



**Transparency International Sierra
Leone (TI-SL)**

The Citizens' Handbook On Village Heads



**Enhancing the Visibility of Village heads to
Ensure Sustainable Community
Development**

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Democracy (NED)**

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PREFACE

Transparency International Sierra Leone (TISL) is a civil society advocacy organization that is dedicated to promoting anti-corruption initiative within the public and private sector. In carrying out this difficult task, we are engaged, among other things, in public education and awareness raising, research through social audit surveys and monitoring of service delivery at both national and local levels of organization.

One of the fundamental focuses of TISL's work is building institutional capacity in the areas of transparency, accountability and citizens' participation as key ingredients to curb corruption and promote the principles of democracy and good governance. In fulfilling this mandate, TISL has been working with Parliament, Local Councils, the Media and other Civil Society Organizations. In working with the Local councils, TISL's focus had been with Councilors, Mayors and Chairmen. One very important component in the local governance structure that has been neglected or forgotten is the Institution of Village Heads.

There are about 96 Village Heads in the entire Western Rural District. They are the lowest arm of local government authority in the Western Area Rural District and the closest authority to the people residing in the villages within the district. However, though this institution dates as far back as before Independence in Sierra Leone, they have over the years almost lost their authority and their mandate has become unclear in the Local Governance System. Local village residents therefore do not engage effectively with them regarding the governance and development of their villages. Consequently, there is little or no development efforts made by these Village Heads even though they have the mandate and authority to manage locally generated resources. As such there is no accountability and transparency in the management of the local revenue or development funds from the local or central government. These resources are being solely used by the Village Heads for their personal gains. This led to the poor turnout of local village residents in the first election held for Village Heads in 2012

It is against this background that TISL developed this hand book on the institution of Village Heads to sensitize and raise public awareness on the institution, to promote transparency, accountability and participation in the governance activities of Village Heads, and to encourage local citizens and other local governance stakeholders to collaborate and cooperate with Village Heads to foster local community development.

CHAPTER ONE

THE DECENTRALIZATION PROCESS AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN SIERRA LEONE

Background

Following the decade long civil war in Sierra Leone (March 1991 to January 2002) considerable studies have been made by successive governments and donor partners to improve the governance system in Sierra Leone. Notably among these studies has been the re-introduction of the system of Local Government and Decentralization. The idea to re-introduce this system was brought about in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report after the civil war. It was meant to ensure that the marginalization and deprivation of communities, which was one of the cause of the war was addressed. In view of this, the Local Government Act of 2004 was passed into law, ushering the local government and decentralization system.



Under this system, government decision making process was taken to the community level and how the participatory approach to governance took a center stage in present day governance in Sierra Leone. The traditional component of local government administration is comprised of chiefdom administrations in the 149 chiefdoms in the provinces (each headed by a paramount chief who is elected for life from a ruling family of the chiefdom). In the Western Area, Tribal

Headmen are appointed by the president to advice on matters concerning the traditions of their ethnic group, and each village in the Western Area Rural District has an elected Village Headman.

However, inspite of the high aspirations by citizens and international actors, the local government systems has faced and continue to face major challenges which continues to exist and pose hindrances towards fulfilling the purpose for which it was established.

Principles of the Decentralization Process

- The transfer of power, authority and resources from the centre to democratically elected local councils
- Bringing political, administrative and fiscal control and responsibility over services closer to the people
- Engendering people's ownership of their local development agenda
- Ensuring that holders of public offices locally are held accountable for their actions to the public
- 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
- Stimulating economic growth in local communities, including public-private partnerships
- Promoting inclusiveness and equality of all citizens within any locality regardless of gender, origin, religion or political persuasion.

Importance of the Decentralization Process

- It is an integral part in the promoting and strengthening Sierra Leone's democratic principles
- It ensures participatory governance
- It ensures effective service delivery through elected councilors

Challenges of the Decentralization process

Notwithstanding these positive trends in the local governance process in Sierra Leone in the last couple of years, there still exists series of challenges. For example, capacity of Local Councils and other decentralized structures such as Ward Committees to carry out their roles: In recent years decentralization and local government reform have seen important administrative processes taking place in Sierra Leone. The aim is to bring decision-making closer to the people, to enhance democracy and good governance. The process is widely supported by most external support agencies operating in the country. However, the decentralization process is marred by the following challenges.

- Making Local Councils accountable to the central government and to donors.
- Snail pace in the devolution process
- No allowances for Ward Development Committee members
- The role of chiefs in the Decentralization Process not clearly stated
- Unhealthy working relationship between Councilor and Members of Parliament

The Way Forward

- Revision of the Local Government Act 2004
- Roll out the decentralization policy and ensure its periodic assessment and review
- Ensure the MDAs devolve residual functions and build local council capacities
- Facilitate timely, predictable and increased performance-based fiscal transfers to local councils
- Establish procedures for revenue collection and sharing between local and chiefdom councils and the administration of property rates respectively
- Strengthen Local Government Monitoring Systems and the role of civil society in the decentralization process
- Support local councils to create conducive environments for private sector development and empower communities to undertake local economic development including small and medium size enterprises.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ORIGIN OF VILLAGE HEADS



Background

The establishment of the institution of Village Heads can be traced as far back as during the colonial period when the British (our colonial masters) ran the administration of the country. The British introduced this idea to ease the burden of running the country's administration including villages in the Western Area Rural District. As such an indigene with an outstanding character of a particular village is appointed to serve as Village Head. During this period, the Village Heads and their cabinets serve as the local government authority representing the central colonial government at village community level.

Following the country's Independence in April 1961 and the handing over of political authority by the British to Sierra Leoneans, thus ushering the late Sir Milton Margai as the first Prime Minister of the country, the Institution of Village Heads rule continued to operate as the institution was still seen as being very instrumental in maintaining peace, tranquility and ensuring, effective service delivery and development in the villages in Western Area rural District.

In 2004 after the Local Governance and the Decentralization Process was reintroduced, the institution of Village Heads was incorporated under the Local Governance System. The Local Governance and Decentralization System is geared towards ensuring participatory governance. This system also ensures that governance decision making process filters to community level and that a participatory approach to governance takes center stage in present day governance in Sierra Leone.

Roles and Responsibility of Village Heads

In present day Sierra Leone, the institution of Village Heads was still maintained as an integral structure in promoting governance and development initiatives at village level in the Western Area District. They are supervised by the Western Area District Council. Presently there are ninety seven (97) registered villages each headed by a Village Head. Ten more villages have applied to the Ministry of Local Government and Rural development for recognition. If approved by the Ministry, we will have a total of one hundred and seven villages in the Western Area Rural District. The villages in the Western Area Rural District are divided into.

1. Koya ward
2. Waterloo ward
3. Mountain ward and
4. York ward

Prior to this, Village Heads were selected to serve for as long as the communities continue to appreciate their services. With the deepening of democracy and the decentralization system of governance, elections are now conducted for Village Heads by the National Electoral Commission (NEC) since 2006. The previous election for Village Heads was held on Saturday 29th June 2013. During the election, Thirty eight villages were uncontested, whilst 55 villages were contested. John Obey was recognized as a village on the 10th of July 2014. Every elected Village Head should serve for a period of three years. Village Heads are expected to perform the following functions.

- Settle dispute between and among villages
- Liaise with security apparatus to maintain law and order

- Ensure the effective implementation of by-laws
- Work closely with Ward Development Committees to enhance development
- Assist the Local Council to collect tax
- Monitor activities in the forest areas
- Mobilize youths for community development activities
- Levy fines on violators of local laws
- Generate funds from activities and business within their various villages like fishing, mining and hotel and tourism
- Carry out any other function as assigned by the Local Council authorities

Administrative Structure

Village Heads must have an administrative structure that should run the day to day affairs of the village. A Deputy Village Head must be appointed to directly assist the Village in administrative functions. However, most of the Village do not have deputies.

In most of these villages, the Village Heads set up structures to manage the affairs of the village. Most of the structures have the following administrative organs.

- Secretary
- Treasurer,
- Public Relations officer,

They also have committees that are responsible for the following sector at village community level.

- Health
- Education
- The environment
- Gender and many more.

Developmental Activities

Most of villages rely on locally generated revenue to embark in developmental activities like the building of schools, markets, water wells and the fencing of cemeteries as they do not receive financial support from local councils

Transparency, Accountability and Participation

To ensure that the principles of transparency, accountability and participation are adhered to in their activities, most of the Village Heads follow the following procedure.

- On yearly bases they summon a general community meeting where they report the total amount of revenue generated for the year, the sources and how it was spent.
- During these meetings also, participants are given the opportunity to make comments and ask questions for clarification purposes.
- The Village Development Committees usually inform the community in a meeting on the development activities they want to undertake. This will be debated and the activity(s) that is finally agreed upon by the community is what will be implemented.

Challenges Faced by Village Heads

Despite the fact that village heads are doing quite a lot in maintaining law and order and enhancing development in their various communities, they are also faced with the following challenges:

- The lack of security personnel/police post in some big villages like Tokeh, which seriously undermines the security of the village
- No financial support from the local council, which undermine certain developmental activities
- No salaries or stipend from the local councils for village heads
- Inadequate powers to monitor and settle land disputes among villages because the powers that the villages heads once had as custodians of lands has been taken over by the local councils

- Ineffective involvement of village heads in the planning and implementation of development activities initiated by the local councils
- Infringements on the responsibilities of Village heads by Tribal Authorities who are only charged with the responsibility of assisting in maintaining peace and stability in the community by mediating on tribal and customary matters.
- Variance in the level of authority wielded by the Village Heads largely due to the influx of citizens from other parts of the country
- Expansion of villages due to the fact that the Western Area Rural District has become a lucrative area to own land, construct dwelling houses and other structures for recreation
- The massive influx of citizens to villages in the Western Area Rural District, most of the citizens that once lived in urban communities are not au-fait with the operations of the villages

CHAPTER THREE

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

What is a Community

A community is a group of people who:

- Live within a certain area.
- Share with one another and support each other.
- Hold similar values and beliefs
- Feel that they belong together due to their history, family relationships, language, or other characteristics.

What is Participation

- Participation is the act of taking part in activities or events.
- Community Participation in local government therefore means the involvement of citizens in the activities of the local community.



Why Should the Community Participate in Village Development?

- The numerous skills, experiences and ideas of citizens in the community are necessary for social development.
- The community knows best what the needs of the local people are and what resources are available in the locality to meet those needs.
- Community participation helps local councillors and local council administrators in the following ways:
 - The community helps to identify the priorities of the people in line with the available resources
 - If the people feel that a development project belongs to them, they will have an obligation to help manage it effectively and keep it going.
 - It is through community participation that the local government knows that they are responding to the needs of the people.
 - The local government depends on a strong partnership with the community in order to undertake effective developments.

Rights of Citizens' in local Development

- To make contributions and recommendations in the decision making process
- To be informed about decisions concerning their rights, property and expectations.
- To receive regular reports about the state of affairs of the councils and their budgets
- To demand that local councils in their communities are accountable to them.
- To have access to public facilities such as cultural centres, play grounds, etc.

Responsibilities of citizens' in Local Development

- To observe and monitor the activities of the local councils
- To pay fees, taxes, rates, etc for services delivered.
- To participate in community development projects
- To comply with the Local Government Act.

What is a Community Based Development Plan (CBDP)

| | |
|------------------|--|
| COMMUNITY | A group of people living and sharing things together |
|------------------|--|

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| | within a certain area |
| BASED | Within a particular area |
| DEVELOPMENT | Progress and long-term growth |
| PLANNING | Designing and preparing for the future |

WHY do we Need a CBDP

- Community-Based Development Planning (CBDP) is a way of directing all local development activities towards the needs and aspirations of the people in the community.
- CBDP is an important tool for using the available resources to meet the needs of the local people at community level.
- CBDP helps to look at what the needs of the local people are in different sectors such as: safe drinking water, health, transport, security, trade, etc and how it can respond of these needs accordingly.
- CBDP should be revised and revised every year to make necessary changes for development as the community desires.

Key Elements of a CBDP

There are several important elements of CBDP which are all linked to each other. They are:

Vision

This is a mental picture of how life in the community should be like. It needs to be a vision (mental picture) that every member of the community can share, so that people can have the chance to put forward their ideas and their own picture of a better life for their community.

Mission

The mission (or purpose) is usually expressed in a mission statement that says what we want to achieve in order to make our vision (mental picture) a reality.

Values

These are the things that we rate highly and qualities that we think are most important for the development of the community. People with different backgrounds and beliefs should be involved to capture shared values that affect all the members in the community.

Involvement

All the people in the communities should have the opportunity to share their views, needs and concerns at every stage of the CBDP process.

Principle of a CBDP

Prioritization

This involves listing development projects in order of their importance and urgency in terms of local development, it means focusing on the areas of greatest need by the community people.

The priorities will vary from one community to another. In a CBDP process, priorities are identified in partnership with the community interest.

Partnership

Agreement on priorities for the CBDP depends on all stakeholders in the community that should work together as partners in development. All those involved must therefore commit their time and energy in order to turn the vision in to reality.

Service Delivery

This involves the provision of services to communities in an equitable manner. CBDP calls for the coordinated use of local resources in order to enhance social and economic development.

The success of the CBDP will be judged by the extent to which it has promoted democratic, participatory, accountable, and competent local government.

What are Citizens' Responsibilities in their Villages

- Citizens must pay their taxes if they want the local government to deliver these services.
- As members of the community, citizens should attend council's meeting at all times to suggest areas of development and monitor the activities of the local council.
- Citizens in a village/ ward should also attend all ward meetings.
- Citizens should also participate in all voluntary development projects undertaken by the council and village heads such as agriculture, road building and maintenance, construction of public buildings (hospitals, markets, youth centres, etc).
- New residents should recognize the authority of the village head and ensure to participate in village development activities.



CHAPTER FOUR

THE IMPORTANCE OF TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN VILLAGE ADMINISTRATION



What is Accountability

Accountability is about being responsible to someone for actions taken; about being able to explain, clarify and justify actions. It implies that someone has a right to know and hold public officials to account; and that public official has a duty to explain and account for their actions. There are many ways in which people and organisations might be held to account. It is useful to think of an accountability relationship as having up to four stages:

Key Components of Accountability

- **Standard setting:** setting out the behaviour expected of the 'Public Official(s)' and the criteria by which they might validly be judged.

- **Investigation:** exploring whether or not the Public Official (s) have met the standards expected of them.
- **Answerability:** a process in which the Public Official (s) are required to defend their actions, face skeptical questions, and generally explain themselves.
- **Sanction:** a process in which the Public Official (s) are in some way punished for falling below the standards expected of them (or perhaps rewarded for achieving or exceeding them).

What is Transparency

Transparency is about being easy to understand, and being open, frank and honest in all communications, transactions and operations. It is possible to be accountable by providing a lengthy and technical explanation of every detail, but if this information is not easily understood by the audience, and if key facts are hidden by the sheer volume of information then the information is not presented in a transparent form. Simply making information available is not sufficient to achieve transparency. Large amounts of raw information in the public domain may breed opacity rather than transparency.

Key components of Transparency

- **Relevant and accessible:** Information should be presented in plain and understandable language appropriate for different stakeholders. Information should be made available in ways appropriate to different stakeholders.
- **Timely and accurate:** Information should be made available in sufficient time to permit analysis, evaluation and engagement by relevant stakeholders. Information should be managed so that it is up-to-date, accurate, and complete.

Transparency and Accountability in local governance is very critical to the success of the decentralization process in Sierra Leone as it promotes efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery. It also helps in reducing corruption at all levels.

Transparency in the Local Government Act

This is the more reason why section 25 of the Local Government Act of 2004 is dedicated to transparency, accountability and participation. According to this section;

- Every Councillor, appointed, or assigned member of staff of a local council is subject to the Anti-Corruption Act of 2001. (103)
- Every Councillor, appointed or assigned member of staff of a local council will made a declaration of assets no later than thirty days after assuming or leaving office. (104).
- All revenues of local councils will be documented in receipts on forms provided by the Government Printer. Any falsification of revenue receipts or recorded revenues by a member of the staff of a local council is an offence and can lead to fines, imprisonment, and /or dismissal from duty. (106)
- Local Councils will publicly post:
 - Monthly statements of financial accounts
 - Annual income and expenditure statements
 - Inventories of assets of the local councils
 - By-laws and notice relating to tax rates and fees
 - Minutes of Council meetings and
 - Development plan (107)

Village heads as elected public figures in local communities and part of the local governance system are expected to uphold the principles and dictates of transparency, accountability and participation as very important ingredients for good governance and development.

The Benefits of Accountability and Transparency in Village Head Administration

- It enhances local community development
- It builds citizens' confidence and trust in their Village Heads
- It prevents unhealthy suspicions by local citizens
- It increase local citizens' support and cooperation with village heads

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Transparency International Sierra Leone (TISL) is an anti-corruption civil society advocacy organization partnered with Transparency International, the Anti-Corruption Commission of Sierra Leone, and the London-based governance reform group Tiri, each dedicated to achieving greater accountability, transparency, and integrity in private and public affairs, curbing corruption, by holding local and national governments to account for their stewardship

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