

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Save the Children Sierra Leone, with funds from Samenwerkende Hulporganisaties (SHO) through Save the Children Netherlands, supported the MEST-led emergency radio education programme (EREP) during the EVD crisis from November 2014 to October 2015. The Stop de-Ebola ramp project was implemented in collaboration with MEST, education actors and community stakeholders. During the project implementation, SC distributed solar-power radios to most vulnerable households (including quarantined families), supported home-based learning, distributed learning materials to students and established and equipped community libraries in four city sections of Freetown in the Western Area Urban district.

The final evaluation adopted a 'process evaluation' approach aimed to give narrative of the course of the 'Stop de-Ebola ramp' project implementation rather than its impact. The evaluation examined the processes of project implementation, systems and management towards delivery of its planned outputs and outcomes in the four project city sections as well as lessons learned, suggestions for future programming and best practises. Data was collected through desk review (that provided secondary data), household survey, key informant interviews and focus group discussions for analysis.

### **Key Results and Recommendations**

#### **Relevance**

The SHO-funded project support to the education sector in the four city sections of Freetown was both needed and highly relevant. The project supported a major priority of government and the MEST-led emergency radio education programme during the Ebola plague when schools were indefinitely closed and students stayed at home. These included distribution of solar-power radios and learning materials, community mobilization in support of home-based learning and establishment of four community libraries. The provision and distribution of solar-power radios to vulnerable households significantly helped students listened to the radio programme in project areas. The community mobilization created awareness on the radio programme and supported the home-based learning; the urgently needed alternative learning opportunities for children at the time. The community libraries were the first ever in the four project locations. These were used as the only alternative places for the non-formal education since schools were closed. Furthermore, the relevance of the project met unanticipated needs of students' which included as follows: kept students busy with education, motivated the students to continue their education and unexpectedly had the potential to minimize the risk for girls' teenage marriage and pregnancy. The following are recommended to realize the relevance of support to children's education:

- Integrate provision of more learning materials in related education projects to students in the intervention city sections; especially survivors and orphans of the Ebola disease.
- Support for alternative education opportunities such as life skills training for older children out-of-school as a result of Ebola in project locations is crucial. For the younger students/pupils' out-of-schools, remedial classes would be an option to prepare them for possible return to school and continue their education.
- Support MEST on the continuation of radio teaching programme during off-school hours (weekends). In this case, where possible, supply of radios that can preserve power for longer period to meritorious student/pupils is recommended.

#### **Effectiveness**

Save the Children SHO-funded project activities made progress towards achieving outputs and outcomes that underscore the overall goal of the project. This include distribution of 1,500 solar-power radios to vulnerable households/quarantined families, pregnant girls for home based learning (benefitting 4,810 children: 4,000 homebased children from vulnerable households; 190 children from

quarantined families, 620 pregnant girls), distribution of learning materials to 10,564, support to 88 community mobilizers (including 68 teachers and 20 youths) and provision of teacher kits to 68 teachers in 15 schools and 10 skills training centres. Also, four community libraries were established in four project city sections (one in each operational city section).

However, timely delivery of some outputs was affected by delay in the execution of some activities and delivery of related outputs. For instance, delay was reported in the arrival of the radios than anticipated as a result of prolonged procurement processes. There were also notable delays in the completion of community library in Grey Bush due to difficulty in securing location for the library. This had implication on children participation in listening to the radio teaching programme and the non-formal education as conducted in the community libraries. The following are specific recommendations for consideration in future education projects:

- Distribution of learning materials to a wider affected student/pupils in the coming academic year as a way of increasing access to education.
- Increased support to more teachers/trainers in schools and skills training centres. This will empower teachers/trainers in delivering educational services and thereby improving the quality of education. Also, support to improving the quality of teachers/trainers through in-service teaching methodologies is recommended. This will place them better in delivering quality service which will in turn improve the quality of education at the same time.

### **Efficiency**

Despite delay in executing some activities, the SHO-funded project was completed within the scheduled timeline as specified in the project design. The project committed substantial funding that efficiently complemented the SC Education sector to provide most needed support to children during the Ebola crisis that required huge investment. Students/pupils were supported with the needed materials (radios and learning materials) to follow on the home-based learning and enabled them returned to schools after re-opened. The four community libraries were established and equipped within the approved budget. In terms of cost-efficiency, the project having benefitted directly benefitted 10,564 students/pupils within the approved budget (€ 694,473) indicates that € 65.74 was spent per a child on average during the course of implementation. The following recommendations are worthy for future projects:

- Timely execution of activities for future projects is fundamental for the achievement of expected outputs and outcomes; and thus efficiency of the projects. SC Sierra Leone should ensure all project activities are implemented as soon as possible to make sure that expected outputs and outcomes are realized by the end of the projects. Delay in delivery of activities would have implication on cost-efficiency.
- There is need for effective monitoring and follow-up activities to ensure that expected benefits are achieved thereby improving the cost-efficiency. Delivery of outputs should be regularly monitored to ensure that they are used for the intended purpose.

### **Sustainability**

SC recruited and seconded a dedicated staff member supporting the School Reopening at MEST which enabled the strengthening of both coordination and information management systems and built MEST's capacity to adequately respond to future emergencies. A full mapping of partners and interventions in the Education Sector has been developed, with an up-to-date database. This tool has been handed over to MEST with regular coaching and mentoring. This has enabled MEST to have a more comprehensive oversight and management of partners' interventions, ensuring they are in line with government priorities and enabling a quick identification of response gaps. SC also supported strategic planning and development of the national and district Ebola transition and recovery plans for MEST and partners

Engagement of the local government and community stakeholders have enhanced ownership of project outputs especially community libraries given 100% involvement of the 8 targeted librarians from the communities. Nonetheless, sustainability of the community libraries has proved to be an issue. There is yet no concrete strategy currently for sustaining the librarians and community libraries. As mentioned from key informant interviews with the Librarians and CFRMs (community feedback and response mechanisms) reference group leaders, the council has not shown any commitment to sustain the community libraries in particular (at least, to continue paying stipends of the project-supported librarians) after the close of the project. SC has engaged the communities about the sustainability strategy especially in terms of managing the library and paying the stipends of the teachers and also providing technical oversight for the librarians generally. Community stakeholders are willing to support the process. However, this process has started very late and that by the end of the grant it was not clear yet if and how community (or government) will be able to sustain the facilities and the librarians. The tendering of minimal resources by the SHO-funded project team in support of income generating activity towards maintaining the project-supported librarians is laudable especially when neither communities nor the local government council has any exit strategy in place.

The following are recommended for the sustainability of the SHO-funded project:

- Sustainability of the community libraries can be reinforced with commitment from intervention communities and the local council in emphasising value of the libraries and securing them. There is need for project team and SC Education Advisor to further discuss with FCC (Freetown City Council) on the exit strategy following handing over of community libraries to FCC's education sector.
- There is need for SC provide resources to, at least, continue paying the stipends of the librarians as a way of sustaining the community libraries in the short-term whilst concrete sustainability strategy is sorted by the communities and the local council (FCC). Integrating the operation of the community libraries by the council as part of the Sierra Leone Library Board management is commended as a long-term strategy.
- It is important that SC Education sector continue to provide regular supervision on the management of the community libraries to ensure that they are always intact and open so that children in the communities will continue to use the facilities.

### **Lessons Learned**

Key lessons learned from the SHO-funded project include:

- i. Although children were represented in the CFRMs reference groups who actively participated in the identification and selection of project beneficiaries, yet there was no evidence of their (children) participation in identifying the type of support needed. Specifically, children were not involved to identify the type of radios and learning materials they needed neither in the location of the community libraries even though the project targeted them. The type of radios provided was based upon the mandate of MEST and there was no opportunity for students/pupils to have determined these. A systemic approach to child participation throughout the various stages of the project will enhance quality
- ii. The involvement of community stakeholders including headmen, local chiefs and councillors helped in reaching the most affected population during the project implementation.
- iii. The establishment and involvement of CFRMs in project implementation enabled project team received feedback and responses related to project activities. This was important for the successful implementation of project and delivering its outputs.
- iv. By the project design, support such as learning materials provided for children was one-off when most children have lost their parents and lacked the sufficient care they needed. In particular, the learning materials (like exercise books) per child were reportedly inadequate and have already been used. Continued discussion with MEST and MSWGCA for longer term support to these

children as part of the Sierra Leone's Post-Ebola recovery strategy should have started at the onset of the project. SC needs to take a reactive step in this direction as part of their wider engagement with the education sector.

Recommendations for future projects include:

- Involvement of children would help to promote child participation and learning. Failing to involve children at all stages of the projects would give less preference to the children, which is against SC values
- Involvement of community stakeholders as seen with the librarians is critical for future projects; this would enhance their participation and ownership of projects' outputs; and hence sustainability of the outputs.
- Establishment of CFRMs are essential for feedback and responses related to project activities. This has enhance monitoring project activities towards successful implementation of project and delivering of outputs and outcomes.

### **Successes**

- i. The solar-power radios supplied to households enabled students listened to the radio teaching programme.
- ii. The radio teaching programme and home-based learning kept school children busy with learning and thus not missed the normal school that much in the four intervention city sections. The students were thus inspired to continue their education and returned to schools after re-opened.
- iii. The learning materials enabled students to cope with radio teaching programme and home-based learning during the Ebola crisis. The learning materials also enabled students to return to school; which lessened the burden on parents.
- iv. Social mobilization campaigns made students felt happy and secured to go back to school when schools re-opened.
- v. The community libraries provided appropriate places for non-formal education to students during the Ebola era. Project-supported teachers were conducting remedial classes to small groups of students (maximum of 15) at a time as a way revising the radio lessons.
- vi. The CFRMs accountability channels allowed feedback and responses from beneficiaries and project communities.
- vii. The involvement of community stakeholders and structures (SMCs and CTAs) enhanced most vulnerable households and children being selected that benefitted from the radios.

### **Challenges/Shortcomings**

The main challenges encountered during project implementation include the following:

- i. According to the information from children during focus group discussion, some radios supplied have short power life (that is, such radios do not keep charge for long) which make them not functioning too long. Children had to put the radios for longer time in the sun for charging. Also, some of the radios were reported to have been malfunctioned as they were received by beneficiaries; though no count of these was stated. As a result, children with such faulty radios missed some of the radio lessons.
- ii. Establishment of the community libraries was depended on available site provided by the communities. Since Kroo Bay and Looking Town have not got any site, the project team relied on the schools that provided space as part of the school buildings for the libraries. As such the available space in the two libraries was reportedly too small and not quite adequate to accommodate many children at a time.
- iii. According to the Librarians, the rough terrain of the community library's location at Looking Town poses difficulty for children to go and use the library. The roof was reported to be have been leaking; this puts the books and other materials at risk of destroying during the raining season.

## **Stop de-Ebola Ramp Final Evaluation 2015**

- iv. Some people felt aggrieved as being marginalised during the distribution of the solar-power radio as 25.9% of respondents indicated they did not get the radio even though they were registered as potential beneficiaries.
- v. Some authorities in the 15 schools visited reported that they were not involved in the distribution of the learning materials according to finding during the final evaluation. According to the authorities, distribution of the learning materials was done in non-organized manner with students/pupils queued outside the classrooms resulting in most children scrambling and some did not get any learning material. However, SC has indicated that at the onset of the distribution, the school authorities wanted to take delivery of the learning materials and engage in their own distribution against MEST directive to SC to lead the distribution. This may have created some discontentment among school authorities leading to their position on the distribution. The Kroo Bay community library was found to have no functioning toilet facility. The toilet was reportedly affected by the flooding that occurred in mid-September and had not been repaired afterwards at the time of the final evaluation. The implication is that there is potential poor sanitation at this library. It is currently closed for public use. SC's attempt to restore it as part of the flood response was foiled by GoSL directive to relocate the inhabitants of Kroobay after the flood.
- vi. The flooding in Freetown in mid-September wildly affected two of the targeted communities (Kroo Bay and Grey Bush). As a result, the two community libraries were affected. Worst destruction occurred in Kroo Bay where most of the materials including chairs, tables, books and other learning materials in the library were destroyed. The flooding also affected several homes that led to displacement of hundreds of children whose books and other learning materials were damaged; majority of whom found their way to the National Stadium. Save the Children however responded by resupplying learning materials to the flood-affected children; which enabled the children attend schools henceforth.
- vii. Delay envisaged in the execution of some project activities affected the timely delivery of the related outputs. This had implication of limiting children participation; say in the listening to the radio teaching programme and the non-formal education as conducted in the other community libraries.