



# United Nations Peacebuilding Funded Youth in Politics and Peacebuilding Project

## Empowering the Next Generation of Leaders in Sierra Leone

### BACKGROUND

Young people in Sierra Leone are at risk and vulnerable to political manipulation, exclusion, and violence. Cultural practices, including gender norms, and socio-economic challenges, influenced by a lack of education and skills for formal or informal employment are root causes of youth's involvement in violence and illegal activities in Sierra Leone. Marginalized groups, such as young women and people living with disabilities, are exposed, and severely affected by conflicts, but also excluded from economic and social opportunities. Young women's participation in politics and decision making is low throughout Sierra Leone because of a lack of information, education, livelihood opportunities, and involvement in political processes, as well as harmful cultural beliefs and gender stereotypes.

Through the Youths in Politics and Peacebuilding project, CRS will work with at-risk youth to realize their full potential.

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The project aims to promote an inclusive political process, social cohesion, and socio-economic improvement for young people in Sierra Leone. Through this project, CRS in partnership with Caritas Sierra Leone which includes (Caritas Bo, Caritas Makeni, Caritas Freetown, and Caritas Kenema and Caritas National Office) will engage diverse stakeholders to address unequal power relations between leaders and young people at district and national levels. The project will empower young people, particularly young men, to engage in advocacy activities against gender-based violence (GBV) and underlying cultural and traditional beliefs that undermine young women's participation in socio-economic activities. Young people will also be empowered and protected to support peacebuilding efforts at chiefdom and district levels.

CRS will introduce its social cohesion framework which will build bridges between community leaders and young people. CRS' innovative social cohesion framework

encompasses three spheres of society: sociocultural, economic, and political. CRS and partners will promote equal opportunities and improve diversity and address politically motivated violence that affects young people, particularly youth who are disconnected from school and employment.

This will create a platform for young people to have a voice in national discussions that will support their meaningful participation in politics and decision-making, and to peacefully resolve disputes and discriminatory practices against young people (including young women and youth with disabilities) in decision-making, peacebuilding, and political processes.

### ABOUT CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES

Catholic Relief Services started work in Sierra Leone in 1963 carrying out the commitment of the Catholic bishops and the Catholic community of the United States to assist the poor and vulnerable overseas. As part of the universal social mission of the Catholic Church, we work with local, national, and international Catholic institutions and structures, as well as other organizations, to assist people on the basis of need, not creed, race or nationality. For over 57 years, CRS has been on the front lines in responding to emergencies and promoting health, education, agriculture, social cohesion, livelihoods, and urban resilience in Sierra Leone.

CRS seeks to assist at-risk youth around the world to realize their full potential. Since 2007, CRS has implemented more than 100 projects globally with youth, either as youth-focused or youth-serving projects. CRS has a rich portfolio across multiple sectors to implement holistic youth programming that meets the disparate—but complementary—needs of this dynamic population.

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### PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

The Youth in Politics and Peacebuilding project will be implemented under an empowerment model with the goal to foster social cohesion and dialogue for women, youth, and persons with disability's involvement in civic engagements at national and community levels through training, change communication, advocacy, and awareness raising to address the underlining factors that prevent youth positive involvement in peacebuilding and leadership and address the limited livelihood empowerment opportunities for youth in Sierra Leone. To ensure social cohesion and create a platform for young people's voices to be heard, the project will also include multi-stakeholder intergenerational and inter-religious dialogues at national and district levels. CRS will also ensure safeguarding and protection of young peacebuilders through our multi-stakeholder dialogue and civic education training with young adults, law enforcement and other stakeholders. The project will be implemented in five districts (Kenema, Bo, Port Loko, Western Area Rural and Urban Districts) to achieve three outcomes.

**Outcome 1:** Enhanced participation and representation of youth (including women and PWDs) in decision-making processes.

**Outcome 2:** Youths are capacitated to mitigate conflict and promote social cohesion.

**Outcome 3:** Youths including young women and youths with disability engaged in diversified livelihoods.

The project is being implemented in partnership and collaboration with range of stakeholders including Caritas Sierra Leone, The National Youth Commission of Sierra Leone, and in collaboration with youths' structures such as the Catholic Youth Organization and CRS University Youth Club.

