning period. The initiative was greatly welcomed by the authorities and the campaigning period passed peacefully.

More recently the DYC has been in discussion with Makeni Council about engaging young people across the city to sensitisise citizens about the importance of paying tax. Their proposed project would employ up to 50 young people as community educators and bring obvious benefits for the council. Through these initiatives, the DYC is helping to demonstrate how young people can contribute valuably to council priorities thereby helping to transform council attitudes towards the youth of the city.
3.5 Key challenges of youth-to-council engagement

“When youth challenge the council in unconstructive ways and are not interested in helping the council to develop, mistrust can develop. Some councils see youths as troublemakers who are trying to police their activities and cause problems. Youth need to learn how to undertake effective and constructive advocacy. They also should demonstrate how they can give payback to the council for example by helping to promote tax collection or engaging in cleaning activities.”

Jonathan Kpakiwa, Capacity Building Manager, Decentralisation Secretariat

“Rural areas often lack dynamic youth leaders because those who have an education and who are empowered and energetic tend to leave rural places and come to Freetown. There is effectively a brain drain of youth leaders at the local level. The youth who are left behind don’t have the confidence or knowledge to engage with decision-makers. This is one reason why so-called ‘youth leaders’ in rural communities are vibrant and dynamic but over 35 years, because the younger once have left.”

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

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

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

Knowledge of council processes
It is clear that many young people and youth organisations are simply not aware of the existing channels through which they can influence council or other layers of local decision-making. Awareness among the general public regarding council processes, fora and means of engagement is low. The rights and obligations laid out in the LGA are not widely known. Civic education was at one time part of the school curriculum, although this has not been the case for many decades.

Quality and calibre of youth leaders and representatives
Given the many challenges faced by civil society in engaging with council authorities, the need for dynamic and talented youth leaders who can overcome the barriers to meaningful engagement is essential. Leaders and representatives not only need the education, training and experience to undertake effective and constructive lobbying and advocacy, but must also have a visionary and developmental mindset to look beyond their own immediate priorities and be able to understand and promote the needs of the wider youth population.

The emergence of such champions for youth is challenged by many factors. One factor is the widespread illiteracy, poor education and the ‘brain drain’ of talented and educated youth away from rural areas. Also critical are the attitudes among appointed leaders of short-termism and self-interest and expectation of rewards for positions of authority. The emergence of strong youth leaders is further challenged by the traditional lack of voice for youth in rural societies meaning few young people have experience of contributing to decision-making or challenging decisions taken. It is also undermined by the occupation of youth representative roles by people over 35 years who do not have young people’s interests at heart and are reluctant to make way for younger representatives.

Despite these difficulties, strong dynamic young leaders do exist. Many of these young people are visionary and innovative, finding new ways to overcome the challenges faced by young people and acting as inspiring role models to other youth. Supporting such youth leaders through training and capacity building is an important role that civil society can play.

Given the importance of effective youth leadership and representation, the legitimacy of those holding formal youth representative roles, both those elected and appointed, should also be taken in to
consideration. The DYC executive is elected from broader Chiefdom Youth Council (CYC) membership, but CYC membership is not elected but appointed by chiefs and other community leaders. Youth Officers are appointed civil servants and, while many of them appear to be serving youth needs as best they can under constrained circumstances, it was notable that not one of the Youth Officers surveyed was under 35 years and most had been in the post for more than five years. NAYCOM and the Ministry of Youth Affairs should consider reviewing these processes.

Organisation and capacity of civil society and formal youth structures
The findings of this study suggest that where youth civil society is organised and united, it is better able to form a constructive relationship with councils and is taken more seriously by those authorities. There is a tradition of mistrust between civil society and councils, and this has been exacerbated in the minds of many council representatives by the confrontational and unconstructive way in which some youth have challenged the council in the past. Youth representative civil society must therefore strive to demonstrate its credentials as a valuable and constructive development partner. Being able to present a united front and show coordination and cooperation between organisations is central to this and requires a strong and educated youth civil society leadership.

If resourced and well managed, government-endorsed youth structures such as the DYC and the District or Regional Youth Officer could be an important focus and channel for the promotion and coordination of youth initiatives and the mainstreaming of youth issues at council. However, these structures currently face a number of challenges in terms of resources, legitimacy and recognition, as outlined above, which need to be addressed as a matter of urgency.
Part Four: Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

The research has revealed many positive signs that young people are increasingly engaging in decision-making at the council level. There are many strong examples of youth representatives working effectively with council to address youth issues and other examples of where youth representatives have held council effectively to account. Also, there are clear indications in many areas that councils are reaching out to youth, involving them in planning processes where the resources are available and consulting with them whenever they can. The widespread participation of young voters in the 2012 elections and the significant proportion of candidates under 35 years elected to office, is very encouraging evidence that young people are embracing democracy and have both the will and the ability to play a central role in governance.

At the same time, it is also clear that youth participation is not uniform and in some areas council-youth interaction is far weaker than in others. There is an array of challenges relating to council funding and capacity, including: the legal and policy framework, traditional cultural attitudes towards youth, the capacity of youth leaders, youth civil society and formal youth structures. While there are some impressive examples of strong, dynamic youth representatives participating effectively in council decision-making, this tends to be the exception rather than the norm and more often youth engagement is low-level and sometimes tokenistic.

4.2 Recommendations: A multilevel approach to strengthening youth participatory governance

Making meaningful and effective youth participation in governance a reality requires the combined effort of local and national government, civil society and donors. Below are some key recommendations that consider how to improve the level and quality of youth participation in decision-making and local council and sub-council level.

1. Fostering participatory governance at the grassroots
   - Strengthening grassroots decision-making structures
   - Empowering citizens to engage with grassroots structures

Participatory governance involving all members of society is a new concept in Sierra Leone, a country where traditionally decision-making has often been the exclusive realm of a few, male, older elites. Changing such deeply rooted societal norms and empowering all citizens - including traditionally excluded groups such as women, youth and the disabled – with the skills and knowledge to contribute to and challenge decisions and hold authorities to account cannot be achieved quickly or easily. However, an important mechanism for ensuring civic participation becomes normalised in society is to promote the concept from the grassroots so that people build experience and knowledge of participatory governance from a young age and from the lowest level of community decision-making. Structures such as School Boards or School Management Committees, Village Development Committees and Student Action Groups – are all potentially fora where citizens can be empowered to contribute on a local level to decision-making that has a direct effect on their lives and in doing so gain the experience and the confidence to contribute at other levels of governance.
2. Promoting civic education

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

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

Case Study 2: Strengthening Social Capital through Capacity Development
GoBiFo project, Bombali and Bonthe

This project, supported by the Japan Social Development Fund and managed by the Decentralisation Secretariat, aimed at strengthening the relationship between villages, wards and district councils in Bombali and Bonthe districts. The focus was on strengthening Village Development Committees, VDCs, to engage in participatory, inclusive planning for their village; and building community capacity to manage block grants and community driven initiatives. Emphasis was placed on ensuring excluded groups such as women, the aged, youth and the disabled, were fully involved in planning and managing community activities.

Some of the results of the project included an increase in trust and accountability as a result of high levels of transparency and accountability at the village and ward levels; a new emphasis on collective decision-making which includes marginalised and disadvantaged groups; and empowerment of communities to direct their own development process in an inclusive and cost effective way, strengthening the linkages between communities and local government.

Case Study 3: Promoting the participation of women and youth in decision-making
Community Empowerment and Development Agency (CEDA), Bonthe

This ENCISS-sponsored project in Bonthe District focused on community sensitisation around the issue of women and youth participation in decision-making in an attempt to tackle the low levels of female and youth representatives in council. Activities included radio discussions, community-level sensitisation involving incumbent councillors and training for youth and women candidates standing for the 2012 elections. The focus of the sensitisation was on challenging stereotypes around women and youth and promoting the idea that inclusion of all groups is essential for good democracy.

Bonthe district saw a high return of youth and female candidates to council in the 2012 elections, including a female council Chair.
3. Strengthening councils’ capacity to serve their youth constituency

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

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

A number of approaches were recommended by interviewees to help address these obstacles. One approach is to build the knowledge and understanding of individual councillors with regards to youth issues. Training could focus on topics such as the principles and practice of participatory governance; how to work with young people and youth organisations; understanding and assessing youth needs and the principles of mainstreaming.

Secondly, the Youth and Sports Committees, the current focus of youth activities at council, should be strengthened by developing clear Terms of Reference (TOR) outlining its role. These currently exist in only a few councils. In addition, this should be complimented by orientating the members of the committee on their roles and responsibilities as committee members.

Thirdly, efforts should be made to strengthen the fora for council-civil society interaction, learning from existing good practice in councils. Some of the innovations observed during this research include dedicated council-civil society fora or coordination meetings which meet monthly to share information and provide feedback on activities, and council-focused radio programmes where members of the public can phone in and address their concerns direct to councillors.

In addition to these initiatives, there is also a strong argument for introducing a youth-specific council level forum. As mentioned in part one, there is legal provision in the NAYCOM Act 2009 to create youth-specific civil society-council fora in the form of the Youth Advisory Committees. These committees, or an equivalent youth-dedicated council-level forum, have the potential to be important champions for the mainstreaming of youth issues at council. The committees would be composed of councillors, civil society representatives, DYC members and the District or Regional Youth Officer.

The establishment of these committees would create an important mechanism through which youth issues could be promoted and mainstreamed at council level and NAYCOM and its partners should strive to accelerate the process of setting them up. At the same time, central government should strive to complete the devolution of all specified Ministry of Youth and Sports functions to council, so that these functions are fully owned by council and the issue of youth is brought right in to the council’s heart.

Some stakeholders proposed the creation of a dedicated youth desk officer in every council whose role it would be to champion the mainstreaming of youth issues. A counter argument put forward is that the equivalent gender officers, where they exist, have struggled to make much impact on decision-making and planning processes because they lack the authority to influence. Any post of this kind would need to be fully legitimated and its role clearly mandated if it is to have a positive effect on youth issues. It may be that other mechanisms such as a committee would be a better vehicle for championing youth issues at council level.

It cannot be ignored that, at the root of many of the existing constraints of council is the issue of funding. Central government transfers currently make up the bulk of local councils’ budget, but these are not enough to realise all the activities of the development plans. Several councils have taken the initiative to raise funds from donors and development agencies and these efforts should be encouraged and supported. However, in an ideal scenario, the tax base at local level would contribute significantly more to the council budget, thereby strengthening the social contract between the councils and tax-paying citizens, the fundamental basis on which the principle of participatory governance is built.
4. Strengthening formal youth representation

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

Formal government-endorsed youth representation, including Chiefdom and District Youth Councils and District or Regional Youth Officers, should play a primary role in representing and promoting the needs of the wider youth population. For them to be able to do that they need to be recognised, legitimate, empowered and resourced. This study revealed that there are currently challenges in each of these areas.

To overcome these challenges, uniform Terms of Reference need to be drawn up to clarify roles and responsibilities of each of these structures and how they interact with, and report to one another. This is particularly important given the creation of a new tier of Regional Youth Coordinators under NAYCOM.

The District Youth Councils are legal entities, and yet the research revealed that in some places, they are not actually recognised by the council. Sensitisation needs to be undertaken with councils to ensure DYC are given the full recognition they require. The creation of Youth Advisory Committees, on which the DYC Chair will sit, will help this process.

For these structures to be legitimate representatives of the wider youth population the appointment/election of individuals needs to be undertaken in a transparent way and the wider youth population should be empowered and enabled to hold them to account. At the moment, CYC
members are not elected but appointed by the chiefdom authorities. The DYC is then formed of five members of each CYC and the DYC executive is elected by that wider body. District and Regional Youth Officers are civil servants appointed by the Ministry of Youth and Sports. In each case, it would be worth considering how the accountability of these posts to the wider youth population could be enhanced, for example through election or – the case of Youth Officers – an appointment board with youth representation.

The resources at the disposal of these formal youth structures are modest and this clearly inhibits the scope and scale of their activities. In addition, CYC and DYC members could also benefit from capacity building training in key areas to enable them to fulfil their mandate.

5. Reviewing the legislative framework

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

The Local Government Act is currently under review and this presents a potential opportunity for addressing some of the legislative obstacles to greater youth participation in council level decision-making as well as introducing the means to enhance youth participation.

Some of the issues that might be considered by the review committee are whether to include specific quotas (e.g. 10% as recommended by the TRC) for youth participation in WDCs alongside the specification for equal gender representation; and whether such quotas should be extended to other areas such as council administrative staff or even councillors themselves. A number of youth organisations are advocating for this.

Another issue for consideration is whether formal youth structures recognised in other legislation (e.g. District Youth Councils, Youth Advisory Committees) should be equally recognised in a revised LGA, and their function and contribution clarified in order to enhance their recognition and legitimacy. Generally, there is poor knowledge of legal provisions beyond the LGA at council level, so cross-referencing to the provisions of other laws could help overcome this knowledge gap. Overall there is a need for synergy, coherence and effectiveness in legislation and policies and ministries such as the Ministry for Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD) and the Ministry of youth need to communicate and coordinate effectively in performing their respective roles.

Finally, the National Decentralisation Policy 2010 identifies gender as a cross-cutting issue and specifies “facilitating mainstreaming of gender perspectives in the business of local councils, especially in the preparation and implementation of a local council’s development plan.” It is a strong recommendation of this report that youth issues are an equally cross-cutting concern and should therefore be given the same treatment in policy.

6. Building civil society

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

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

However, not all youth-focused civil society has the capacity to work effectively with council. It is important that grassroots youth organisations are strengthened through training and capacity building to improve their lobbying and advocacy skills, as well as their ability to engage with and effectively represent their own youth constituents. Innovations and best practice in enhancing youth participation, many examples of which are given in this report, should be captured and shared widely among CSOs.
Initiatives such as the Forum for Youth Serving Agencies (FYSA) in Kono are an excellent way to promote sharing and learning about youth organisations. This body also plays a central role in coordinating youth civic participation activities and acting as a mouthpiece for advocacy in that area. A key role for civil society is to help overcome the negative stereotyping of youth by demonstrating the positive contributions they can make to society. As this report highlights, when this approach is taken with council (i.e. demonstrating specifically how youth can be valuable partners to council) it can have an immediate and positive effect on the way that youth are regarded and the relationship between civil society youth representatives and council.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Government of Sierra Leone (2003) Sierra Leone National Youth Policy


International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) (2011) Young Citizens: Youth and Participatory Governance in Africa, Participatory Learning and Action, IIED


Justice, Peace and Human Rights Commission, Decentralisation process in Sierra Leone northern region, Catholic Mission Diocese of Makeni


LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

**Councillors and council administration**

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

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

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

**Civil Society Organisations**

Simeone Sandi, Secretary, District Youth Coalition, Kono
Arthur Kargbo, Program Coordinator, Advocate of Vulnerable Aid (AVA)
Sahr Rodney Sourie, Youth and Accountable Governance Program, Network Movement for Justice and Development (NMJD)
Gladys Mbayo, Gender Desk Officer, Knowledge for Community Empowerment Organisation, (KoCEPO), Kono
Mohamed Jalloh, Programme Coordinator, Knowledge for Community Empowerment Organisation, (KoCEPO), Kono
Tamba B Gbenda, Project Coordinator, Movement of Concerned KonoYouth (MOCKY)
Ibrahim A S Bockarie, Programme Officer, Movement of Concerned KonoYouth (MOCKY)
Alex Nallo, Regional Chair of the Civil Society Movement, Southern Region
Amos Patricks, Programme Officer, Movement towards peace and Development Agency (MoPaDa)
Francis Kai-Katta, ENCISS, Bo
Aruna Ibrahim Jah, Project Coordinator, Community Empowerment Development Agency (CEDA)
Joseph Pokawa, Regional Programme Director, Network Movement for Justice and Development (NMJD)
Ahsai Musa Conteh, Regional Coordinator, Community Empowerment for Rural Development (CEFORD)
Abdualiwalon-Jalloh, Governance and Decentralisation Coordinator, ENCISS
Emerson Kamara, Director, PeaceLinks
Charles NachMback, Project Manager, Local Governance and Economic Development Project, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
Pious Bockarie, Local Governance and Economic Development Project, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
Floyd Davies, Director, Centre for Local Government, Decentralisation and the Environment (CLOGADE)
Michael Yamba, Managing Partner, Centre for Local Government, Decentralisation and the Environment (CLOGADE)
Mohamed Vayombo, Research Assistant, Centre for Local Government, Decentralisation and the Environment (CLOGADE)
FodayAbassSaccoh, Research Assistant, Centre for Local Government, Decentralisation and the Environment (CLOGADE)
Mohammed Alpha Jalloh, Knowledge for Community Empowerment Organization (KoCEPO)
National government
Alhassan Joseph Kanu, Director, Decentralisation Secretariat
Jonathan Kpakiwa, Capacity Building Manager, Decentralisation Secretariat
Colina Macauley, Monitoring and Evaluation Manager, Decentralisation Secretariat
Sullay B Sesay, Project Coordinator, Social Capital Project (GoBiFo), Decentralisation Secretariat
Sahr Moigua, Executive Secretary, Local Councils Association of Sierra Leone
Sembia Johnson, Technical Consultant, Local Councils Association of Sierra Leone
Alison Sutherland, Local Government Advisor, Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development

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

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

- Livelihoods and employment
- Sexual and reproductive health
- Civic participation

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

Restless Development takes five approaches to achieving its goals:

- **Direct Delivery** of evidence-based grassroots programmes and services to a critical mass of young people;
- **Building a Strong Youth Sector** by providing technical support to a critical mass of national youth-led and youth-focused civil society organisations;
- **Shaping Policy and Practice** through sustained engagement with strategic partners (government, donors and the private sector) to help them work more effectively with and for young people as part of their core strategies and business models;
- **Sharing and Learning** by capturing and disseminating best practice, replicable models and learning from other organisations;
- **Generation of Leadership** by linking young leaders to professional experiences and opportunities.