



Fund for Innovation
and Transformation

Fonds pour l'innovation
et la transformation



CAUSE CANADA

“Wi lead by Sabi” (We Lead by Example)

Context

In Sierra Leone, 1.3% of the total population has a disability, and 35.3% of all persons with disabilities are in the Northern region, the country’s poorest region. People do not generally understand disabilities, and cultural and religious beliefs exacerbate misconceptions about disabilities. Although 54% of the persons with disabilities in Sierra Leone are male and both genders confront serious discrimination and marginalization, women and girls with disabilities face numerous barriers in accessing and exercising their rights, which are further exacerbated by poverty and remote rural locations. Their exclusion from national gender equality movements and the high degree of fragmentation within the disability movement in Sierra Leone gives them little voice to express their needs.

The Innovative Solution

Supported by FIT, CAUSE Canada and CAUSE Canada Sierra Leone Partnership tested an innovative solution to address discrimination at the intersection of gender and disability. Women with disabilities were appointed as “Champions” in 14 rural communities in the Koinadugu and Falaba districts, to work with out-of-school girls with disabilities, their families, and the entire community to identify and plan specific strategies towards improved access to rights. Specifically, their rights to education, sexual and reproductive health (SRH), and protection from sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) were prioritized according to the needs already identified during consultations with the community.

Advancing Gender Equality

CAUSE Canada advanced gender equality through three key approaches:

1. Empowering champions. The main success was that Champions’ empowerment was demonstrated in their actions as change agents in their communities reaching over 700 women and girls with disabilities across 14 communities.
2. Engaging with 55 families of girls with disabilities resulting in increased awareness and understanding about disabilities, and 49 families enrolling their daughter with a disability in school.
3. Promoting women and girls’ rights among the communities. Each of the 14 communities developed a plan including strategies to improve women and girls with disabilities access to education, SRH and protection from SGBV.



COUNTRY

Sierra Leone

AMOUNT

\$174,089

TESTING PERIOD

12 months
Ended March 2023



GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE (GE3)

THEME: SOCIAL JUSTICE & HUMAN RIGHTS

Testing Framework

The innovation used the “Most Similar Systems Design/Mill’s Method of Difference” approach.

This involved training 14 Champions, 7 women with disabilities and 7 women without, each working in one community. The innovation compared communities’ outcomes to analyze changes in knowledge, awareness and attitudes among girls and women with disabilities, families of girls with disabilities and the communities and action plans designed by each of the families and the community working groups.

These changes were assessed using pre- and post-tests, interviews, and focus group discussions.

Results and Impact

- Most notable is the change in sexual reproductive health rights (SRHR) awareness. At baseline only 3% of the women and girls with disabilities were aware of their SRHR, at endline 74% of the women and girls (74/100) in Cluster 1 and 62% (53/85) in Cluster 2 demonstrated having access to SRHR by acknowledging the availability of contraception and/or because they had visited a health center to receive a service related to their menstrual health or hygiene.
- 98% of the girls in Cluster 1 (56/57 girls) and 88% of the girls in Cluster 2 (45/51 girls) reported being enrolled in school during the endline survey.
- At the baseline 3/109 surveyed women with disabilities could mention situations of SGBV. Through the awareness raising campaigns 81% of women and girls with disabilities (81/100) in Cluster 1 and 79% (73/92) Cluster 2 recognized feeling vulnerable to SGBV.

Key Lessons

1. Building strong relationships with the community ensured that women and girls with disabilities were able to exercise their rights. For example, in Sierra Leone people living with disabilities are entitled to free health care, and champions who built relationships with health care providers made it possible for persons with disabilities to access free health care services. Additionally, all 14 champions reported being confident in their skills and knowledge to lead change in the communities.
2. Advocacy is a strong tool to drive change. The champions continued advocating at the family and community level. This led to greater interest in supporting women and girls with disabilities, which resulted in increased school enrolment of girls with disabilities.
3. Families of girls with disabilities took the lead in coming with a plan and financing their girls needs. However, given that most of the families are living in poverty they could not follow through on their plans the innovation pivoted to providing financial support to purchase mobility devices for the girls. This pivot allowed for the families to follow through on other plans that did not require a lot of capital such as enrolling the girls in school.

“After the training with CAUSE Canada and Cause Canada Sierra Leone Partnership...I was touched, and I automatically changed my mind about giving (my niece) for marriage. I cancelled the marriage and decided to look for support to continue seeing my children and my niece through school.”

- Guardian/Aunt of a 13-year-old girl

PARTNER ORGANIZATION

- CAUSE Canada Sierra Leone Partnership

TARGET PARTICIPANTS

Direct participants included 589 men and 1700 women, 1090 girls and 691 boys in 14 rural communities of the Koinadugu and Falaba District of Sierra Leone

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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ABOUT FIT

The Fund for Innovation and Transformation supports Canadian small and medium-sized organizations (SMOs) testing innovative solutions that advance gender equality in the Global South.

