



Fund for Innovation and Transformation

Fonds pour l'innovation et la transformation



CAUSE CANADA

# Eradicating Child Marriage in Sierra Leone

## Context

In Sierra Leone, gender inequality and poverty contribute to high rates of child marriage. In rural communities, where poverty is most prevalent, 44% of girls are married before turning 18 (MICS, 2017). This contributes to increased maternal mortality, since many girls have children before their bodies are ready. CAUSE Canada conducted a baseline study in November 2020, which identified the driving factors behind child marriage. They found that girls' families benefit from child marriage through the reduction of family expenses, receiving a bride price, benefiting from their son-in-law's help on the farm and upholding their status as a respectable family whose daughter did not get pregnant out of wedlock. The study also revealed a patriarchal context where women are primarily valued for their domestic and childbearing abilities.

## The Innovative Solution

Supported by FIT, CAUSE Canada and CAUSE Canada Sierra Leone Partnership tested an innovative approach that targets the demand side of child marriage. This involved educating men seeking child brides about the negative consequences of child marriage for them, their families and communities. The solution included training community leaders, empowering advocates, organizing community events against child marriage and collecting data on the number of prevented marriages vs. marriages that took place despite the intervention.

## Advancing Gender Equality

CAUSE Canada aimed to create a shift in how girls were treated by promoting the rights of girls and adolescents to principal decision makers on a personal, relational and societal level. Advancing gender equality was achieved through 1) training community leaders as advocates against child marriage; 2) empowering the advocates to organize visits to the homes of men seeking child brides to discuss the negative outcomes of child marriage, and to the homes of girls' families to identify other ways



**COUNTRY**  
Sierra Leone

**AMOUNT**  
\$216,849

**TESTING PERIOD**  
15 months  
Ended January 2022



**SDG 5: GENDER EQUALITY**



**GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE (GE3)**



**THEME: GENDER EQUALITY**

of mitigating poverty instead of child marriage; 3) organizing community events against child marriage; and 4) measuring the number of prevented marriages and comparing it to the number of marriages that have taken place despite the intervention.

## Testing Framework

Results-based management was used because it defines innovation success through achieved results and demonstrates whether innovations yield the expected results, for what beneficiaries, under what conditions and to what extent. The innovation made use of control communities where no activities were implemented. Progress towards validating the hypothesis was measured through the home visit monitoring tool, program logs, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, surveys and observation to identify changes in attitudes, capacity and behaviour.

## Results and Impact

Between January 1 and September 30, 2021, 137 child marriages were cancelled in the Koinadugu and Falaba Districts in the Northern Province of Sierra Leone as a result of this innovation. Interventions have also empowered chiefs and other community leaders to help eradicate child marriage in their communities. Overall, the innovation reduced child marriage by 95% in target regions, far surpassing their target of 50%. The control group communities continued to experience high demand for child brides.

## Key Lessons

1. The testing approach of having a control group made it easier to better understand the impact of community and family education.
2. The involvement of community leaders in educating families and communities about girls' rights is a much more effective approach than use of external persons. These leaders must be trained on how to speak about sensitive topics and how to build trust with families.
3. Having appropriate referrals in place to offer support to families and girls when marriages were cancelled was essential.
4. Engaging high school students in drama performances held during community engagement events was a good way of engaging the youth.

"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 2,778 men and 2,599 women and girls in 30 rural communities of the Koinadugu 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.

