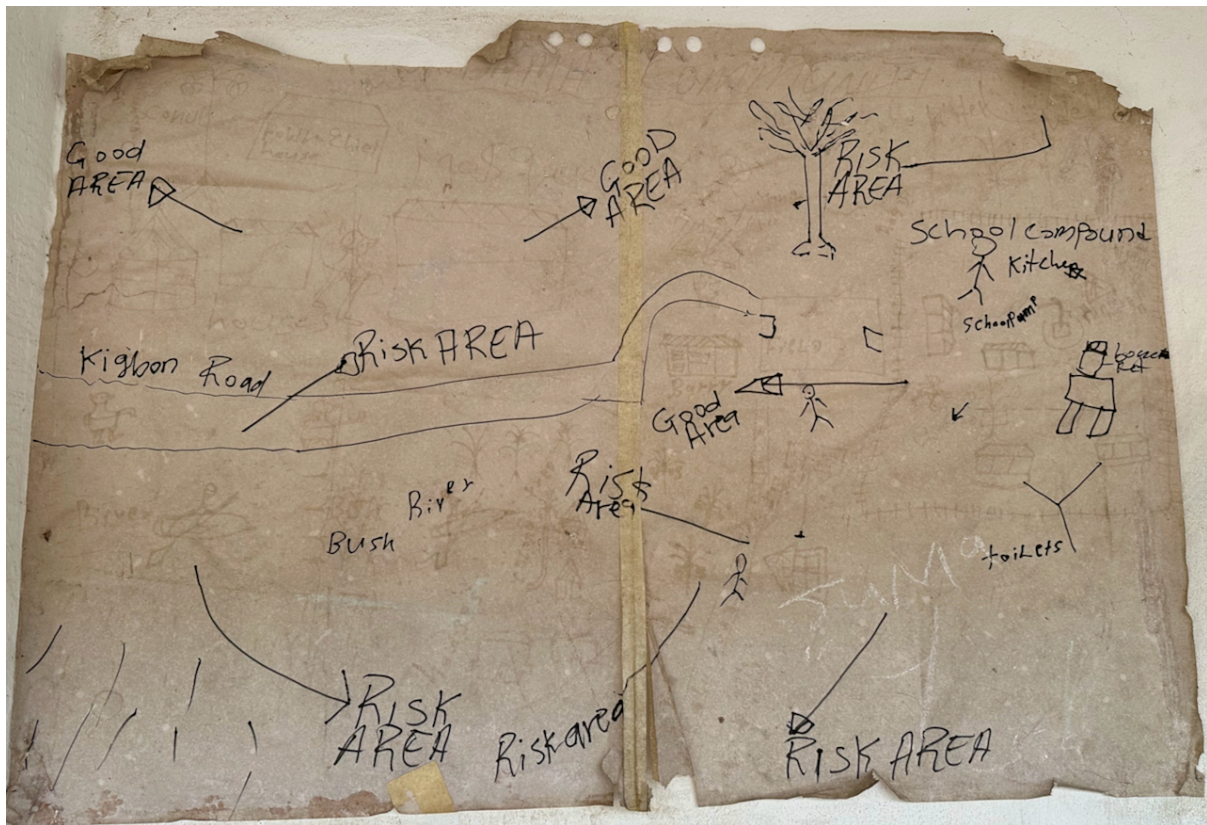


**EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF PROGRAM ACTIVITIES:
REDUCING VIOLENCE AND PROTECTING GIRLS AND BOYS IN
SCHOOLS IN PUJEHUN DISTRICT, SIERRA LEONE**

FINAL REPORT

PROGRAMME CO-FINANCED BY THE
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION
AND SAVE THE CHILDREN ICELAND (BARNAHEILL)

IMPLEMENTED BY
SAVE THE CHILDREN, PUJEHUN/FREETOWN OFFICES



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DISCLAIMER

Whilst care has been taken in the preparation of the material in this document to ensure its accuracy, T16 ehf does not warrant that the information contained in this document is error-free and, to the extent permissible under law, it will not be liable for any claim by any party acting on such information.

COVER IMAGE CREDITS: Risk mapping of the school compound in Gondama.

Sierra Leone's administrative districts and Chiefdoms as before 2017

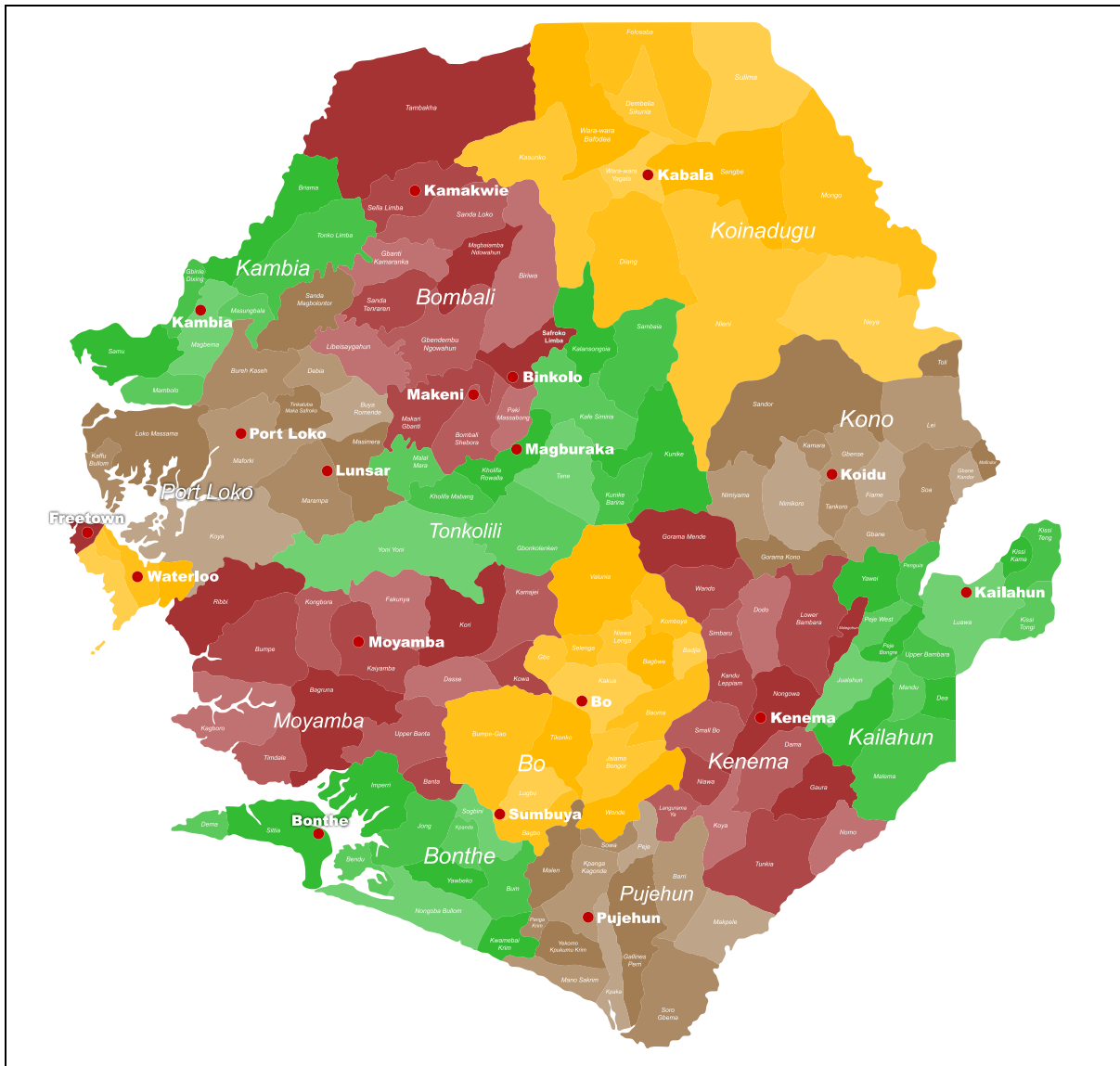


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List of Acronyms

BFC	Building Futures for Children
CC	Children’s Club
CWC	Child Welfare Committee
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
FP	Focal Point
FSU	Family Support Unit of the police
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GNI	Gross National Income
HDI	Human Development Index
IDI	In-Depth Interviews
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Iceland
MOGCA	Ministry of Gender and Children’s Affairs
MOBSSE	Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education
MMR	Maternal Mortality Rate
MSG	Mothers’ Support Group
NMR	Neonatal Mortality Rate
OSC	One Stop Centre
PMC	Paramount Chief
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
RTBC	Right To Be a Child
SC Iceland	Save the Children in Iceland—Barnaheill
SC Pujehun	Save the Children Pujehun District Office
SC Sierra Leone	Save the Children Sierra Leone Country Office
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SMC	School Management Committee
SNTV	Say No To Violence
SRHR	Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights
SSC	Safe School Committee
TOR	Terms of Reference

TSC	Teaching Services Commission
U5MR	Under-5 Mortality Rate
VC	Village Chief
VSO	Volunteer Service Overseas
WFP	World Food Programme
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

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Executive Summary

From 1 October 2021 to 30 September 2022, Save the Children (SC) Iceland collaborated with the SC Country Office in Sierra Leone to implement the pilot project Say No To Violence (SNTV). The project was to be implemented in ten target schools and attached communities in Pujehun District in the south-eastern part of Sierra Leone. It was a follow-up to the project Building Futures for Children (BFC), funded by a private donor through SC Spain in the 2018-2021 period. At termination, the BFC had built and renovated ten schools in the project area with Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) facilities at each location.

Pujehun District is the third largest district in Sierra Leone, with an estimated population of about 400,000. It is divided into 14 Chiefdoms, each presided over by a Paramount Chief who works with his/her village chiefs. Rivers and streams characterise the landscape. Agriculture and fishing form the backbone of the district's economic activity. Pujehun District has the highest multidimensional poverty in the country, the highest percentage of deprivation, and scores lowest on the country's sub-national Human Development Index (HDI). Thus, school access is difficult in most settings where the SNTV was implemented.

SC Country Office in Sierra Leone has since 1999 been engaged in diverse project works, currently working in four districts across health, education, protection, livelihood, and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) sectors. With funding from SC Iceland, it managed to give continuity to the project BFC in Pujehun District. The overall objective of the SNTV was to ensure that girls and boys of school-going age were safe and protected from violence, such as sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), in and around schools. The intended outcome was reduced violence, including SGBV against boys and girls in target schools. Attention was to be given to vulnerable children, focusing on girls on the move. In total, 7,758 people were reached by the project activities, of whom 1,611 were girls, 1,573 were boys, and 252 were girls on the move. The total budget was 200,404 USD, with funds from the Icelandic Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and SC Iceland. The project proposal, which assumed that a final evaluation would be conducted before project termination, was delayed for various reasons until November 2023. Thus, following the termination of SNTV in September 2022, SC Iceland and SC Sierra Leone signed a new contract for a 3-year project, Right To Be Child (RTBC).

To create a baseline for data collection in the project setting, a team of national consultants conducted a mixed-method study in June 2022. The results indicate that about two-thirds of the children had experienced some form of violence in the preceding year, with girls more likely to report such experience. Corporal punishment was the most prevalent (89%) form of abuse. Almost half of the children reported experiencing neglect and two out of five psychological/emotional abuse. In the school, two out of five participants reported bullying from peers, violence by a teacher (66%) and senior students (24%). Almost three out of five children reported violence by a parent or a caregiver.

The present evaluation was conducted in Pujehun District and the capital, Freetown, in the period 11-29 November 2023. It rests on agreed Terms of Reference (TOR) that included the evaluation questions, grouped into five distinct evaluation domains. In preparation for the evaluation, an Inception Report was delivered on 1 November 2023. Two evaluators visited all ten target schools. At each school, they discussed separately with children in the Children's Clubs (CC), mothers in the Mothers' Support Groups (MSG), headmasters, teachers, members of the School Management Committees (SMC) and School Safety Committees (SSC), Focal Points (FPs), village chiefs and one Paramount Chief for one out of four Chiefdoms involved in the project activities. Two translators supported the evaluators and discussed with almost 300 evaluation participants, including SC staff in Pujehun District and Freetown and other distal stakeholders. The evaluators were given access to key project documents by the Collaborating Partners. The evaluation was conducted one year after the conclusion of the one-year pilot project SNTV and one year into the project RTBC. Consequently, the interviewees had difficulties separating the activities of these

two projects and activities implemented as part of BFC, as all of them had been implemented by SC Pujehun.

Below is a summary of responses to the five evaluation questions, as outlined in the TOR.

Relevance: The building of the target schools as part of the BFC laid the foundation for the implementation of the SNTV project. Most of the teachers (77%) are not pin-coded, i.e., certified teachers on government payroll; thus, they are volunteers with minimal training in teaching. There are reports that the school environment was characterised by physical beatings, including using the whip, in the classroom. Through project activities, the importance of non-violent disciplining of school children was highlighted, and CCs, MSGs, teachers, SMCs and SSCs reported less, at times, non-existing, physical beatings in school.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) has been highlighted during the implementation of project activities. Children claimed they had the right to education and that they did not like to be beaten, neither in school nor at home. In line with Results 1, there were systems/structures for school safety, child protection and prevention of violence against children in place, and these had been developed and supported through the project activities. In line with Results 2, there is evidence that CCs, MSGs, SMCs, SSCs, headteachers and teachers are genuinely engaged in school safety management and in work to prevent violence against children in the school and the community, as well as violence between the children themselves. Further, many evaluation participants belonging to the various groups in focus expressed knowledge of and concern for protecting children from sexual violence. In line with Results 3, there is evidence that community members and school authorities are aware of the importance of the safety of children in the school and preventive actions against violence and are doing something about it. Stakeholders, including children, are also verbal on the importance of preventive actions against sexual violence and at ease when informing of available reporting hotlines.

An important lesson for future work relates to maintaining infrastructures constructed by the BFC, an issue raised by all stakeholders, including children. Implementing a project with the aim to change people's minds regarding respect for children's right to education, child protection, and a life without violence is difficult without attention to the physical infrastructure of the school setting and material conditions of life.

Another lesson learned is that the distribution of educational materials needs revision. Evidently, despite efforts to distribute limited quantity with a keen eye to those most vulnerable, the emphasis on girls on the move, an ill-defined concept in the setting, was not well received. With a few exceptions, the concept was defined as the most vulnerable girls attending school from communities in the school's catchment area. Boys in similarly dire situations were excluded.

The project was, at least to some extent, meeting the needs of the key stakeholders and beneficiaries in the project areas. It fitted well with national priorities as in 2023, the Government of Sierra Leone has forbidden corporal punishment in schools; work is ongoing to forbid violent upbringing at home.

To sum up, based on the evaluation's findings, it can be concluded that the project activities were relevant with distinct positive outcomes and were well received by stakeholders and beneficiaries.

Coherence: The project gives evidence of internal and external coherence in the setting with no duplication of efforts; on the contrary, the intervention adds value to other ongoing activities.

Effectiveness: The project activities were effectively implemented as intended, with overall good results in line with the original project document. It was also of value for the organisation and staff and of good quality for the beneficiaries. That said, the later addition of a new beneficiary group (i.e., girls on the move) needed a revised definition that was better adapted to the setting.

Efficiency: The project SNTV is a costly human resource intensive project with difficult-to-reach project villages with minimal investment costs, negatively affecting the projects efficiency. Nonetheless, the different budget items lack good definitions that make proper evaluation on the project's efficiency difficult.

Sustainability: Our findings indicate that the project activities have potential short- and medium-term benefits for the direct beneficiaries and their immediate families and community members. A life without violence lays the foundation for improved child development. The children who have benefitted directly from project activities may benefit in the long term and apply non-violent upbringing when they build their own families. That said, without outside funding and support to the involved communities, these have no resources to develop and continue with child protection activities to the same extent as implemented in this project. The staff and community members suggested introducing income-generating activities to strengthen the sustainability of the ongoing child protection work.

To sum up, the project on child protection activities in focus in this report is difficult to implement in any setting. Thus, the evaluation's overall conclusion is that the partners have been mostly successful in implementing planned activities as laid out in the project document for SNTV.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the context

1.1.1 Geography

Sierra Leone is in western Africa at 8.5°N and 12.1°W and borders Guinea (Conakry) to the north and north-east and Liberia to the southeast. It covers 71,740 km² with a coastline of 402 km along the Atlantic Ocean with many beaches, estuaries, and mangrove swamps. The country is characterised by four main regions: the coastal plains, the interior plateau, the interior plains, and the eastern mountains, with Mount Bintumani as its highest point (1,950 m above sea level). The interior plains are characterised by biodiversity, rainforests and several rivers that support agriculture and provide vital resources for the population's livelihood.

1.1.2 History

Sierra Leone owes its name to a Portuguese explorer who, in the 15th century, was the first to see and map the Freetown harbour (1). The country's name refers to the Portuguese name Serra Lyoa (e. Lion Mountains), i.e., the range of hills surrounding its harbour, one of the world's largest natural harbours.

Sierra Leone became formally a colony of the British Empire in 1787. In collaboration with the Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor, in 1792, it founded a settlement called Freetown for people liberated from slave ships after the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade. The repatriated individuals had diverse ethnic backgrounds from different parts of West Africa and laid the foundation of the Creole or Krio community in Sierra Leone. In the post-World War II era, various movements pushed for independence, including the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) and the All People's Congress (APC). It was granted on 27 April 1961, when the country became a member of the Commonwealth of Nations with Freetown as its capital. After independence, SLPP and APC have been the two main political parties, periodically interchanging government power.

Sierra Leone's civil war from 1991 to 2002 had its roots in complex factors. It took hold when the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) sought to overthrow the government and gain control of the country's rich diamond mines. The more than decade-long war was characterised by extreme brutality and atrocities against civilians, including mutilations, amputations, and the recruitment of child soldiers. The war ended in 2002 following international pressure and negotiations, supported by peacekeeping forces from the United Nations and the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG).

In 2014, together with its neighbouring countries, Guinea (Conakry) and Liberia, Sierra Leone was affected by the worst Ebola epidemic in history, with 14,124 cases and 3,956 (28%) deaths (2). Many frontline healthcare workers were among those who succumbed, including medical doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals. A few years later, the COVID pandemic struck in late March 2020, with a total of 7,766 cases and 125 deaths as of 22 November 2023 (3). In line with other governments across the continent, measures to prevent the spread of the virus included restrictions on movement and temporary closures of schools. To mitigate the pandemic's impact on children's education, efforts were made to provide remote learning opportunities through radio, television broadcasts, and online platforms.

1.1.3 Population and economy

The population, estimated to be 8,908,040 (2023 est.) with approximately 60% younger than 25 years (4), consists of 18 ethnic groups, of which Temne (35%) and Mende (31%) are the most numerous (1). Most are Muslim (77%), followed by Christians (23%) (2019 est.). English is the official language; however, its use is marginal. Krio, understood by 95%, is the *lingua franca*, while Mende is the principal vernacular in the south of the country and Temne in the north.

In 2022, the Gross National Income (GNI) per capita (Purchasing Power Parity-PPP) was 2,190 USD per capita based on Purchasing Power Parity (PPP); a similar figure for Iceland was \$52,150. The health situation of the population is precarious and characterised by high mortality rates; the average life expectancy is 54 years (2022). In the Countdown 2030 (5) the maternal mortality rate (MMR) was 443 per 100,000 live births (2020), the neonatal mortality rate (NMR) 31/1,000 livebirths (2021) and the under-5 mortality rate (U5MR) estimated at 105 per 1,000 live births (‰) (2021); for those 5-14 years of age, the mortality rate is 25 out of 1,000 live births. The nutritional state of children is precarious, with 6% suffering from acute malnutrition (wasting) and 27% from stunting (low height-for-age). Sierra Leone scores 51% on the early childhood index (5) and ranks 172 out of 186 countries where childhood is most threatened (6).

The Human Development Index (HDI) is a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and having a decent standard of living (7).¹ Sierra Leone has consistently ranked among countries with the lowest HDI score; in 2022, it ranked 181 out of 191 countries. On the same index, Norway and Iceland ranked first and second, respectively. In the KidsRights Index 2023, Sierra Leone ranked 189 out of 193 countries² (8); on the same index, Iceland ranks 3rd, after Sweden and Finland.

1.1.4 Administration

Sierra Leone is divided into four provinces, i.e., the Eastern, Northern, Southern and North-west Provinces, that nevertheless have no autonomous political power. Rather, they are geographical delineations, with the administration focusing on coordination, resource allocation and facilitation of governmental services within their respective jurisdiction.

In addition to Provinces, Sierra Leone is divided into 16 districts, each holding considerable power in managing local affairs and implementing policies. They are led by district councils and chaired by district chairpersons, and they oversee resource allocation, service delivery, coordination and collaboration, and overall community development within their respective districts.

Along with the governmental structures of provinces and districts, 190 Chiefdoms are traditional administrative units. A Paramount Chief leads each Chiefdom with considerable cultural, social and political power in their respective communities. Chiefdoms predate the colonial era and continue to exercise power along the governmental structures through their advisory role and engagement with governmental authorities in matters of concern to their respective communities. Chiefdoms are divided into sections, villages, and villages into families or clans, creating a hierarchical structure.

1.2 Save the Children

1.2.1 Save the Children Sierra Leone

SC International is the largest NGO in the world that focuses on children's rights, with its presence in 120 countries. The organisation aims to improve the lives of children, guided by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The organisation aims to ensure that children survive, learn, and are protected.

SC Sierra Leone has been engaged in project work in the country since 1999, working in four districts within the health, education, protection, livelihood, and WASH sectors. Specifically, the protective sector of its Country Strategic Plan for 2019-2021 aimed for a reduction in accepted violence and harmful gender discrimination, adolescent pregnancy, and early and forced marriage.

¹ The health dimension is assessed by life expectancy at birth, the education dimension is measured by mean of years of schooling for adults aged 25 years and more and expected years of schooling for children of school entering age. The standard of living dimension is measured by gross national income per capita.

² The index consists of five domains: Right to Life, Health, Education, Protection and Enabling Environment for Child Rights.

The organisation's staff works directly with children and families, engages with communities, and builds the government's capacity at local and national levels to enable children, with a specific focus on girls, to realise their rights to health, education, protection and participation. For more upstream impact, the organisation's advocacy team works to influence legislation, policies, and funding for children's and gender issues through direct engagement with government agencies and working in partnership with civil society, including girl champions. In addition to strong community engagement, SC Sierra Leone has an extensive working relationship with the Government of Sierra Leone, including the Ministry of Social Welfare, the Ministry of Health and Sanitation and the Ministry of Education.



Figure 1. *SC Sierra Leone Country Office, Freetown.*

1.2.2 Barnaheill – Save the Children Iceland

SC Iceland is an organisation under the umbrella of SC International. It was established in 1989 with an initial focus on activities within Iceland (9). Guided by the CRC (10), the SC Iceland contributed to work that 2013 resulted in the CRC becoming legally binding in national legislation in Iceland. The focus has been on children's health, education, and well-being rights. In collaboration with other like-minded organisations, its thematic areas of interest in Iceland include work against children's usage of tobacco, alcohol and drugs and promotional activities to foster the socio-emotional development and well-being of children. Preventive work against sexual abuse of children has also been prominent, resulting in a merger with the Icelandic NGO *Blátt áfram* in 2019, including the adoption and implementation of the BellaNet methodology for preventive actions.

On the international scene, SC Iceland contributed to the work of SC International in Uganda from 2007 to 2013 (11). The overall objective was to support governmental efforts in two northern districts following the military conflict by reconstructing and developing the social sector, including education, health, child protection and food security. In 2018, the Board decided to expand its international engagement and had two successful proposals to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in Iceland for humanitarian assistance to Syria and Yemen. To strengthen this work further, a new Director for International Projects post was established in August 2019. SC Iceland is now actively involved in projects in Uganda, Sierra Leone, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). It also supports humanitarian activities through its international arm in Syria and, most recently, refugees from Ukraine.

Since October 2021, SC Iceland has been involved in two projects in Sierra Leone, i.e., Say No To Violence (SNTV), the project in focus in this evaluation, and Right To Be Child (RTBC), a 3-year project that followed SNTV, to be terminated in September 2025.

2 Methodology of the evaluation

2.1 Terms of Reference

The contract with the MFA for SC Iceland project SNTV in Sierra Leone stipulated that an external evaluation should be conducted at the termination of project activities (Section 3.2). Dr Geir Gunnlaugsson, a paediatrician and Emeritus Professor of Global Health, on behalf of T16 ehf., was approached by SC Iceland to conduct the evaluation based on an agreed Terms of Reference (TOR) for the evaluation, signed on 12 August 2023 (Annex 1). It was later agreed, without additional costs to SC Iceland, that Dr Jónína Einarsdóttir, Professor of Anthropology, University of Iceland, and one of two owners of T16 ehf would support the consultant.

As the TOR outlines, the evaluation of the project activities in Pujehun District was expected to be evidence-based and conducted with an accepted methodology. The evaluation was to assess how well the Collaborating Partners achieved the project's objectives regarding various factors, e.g., inputs, actions and results. The evaluator was further expected to summarise lessons learned from the project that can be used in SC Iceland's future work and continued support in the area. The Collaborating Partners expected the evaluator to follow accepted evaluation standards, including maintaining impartiality in the work, showing sensitivity to local culture and social values, and ensuring participants' confidentiality.

In line with the TOR, the evaluator conducted a desk analysis before the field visit and delivered an Inception Report on 1 November 2023.

2.2 Field visit

A field visit was conducted in the period 11-29 November 2023, first with two nights in the capital, Freetown. On 13 November, the consultants met SC Sierra Leone staff at the country office and received a briefing on the security situation. Out of the five security levels applied by SC, Sierra Leone is at security level 3, which means that it is volatile. Evaluators were informed that movement was permissible between 06H and 18H. The consultants received a telephone with key numbers for contacts with SC Sierra Leone staff and used it as an internet router through its hotspot capability.

After a briefing in Freetown, the consultants headed for Bo, the administrative capital of Bo District, a neighbouring district to Pujehun, where they were based 13-20 November. Afterwards, they moved to a guesthouse in Pujehun town and returned to Freetown on 24 November. At the end of the field visit, they met staff of SC Country Office for additional information and debriefing.

SC Pujehun recruited two local translators to assist the consultants during the fieldwork in Pujehun, i.e., Mr Brima Sannoh and Ruth Sowgi Tucker. They assisted the consultants with translation and general support during the field visit; both are journalists and experienced in the setting, speaking Krio and Mende. A car with a driver, Mr Mohamed Kemoh, was also provided during the visit.

2.3 Visits to project communities

The evaluation team visited all ten target schools supported by SC Iceland in Pujehun District (Annex 2); the team usually included the two consultants and translators and one staff member of SC Pujehun. Three of the communities were reached by car on roads of variable quality, while seven were visited on a boat after about one hour of driving on difficult roads before boarding the boats to sail for almost 1-3 hours to reach the target communities. The staff of SC Pujehun and those involved in project activities were also interviewed, including governmental officials who collaborated in the project activities.



Figure 2. *Crossing ricefield to reach Kombpi.*

2.5 Collection of data

The sampling of participants for individual In-Depth Interviews (IDI) and Focus Group Discussion (FGDs) depended on the evaluators' access to those willing to participate in the activities. An attempt was made to include in the sample as diverse group members as possible with equal gender representation, if possible. Interviews were held with SC Sierra Leone staff in Freetown and Pujehun, who have contributed to project implementation. Quantitative information was provided from the Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) programme in place.

The two evaluators conducted interviews in English with SC staff, both in Freetown and Pujehun, and notes were written down on paper and transcribed to electronic format the same day or no later than within three days. In the communities, the two translators assisted the evaluators in facilitating the discussion.

SC staff organised all the evaluation visits beforehand and contacted the persons responsible at each site to receive the consultations. All visits to the ten schools had the same components and included IDIs or FGDs with the following people: 1) Headteacher/teachers; 2) Members of the School Management Committee (SMC) and School Safety Committee (SSC); 3) Mothers' Support Group (MSG); 4) Children's Club (CC); and 5) Village chiefs and traditional authorities. Discussion with children was either in a large or in a smaller group. The evaluators allowed participants to raise their voices to give their opinions. They emphasised that the participants could speak freely and anonymously. It was a limitation that the consultants arrived accompanied by SC project staff; however, during the interviews, the SC staff were not present to avoid influencing the conversations. The guiding themes for discussion included the following: the activities of the respective group or individual in furthering the aims of SNTV, to what extent the activities had been successful in fulfilling the aims of SNTV, what was the main challenge in fulfilling the project aims and what additional work or support would be needed to secure the implementation of CRC. Other themes developed along with the discussion and depended on each group being interviewed. The evaluators further inspected the school's infrastructure shortly.

Access to two evaluators simultaneously working facilitated data gathering; nonetheless, time was relatively short in each community due to the long time needed for travel to reach them. Data collection in all the communities that belong to the school's catchment area was impossible due to time limitations. However, the members of the committees and groups and children from all the attached communities who attended school on the day of the visit took part in the evaluation.

Before delivering the final report, the evaluator distributed a draft for comments to SC Iceland that requested feedback from collaborators in Sierra Leone.

To sum up, the evaluators met and discussed with almost 300 people, including SC staff, government officials, community members and children. Selected key informants met during the visit are listed in Annex 3.

3 Project goals and objectives

3.1 Project setting

Pujehun District is in the Southern Province and is the third largest in the country, with a surface area of 4,105 km²; since 2017, it has been divided into 14 distinct Chiefdoms. It borders the Atlantic Ocean in the south-west, the Republic of Liberia to the south-east, Kenema District to the north-east, the Bo District to the north and Bonthe District to the west (Figure 1). It is characterised by rivers, e.g., the Moa River, and streams, which provide irrigation for farming and support local livelihoods. Agriculture forms the backbone of the district's economic activity through its fertile land that allows for cultivating various crops such as rice, cassava, cocoa, coffee, and palm oil; fishing is an important source of supplementary food and income for many communities along the riverbanks. Further, diamond mining, with the involvement of internationally owned mining corporations, is an important economic activity. Diamonds are generally found in riverbeds, muddy deposits, or within the earth's surface, with a potential for small-scale artisanal mining activities in certain areas within the district.

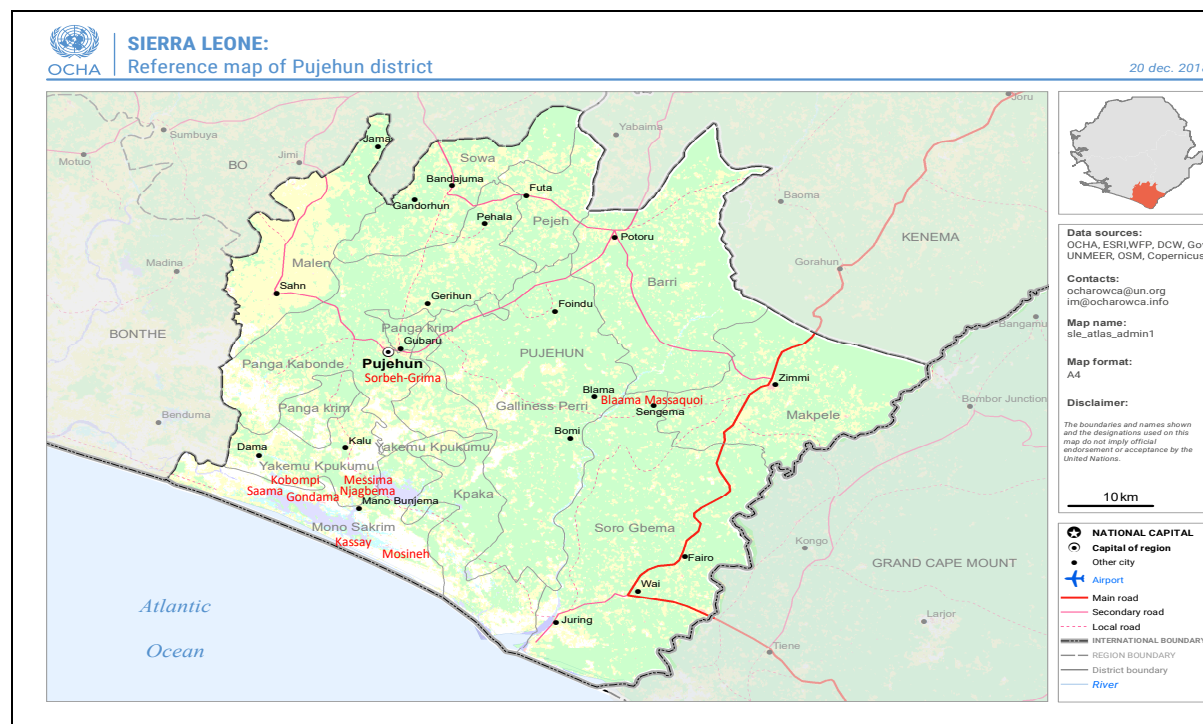


Figure 3. Map of Pujehun District with the approximate location of the target school communities, nine marked in red and one in black (Pujehun town). Source: OCHA, 2018 (12).

Like many other areas across the country, Pujehun District was affected by the civil war. Villages and towns were raided, leading to the destruction of homes and livelihoods, resulting in displacement as civilians fled their homes to escape violence and atrocities. It was also affected by the ravaging Ebola epidemic (the last case in the autumn of 2015) and later the COVID pandemic.

Pujehun District has an estimated population of about 400,000, with Pujehun town as its administrative centre that suffered severe damages during the civil war. About 19% of the population are children under five years of age, 28% are children aged between 5 and 14 years, and 49% are in the age group of 15-64 years (13). The district has among the lowest population densities in Sierra Leone, with most (87%) living in rural areas with an average size of 6.2 members per family. The 2019 Sierra Leone Multidimensional

Poverty Index³ found that Pujehun had the highest incidence (87%) of multidimensional poverty and the highest percentage (64%) of deprivation among those who are poor (14). Further, Pujehun District scored lowest on the country's sub-national HDI.

3.2 Project proposal

Following an appeal in 2021 from SC Sierra Leone, SC Iceland applied for funds from the MFA for a one-year pilot project, SNTV, to be implemented from 1 October 2021 to 30 September 2022 (15). The project activities were to be concentrated in ten target schools and communities within each school's catchment area in four out of 14 *Chiefdoms* in Pujehun District (Annex 4). The project was a direct continuation of the Building Futures for Children (BFC) project funded by a private donor through SC Spain but implemented by SC Sierra Leone in the 2018-2021 period. The project resulted in new and renovated school buildings in the ten rural communities, including WASH facilities with water pumps and latrines. The new facilities were also adapted to the needs of disabled children, with special ramps for them to access the classrooms. The MOBSSE chose the sites for construction focusing on disadvantaged areas in need of a school; seven were in distant rural riverine communities, two were in nearby communities near Pujehun town, and one was in the administrative district capital. The SNTV project was to boost the new schools with skills and ability to prevent violence against children and protection of children in and around the schools.



Figure 4. *Sierra Leone Church Primary School, Kobompi, with WASH facilities.*

The overall objective of SNTV was to ensure that girls and boys of school-going age, including girls on the move,⁴ were safe and protected from violence, such as sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), in and around schools. The intended outcome of the project was reduced violence, including SGBV against boys and girls in target schools.

Following a framework agreement with MFA, signed in March 2022, and considering the results of the baseline study and the overall progress of the pilot project, the Collaborating Partners signed a new contract for the project, RTBC, in the same ten schools and attached communities in Pujehun District, with a duration of three years (1 October 2022 to 30 September 2025). This new project aims to ensure all girls and boys are safe, protected from violence, and experience improved well-being in school, in the community and at home. Thus, it builds on the work the Collaborating Partners implemented during the pilot project SNTV.

³ Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) is a measure used to assess various deprivations faced by individuals and households beyond income poverty. It considers different dimensions such as health, education, and living standards to provide a more comprehensive understanding of poverty.

⁴ Criteria for identifying girls on the move, as agreed with SC Iceland: (a) Girls that are aged 6-12 years, not living with their biological parents; and (b) can include: orphans; father living in another country; girls who have missed out on education because of their movements or relocations.

3.3 Participatory Needs Assessment

As stated in the project proposal, a final external evaluation was planned to be conducted at the end of project activities in October 2022. As a one-year pilot project, its implementation aimed to lay the foundation for long-term continued support of SC Iceland to SC Sierra Leone, yet pending the outcome of a final evaluation. The Collaborating Partners agreed, however, to delay the final evaluation as the project implementation unfolded. Rather than do an evaluation at the end of the pilot project, a participatory needs assessment including children and authorities in the area, to serve as a baseline study, was conducted by national consultants in June 2022, applying mixed methods (16).

The quantitative component of the baseline study focused on recall from participants of their experiences of violence in the preceding year (January to December 2021). Despite observing some changes in disciplinary practices, children experienced various forms of violence, both in school and at home. About two-thirds reported some form of violence in the preceding year, with girls more likely to report such incidents. Corporal punishment was the most prevalent (89%) form of abuse.⁵ Physical assault and humiliating treatments were the most prevalent forms reported (approximately 65%). Almost half reported experience of neglect and two out of five psychological/emotional abuse. In the school, two out of five participants reported bullying from peer violence by a teacher (66%) and senior students (24%). Almost three out of five children reported violence by a parent/caregiver. Additionally, about two out of three participants, both girls and boys, reported not feeling safe in and around their school environment. Identified risks included a lack of fence around the school premises, poisonous snakes, badly maintained school buildings and unfriendly toilets. Experience of sexual abuse was reported as neglectable. Nonetheless, children reported experience within their families of forced child marriage (8%) and that at least one girl in the household (5%) had undergone Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). No proper referral mechanisms for violence, including SGBV, were in place across the ten targeted schools, and only half of the schools had established Child Welfare Committees (CWCs, now Children's Clubs (CC)), Mothers' Support Group (MSG) or Safe School Committees (SSC) before the initiation of project activities. According to the qualitative component of the study, children reported that they did not participate in decisions that affected their life situation, particularly at home, and had several proposals for improvements.

3.4 Beneficiaries

At its conception, the project was estimated to reach 7,785 primary beneficiaries, including 3,920 children (2140 girls and 1,780 boys, both directly and through their families) in ten target school communities in Pujehun District. Other primary categories of project beneficiaries included teachers and school administrations, parents/caregivers, and district authorities.

At the national level, the project would collaborate with the MOBSSE and other relevant ministries of the Government of Sierra Leone. At the district level, SC Sierra Leone aimed to establish and sustain productive relationships with district authorities in Pujehun, including the School Supervisors.

At the community level, religious and traditional leaders were identified as the key powerholders. Their involvement and engagement in the design and delivery of activities will positively influence the project and its results, as well as the engagement and ownership of activities by communities in general.

⁵ In school, examples of corporal punishment include winding of the ears, frog style, kneeling, finger standing, chair sitting by hanging on the knees, and child labour. At home children reported head-knocking, denial of food, beating, domestic violence between parents/caregivers, child labour and overload of children's responsibilities, use of abusive language against girls, locking of children indoors, burning of hands as punishment, and household child labour.

3.5 Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL)

SC's MEAL – Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning – department collects and uses data to support decision-making and continuous improvement in all projects implemented by the SC Country Office, including in the project area. In line with SC standards, anticipated MEAL mechanisms for this intervention included a project-level plan to guide data collection and information sharing with beneficiaries for accountability (Annex 5).

SC has found that telephone hotlines are the most accessible accountability mechanism for adults and children when reporting abuse, including SGBV. The SC Sierra Leone runs one of the toll-free hotlines (Leh We Tok, 922). Another is run by the One Stop Centre (116) under the Ministry of Gender and Children. The third one is run by the MOBSSE (8060).



Figure 5. Information sheet in Njagbema on reporting channels for sexual abuse cases.

3.6 Coordination

For this project, SC Iceland was the contracting agency, and SC Sierra Leone was the implementing agency through its Field Office in Pujehun.

3.7 Budget

The total budget was 200,404 USD, with funds from the Icelandic Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and SC Iceland. As reported in the Final Narrative Report to MFA, the project costs are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of budget and actual costs per budget item. Say No To Violence, 1 October 2021 to 30 September 2022.*

Description	Actual budget	Actual costs	Percentage costs
Equipment	8,913	8,911	4
International Staff	4,772	5,249	3
Monitoring and evaluation	17,725	11,513	6
National Staff	18,468	15,779	8
Operational costs	45,990	47,032	23
Project supplies	7,966	8,366	4
Result 1	21,723	22,061	11
Result 2	23,879	24,411	12
Result 3	23,169	23,411	12
Start-up activities	1,302	1,302	1

Support Staff	21,833	26,695	13
Cross-Cutting activity costs	4,664	4,136	2
Grand Total	200,404	198,866	98

*The table includes costs transferred to Sierra Leone for project activities. Additional costs, not included, are funds for external evaluation, visits of SC Iceland to the project setting and funds to SC Spain. Thus, total project costs were 235,972 USD.

3.8 Cross-cutting issues

In the project proposal, cross-cutting issues included human rights, gender, child participation, sustainability, participation and buy-in by the population, and diverse partnerships.

In short, in line with Iceland’s development policy, poverty is not only a lack of material resources but also safety, power and control over one’s situation. In the project, children’s rights are at the heart of program activities, and SC International applies the principles of children’s rights for them to enjoy their rights irrespective of the setting where they live in all their projects. Further, the project was to be gender-sensitive, in line with Iceland’s development policies. Children were also to be responsible for participating in any matter of concern to them, with a particular focus on vulnerable children of different ages and abilities. Additionally, the project activities aimed to fight violence against children, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), particularly SDG 5.2. The involvement of key stakeholders in Pujehun was also important to secure their ownership of the project’s results. Ongoing and new partnerships were also to be sought and strengthened during project implementation.

4 Program theory and program logic

4.1 Considerations

The project implementation benefits from SC Sierra Leone’s longstanding experience implementing projects in the country (Section 1.2.1). The Pujehun Field Office is currently engaged in four projects.

- RTBC (since 2022, donor SC Iceland)
- Jersey Overseas Aid Commission–Sustainable Livelihood and Community-Led Conservation and Protection of Mangrove Ecosystem (since 2022, donor UK)
- Momentum Country and Global Leadership (MCGL) (ongoing for more than three years, USAID)
- Sierra Leone Education Improvement Challenge (SLEIC)

4.2 Participatory approach

The project builds on and continues SC Sierra Leone’s work on the BFC project. Thus, the proposed project benefits from improved infrastructure, offering continuity in work to provide education in the ten target school communities, guided by consideration and respect for children’s right to a life without violence. For successful outcomes, the project staff has built up a reputation and contacts in the Pujehun District that supported the implementation of project activities, i.e., giving children an opportunity for education free of violence and protection in the environment in which they live. Of particular interest are collaboration and partnerships with the SMCs, SSCs, MSGs, and CCs that are active in each target school. It also entails that due consideration is given to traditional authorities at the level of the four Chiefdoms involved in project activities, particularly traditional village authorities.

4.3 Program Theory and Program Logic

The overall aim of the SNTV project was to ensure that girls and boys of school-going age are safe and protected from violence, including SGBV, in and around target schools. In short, the theory for project activities was that providing teachers, family members, children and the community at large with

information on the negative consequences of physical violence against children would result in a decrease in such violence, both in school and at home. Through training sessions, the teachers would adopt new disciplinary methods in class and refrain from using physical violence against their students. Empowering children with knowledge of their rights in line with CRC would also help them stand up for their rights. Further, through awareness campaigns and report systems, the community at large would increasingly avoid practising physical violence against children and give closer attention to their needs, in- and out-of-school, e.g., on their interactions in play. At the same time, community members and leaders would receive support to strengthen community-based child protection initiatives, particularly against SGBV, and link them with existing local, district or national services. In the long term, children will complete basic primary education free of violence, which opens further opportunities for them with improved prospects of sustainable livelihood.

The logic for project implementation rests on providing inputs, including funds, staff, materials and technical resources for activities supportive of its intended outcomes. In short, activities include, e.g., training sessions for teachers and school administrators, children, and community members at large on safety in school, positive parenting, and support to community-based welfare committees led by women and children. Children's rights were to be highlighted, with a focus on their right to protection, e.g., against SGBV and the special needs of girls on the move, with information on existing reporting channels in cases of abuse. The engagement of existing community structures was to be secured through awareness campaigns; these aimed to reach traditional authorities and village chiefs to promote the protection of children and their right to a life without violence, both in school and at home. In the short term, the program logic assumes that the outcome of project activities will result in structures that focus on children's protection and well-being and prevent violence, including SGBV, with decreased child abuse and violence in school and the community as a result. Considering this was a pilot project for one year, no long-term impact was to be expected at the end of the project activities.

For both the program theory and program logic, the partners assumed that the community would accept interventions for child protection and was willing to participate. They also expected that the proposed activities would result in a positive change in the behaviour of individual teachers, children, parents and the community at large, increasing children's protection and well-being in the target communities.

4.5 Project activities

In the project proposal for the pilot project, the Collaborating Partners agreed the project's aim was to be achieved through three defined results and specified activities for each of the three results components and associated indicators, listed and discussed in Section 6.1.

5. Findings

In this chapter, the evaluators summarise the information provided by evaluation participants during the field visit. It builds on IDIs and FGDs with almost 300 people, i.e., staff from SC, children, community members taking part in the CCs, MSGs, SMCs and SCCs, head teachers, teachers, traditional authorities, and public officials (Annex 3). The aim was to allow their voices to be heard, to the extent possible, on their experiences of implemented project activities and the project context. This Chapter builds the foundation for our responses to the TOR and Inception Report evaluation questions.

For the evaluation participants, it merits mentioning that SC Pujehun has implemented all project activities since 2018. Thus, they often do not consider different projects and funders separately, mainly for SNTV and RTBC.

5.1 SC staff Pujehun

5.1.1 SNTVs main components

The SC staff explained how the work on preventing violence against children in school and the community was primarily implemented with the support of the following school-based committees:

- SMCs, established by the MOBSSE, have seven community members, including the headteacher, the secretary and the chairman. SMCs are functional with agendas and minutes. SC Pujehun staff has trained its members in child protection and discipline of children in the project communities, provided banners on corporal punishment and information on accessible toll-free helplines to report sexual abuse.
- SSCs are functional and have meetings with minutes. The headteacher is leading the SSC in the respective school. SSC works to secure safety in and around the school and for children with long distances to attend school.
- MSGs were formerly CWCs at the district level created by the MOBSSE. SC Pujehun transformed it into MSGs at the school level. All the target schools have an MSG, reaching the communities with support from SC Pujehun.
- CCs are part of the Children’s Forum Network, which acts nationally. Each school has one club, with ten boys and ten girls. The CCs develop activities for themselves and advocate for the CRC. CCs support children in school and the community. The CCs are active clubs which have helped children who have dropped out of school to return. One SC staff member said: “The children in the clubs are not afraid to express their views.” CCs support each other through mentorship and psychosocial aspects and collaborate with MSGs.

The SC Pujehun organised training for the teachers on the Teachers Code of Conduct with facilitators from the MOBSSE and Teachers Services Commission (TSC). They were engaged in safety, prevention, and child protection measures, including community mobilisation to stop violence against children. Since 2023, the Government of Sierra Leone has forbidden corporal punishment by law in schools.



Figure 6. Staff at the SC Field Office in Pujehun District with consultants and translators.

SC Pujehun staff underlined that according to government policy, schools should provide free quality education, meaning free from fees for all 6-16 years of age; there are no preschools in most of the project communities. All the target schools are free of charge in terms of school fees. Nonetheless, students pay for books, uniforms, and, at times, extra costs, e.g., furniture. Guided by the principle to “leave no child behind”, SNTV tried to identify all vulnerable children, including children with disability, through community mapping in the smaller communities. In larger communities, SC Pujehun targeted schools for mapping for vulnerability.

Another component of the project was to provide extra support for girls on the move, based on the assumption that girls had left school because of corporal punishment, or the families sent them elsewhere to study. SC Pujehun staff aimed to act against SGBV by finding solutions to keep girls in school with special support.

SC Pujehun staff pointed out that a lack of qualified teachers was challenging for the schools. During the implementation of BFC, SC Pujehun supported volunteer teachers in attending a 3-year training program with virtual teaching that allowed them to study during their vacations to become certified teachers. SC Pujehun provided support to them, e.g., with transport and facilities, and linked them to the MOBSSE to become pin-coded, i.e., put on the government payroll as teachers. It is challenging to recruit pin-coded teachers to isolated schools; however, teachers already living in the communities are likely to stay there, while other pin-coded teachers hardly accept staying in these small and rural communities.

An interesting story is that SC Pujehun invited the Head of the national TSC in Freetown to visit one of the most distant project communities. He became very impressed by the work, and coincidentally, he is the current Minister of Education.

5.1.2 Collaborators

SNTV was an integrated project, working with education at 20% and protection at 80%. Thus, collaboration with the following state institutions and other organisations has been crucial:

- MOBSSE has an office in Pujehun town. It collaborated on educating the volunteer teachers, aiming to have them certified and pin-coded later.
- TSC were facilitators in the courses for the volunteer teachers.
- Ministry of Gender and Children Affairs on issues under its responsibility, i.e., the One Stop Centre (OSC) with services for victims of sexual abuse.
- The Family Support Unit (FSU) within the police receives victims of sexual abuse, register their case and makes a formal request to the OSC.
- Civil Society groups link communities and government by advocating for legislation and policy. Civil Society is an umbrella for civil organisations, and a loose coalition is active in Pujehun, “speaking for the voiceless.”
- Arabic schoolteachers who Koran schools attended by boys and girls. SC Pujehun has collaborated with Arabic teachers who have become instrumental in taking their students to public schools in some of the target communities of SNTV. Thus, SC Pujehun created a bridge to formal education for these children and their Arabic school education.

5.1.3 Challenges

According to the SC Pujehun staff, the main challenge for the SNTV had to do with the support for girls on the move, which included direct support for school uniforms and materials. The staff had identified 252 girls who stayed in villages without any school or outside their home village; it selected 70 for support in line with criteria formulated in collaboration with SC Iceland. SC did not reach the target for supporting all girls on the move, which was the only unmet target. Boys who lived under the same conditions as the girls who benefitted from the support got no support. Boys asked: ‘Why do we not receive similar support?’ The staff responded that SNTV was a pilot project, and all benefitted from the awareness community campaigns. They felt terrible not being able to include support for boys in similar situations. Girls on the move was challenging component to implement, and the evaluation participants and SC Pujehun staff felt no support for boys as unfair.

There were additional challenges:

- SC Pujehun would have liked to give more direct support to vulnerable children. Livelihood support would have been beneficial, including support for the MSGs.

- Sexual Health and Rights (SRHR) should have been included.
- Additional work is needed on violence because adults, including parents, need to be better educated on child rights and the harms of violence against children.
- There is a need to continue to support volunteer teachers to become certified and later pin-coded; about three out of four teachers are neither certified nor pin-coded, while almost all headteachers are pin-coded.
- Sustainability of the schools is an issue: How can the communities support their schools, value education and work for children's rights in the long run?
- A lesson from SNTV lacking in the ongoing project RTBC is that more staff is needed – two staff members follow their respective villages, which entails a lot of work.
- Still, there are communities without schools in riverine areas.

5.1.4 Say No to Violence (SNTV) *versus* Right To Be Child (RTBC)

SNTV was a pilot project in the ten schools constructed by SC Spain and their catchment communities. In contrast, RTBC targets the schools and the attached communities because it became apparent that working with the communities was essential to stop violence against children and to give them their rights. Further, some out-of-school children need more attention.

RTBC focuses on protection and prevention, as did SNTV, but adds positive parenting and play to the project activities.

SC Pujehun learned from SNTV the importance of having a Focal Point (FP) in the communities, which allowed children and other community members to report violations of children's rights. Currently, two FPs in each community, one male and one female respond to the calls. The children selected FPs who received targeted training. Children inform what people they do not want to respond to when they report violations.

Hotline #116 is a toll-free national number with its centre in Freetown, but it refers reported cases to the respective districts. SC Sierra Leone has a toll-free number, #922, for talking with victims and reporting incidents. RTBC provides more support to this aspect than SNTV. Reported cases from Pujehun District are attended by staff of OSC and FSU run by the police.

Staff lamented that SNTV did not work with SRHR. The same applies to RTBC; there is no sexual health component. In RTBC, there is no emphasis on girls on the move, yet still, children, girls and boys alike, travel long and dangerous distances to school, particularly in the rainy season, some on small canoes. RTBC has no support for vulnerable groups of children, and there are some in dire need of help. Sometimes, support is crucial for their continued school attendance. A staff member pointed out that the implementation of CRC did not only depend on "changing people's minds" – material conditions of life also matter.

5.2 Children's Clubs (CCs)

The children had some difficulties listing the difference between SNTV and RTBC; however, they could quickly outline the shared content of these two projects. Typically, they said that SNTV was about "stopping violence against children and giving them their rights." In this context, it is crucial to remember that the younger children we met during the evaluation were not attending school during the implementation of the SNTV project, and the oldest children at that time had left school.

5.2.1 Activities

A member of one of the CCs explained that with the establishment of the club, children started talking together. They also got training from SC Pujehun, which they appreciated. Their main activities within the framework of the SNTV were counteracting violence against children and having them attend school. The children also mentioned other activities that belong to the RTBC project.

Counteracting violence against children is one of the main tasks of CCs. The children outlined several activities they performed to free themselves from violence. “We talk a lot together and learn about no violence, and then we teach others,” said a member. “Teachers should not flog children,” another child argued. Children submit anonymous complaints about rights violations in a particular Suggestion Box in school. There, they reported, for instance, when parents beat them at home. “We can also use the Suggestion Box to thank SC for good work. CC has one out of three keys to open the Box.”

The CCs were also concerned about violence against children in the community: “We do community engagement and talk about stopping violence.” Most meant that the community treated them well. However, it was not always easy; some stubborn adults would not take them seriously. The children agreed that the work to prevent violence was more accessible in the school than in the community. The children were also aware that children should not beat each other, and when that happened, they said they tried to stop the fight.

In case of severe violations of children’s rights, not least sexual violence, children were aware that they could phone #922, #116 or #8060. The most often mentioned was #922, i.e., the SC Sierra Leone number. “Now we phone #922 to report violations; we loan a phone when somebody violates us,” said a child. There were several ways of reporting. Another child explained: “When a child is violated, it should be reported to the headteacher and the village chief, who then takes legal action and warns the perpetrator.” Still, another child informed that in case of serious violence, a child should report first to MSGs: “They report it further and call the 922. MSG helps us a lot.”



Figure 7. *Interview with members of the CC in Kassay.*

Another critical activity mentioned by children in the CCs concerned enrolment in school and prevention of dropouts: “When somebody stops attending school or stays at home, we go to the parents and ask them to send the child to school.” They said most dropouts were orphans, and their caregivers did not care about school. In case of difficulties convincing parents or caretakers to send the child to school, a child explained: “We ask our parents to help, then our parents talk to the caregivers. We advise dropouts to return to school.” In one school, children had, without success, tried to convince a girl who got pregnant to come back to school. In one school, children said they also tried to arrange some supplies to ease the eventual financial burdens of the most vulnerable children. Some children recognised poverty as a common reason for staying out of school, and in some cases, the parents did not support education; they had more faith in agriculture.

In three schools in Pujehun town or its neighbourhood, some children walk long distances to school; in the riverine communities, many children attending schools had to walk or travel by boats or canoes. Children in the CCs recognise SC Pujehun’s support in reducing the associated risks with travel to school. In one school, parents accompanied children crossing rivers to school while MSG helped them to return home. The children were keen to recognise the multifaceted help they received from MSGs: “When a child

is sick, MSG takes them to a health centre. MSG also provides toys, cooks food, cleans the school, and goes to see children who do not come to school.”

5.2.2 Success

In discussions with the children, most argued that before the SNTV project, the teachers were beating them in school. However, the children said the teachers no longer beat them because of their training. They did not doubt that the activities organised by SC Pujehun to fight corporal punishment against children were having the desired impact. “We are happy with SNTV,” a child said, and another argued: “SNTV saves lives. It stops beating of children.” Repeatedly, children said: “Before, there was a lot of beating in school, now it has stopped.”

A child pointed out that “not only parents used to flog children but also other people and the teachers in the school.” While the children recognised that corporal punishment in schools had stopped or at least reduced, they highlighted that such violence was more difficult to eradicate in the community. “We have had training in violence, how to complain when the rights of children are violated. Parents also learn and must accept it. Instead of beating, they take something from us,” a child argued. Some meant that there were parents who did not beat children anymore; they were using another kind of punishment, for instance, taking something attractive from the child.

The children recognised ways to report serious violations. Less severe violations of their rights were reported in the Suggestion Box, for instance, when parents sent them to work during school hours and “when there are some supplies and teachers refuse to give them to them.” They explained that a particular committee would open the suggestion box and that a member of the CC had one of the three keys needed simultaneously to open it.

The children recognised that SC Pujehun supported the training of parents to raise their children properly, which was crucial, and some parents who used to beat them did not do so anymore. A child argued that children who suffer beatings run away from home, and no parent wanted that to happen. Nonetheless, not all parents had stopped, and there was a need for further work.

The second main success was to increase enrolment in school. The children agreed there had been great success in that regard. “Parents have learnt to value schools, and all children attend school now,” a child argued. Another meant that there were no dropouts, thanks to the work done: “All children want to become educated for their own best and the community’s interests.” While happy to claim success in increased enrolment, the children acknowledged that not all children attended school and identified three groups likely to be out of school (Section 5.3.3). The CCs also held that disabled children increasingly attended school; however, there were some challenges: “Disabled children go to school; sometimes they are bullied, something we need to work with” (Section 5.3.3).

The children appreciated the support provided by SC Pujehun, not least the provision of uniforms and school materials. They knew some parents paid for uniforms for some children while SC Pujehun, with MSGs involved, supported others. Children expressed their appreciation of MSGs, groups established by SC Pujehun: “MSG helps a lot; they clean, cook, plant trees and flowers. We children play with them. We report to MSG when something is wrong, and MSG acts.” In one school, MSG took the initiative to seek health care for sick children. Beyond the aims of SNTV, a few children argued that SC Pujehun’s work against child labour and early marriage, activities included in the RTBC project, had also been successful.

5.2.3 Challenges

Despite success in reducing corporal violence against children, particularly in schools, the success was more modest in the community. The only way was to continue talking about the importance of stopping violence against children in the community and seek help from friendly adults willing to support them. Likewise,

violence between children was seen as a less severe problem in the school than in the community: “It is difficult to stop, and we need help from adults to stop it.”

The CCs recognised poverty as a serious and challenging problem; they often asked for business support for their parents; some children did not attend school because of poverty. Further, children also mentioned that not all children went to school because of work; in one school, they meant that this applied more to boys than girls. The children also said some parents “value agriculture more than education.” The CCs members recognised that there were children only attending Arabic schools. Some of these had their parents elsewhere, but children with parents wanting them to attend both Arabic school and the official school had to choose between them because of the overlapping timing of the teaching. A child said: “We will try to work on this issue; we must have the Arabic teacher and the schoolteachers talk together.” In one school, the headteacher explained that the Arabic school teacher in the village collaborated with the government-run school; however, the students did not attend his school on Friday because of prayers.

The children argued that their teachers needed more training and should be supported to become pin-coded; likewise, the school administration should get more training in CRC. All parents did not accept to stop beating children and violate other children’s rights, while others did and, sometimes, they reported violations. They were also concerned about the bullying of disabled children and interpersonal fighting among themselves. A boy wanted a phone to report violations, and a girl asked for menstruation pads. In a school in a semi-urban area, children asked for security and pointed out that there had been a robbery at the school.

Children were concerned about the lack of security during travel to and from school. They wanted more secure boats for those who lived on the other side of the river or the lake and mobility support for those who walked long distances; they all needed rain protection. Many asked for more teaching in sports, sportswear, balls (not least footballs), and cleaning of the field in front of the school for a playground. Searching for natural resources, the “Chinese” had left a deep hole near one of the villages that was full of water, causing security risks for children.

Finally, the children mentioned the lack of maintenance of chairs, school tables and benches, toilets, and water pumps and a need for more classrooms; in some schools, two classes simultaneously use the same classroom. Many asked for help with school materials, including uniforms. The children also mentioned the need for a fence around the school, solar panels, after-school support, and enough food. Many wanted materials to have a school band. Further, the children called attention to the lack of preschools, secondary schools and health centres.

5.3 Mothers Support Groups (MSGs)

Some MSGs had clear ideas about the difference between SNTV and RTBC, explaining that the former focused on violence. At the same time, the latter was concerned with broader challenges in children’s lives and providing children with rights. However, some claimed there was no difference. One member of MSG argued, for instance, that SNTV was about how to raise children without beating them, how to prevent sexual violence and the importance of sending them to school. Another argued that SNTV had helped children and women to have their rights respected.

The MSGs are voluntary groups aiming to benefit the community. They organise themselves, and their work is entirely voluntary. When asked about the motives for volunteering as a member, the answer was always the same: “Because of our children” or “We work for the best of our children.” In short, MSGs “look for the safety of the children so that they suffer no hardship.” The mothers agreed that it was a lot of work, and the list of activities was long. They thank SC for the training on violence against children: “We work with the laws of SC.”

5.3.1 Activities

Within the framework of the SNTV project, fighting violence against children is a priority. The aim was to stop violence against children in schools and the community. MSGs aim to prevent violence. They control the children in the mornings in school and are observant of corporal violence: “We fight violence against children. We come to school and monitor the relationship between the teachers and the children. Teachers should not violate the rights of children.” MSGs also talk about the teachers as collaborators in fighting violence against children. MSGs are also observant when children bully each other and fight: “We interfere when we see children fighting.” They lament that, at times, children tease disabled children: “We try to work against it.” MSGs also visit parents, trying to have them understand the importance of stopping violence against children: “Parents need to be open and treat their children well. SNTV has exposed parents who do not care for children properly – we visit them and talk to them.” They admitted that it was not always easy.

Mothers were also concerned about sexual violence. Another mother argued, “We must work against sexual violence, against rape. Earlier such issues were not disclosed, but now we discuss it more openly.” Sometimes, MSGs report severe violations, mainly sexual violence. “We report in case of rape or severe violation, it can take a week. First, we inform the village chief; after that, we phone and report,” explained one of the members. They remembered all three numbers: #922, #8060 and #116. However, the mothers mention #922 most often. Either the child tells the MSG or their parents, who report or inform the MSG, who subsequently report it to #922. “We do not want the rapist to run away. So, we report it quickly to FSU in Pujehun,” a mother argued. “Children also report themselves,” a mother said. One of the MSGs said that children also use the Suggestion Box to report some violations of their rights, for instance, when parents violate their rights.

A mother explained: “When children report they have been violated at home, we talk with the parents. When we observe violence, we act. The MSG tries to stop it.” Some groups explained that in case of violation, they fined the aggressor 50,000 SLL, money that the chair lady keeps. Another mother said: “In the community, we try to implement the law of SC. Those who break that law are fined SLE 30,000 (~1.25 USD), and the money goes to the village chief,” argued a member of MSG. Another member of MSG explained: “In the community, we fine for violations; when one has been fined, the others do not want to be fined, and that person does not want another fine.”

Another child’s right of priority concerns enrolment in school and avoiding dropouts: “We monitor how children attend school,” said a mother. The MSGs visit the community and talk about school and good relations between teachers and children: “We advise parents that their children go to school, and when children stay at home, we visit the parents and ask them to send the child to school. Some accept what we say, others not.” They informed me that there were Arabic schools in two communities with students from other communities. In one village, a member of the MSG explained: “Here in this village, children go to school, and some do both.”

MSGs are also concerned with children who walk long distances or paddle a canoe to school in the rain. In one school, the parents who are fishermen take them to school, but MSG helps them go back home. A mother described how they dried children’s wet uniforms when caught by rain. They also monitor children’s clothes and uniforms. “In school, we check the children are properly dressed.” explained a mother. Another mother explained: “We provide uniforms. Most parents pay, but SC helps with the task.”

“We look into the needs of children,” a mother said: “We have been trained in how to prevent sexual violence, child labour and how to stop violence against children.” Additional activities include helping with arranging medicine when children are sick, cleaning the school, cooking for the children, and working with teachers on how to take care of children in school.



Figure 8. *Interview with members of the MSG in Messima.*

5.3.2 Success

All the MSGs agreed that the SC project had “benefitted us and our children. It works in giving rights to our children.” The MSGs agree that SNTV is good: “It helps us raise our children.” Many argued that the teachers used to flog children, but because of training, they stopped. Members of the MSGs see themselves as active partners in combating violence against children, or like one mother said: “There is no beating in the school when MSG takes action.” They argued that the implementation of the project had empowered MSGs and parents: “We are happy for the teachers, too, and their relationship with their parents is much better than it used to be. Before SNTV, the school did not show parents and children much respect. Teachers have learnt a lot.”

Combating violence in the community requires more work. “Some parents are stubborn. But people have started to rethink their right to beat children for punishment. Now they threaten children, talk to them, take something from them, or let them go to sleep.” The MSGs observe the community, and some parents collaborate: “For those who refuse, we simply keep on with our work.” A mother warned that parents should remember that abused children run away from home. The MSGs agreed that, thanks to SNTV, domestic violence was reduced in the community. Before SNTV, “we used to beat children. Now, when children report violence to MSGs, we report to the village chief, who contacts the police in Pujehun.” Some parents have realised that beating children makes them stubborn. Thus, they stopped,” explained a mother.

There has also been an awakening regarding sexual violence: “Before SNTV, nobody wanted to disclose sexual violence. All the MSGs know the numbers to report serious violence. “We prefer to use the SC Sierra Leone number #922.”

Members of the MSGs agree that since SNTV, more children have attended school, thanks to the effort done at the community level: “Now, we manage to get them to school.” Now, children attend school. Three reasons were given: First, parents now believe in education; second, food provided by World Food Programme (WFP) in the school is fundamental; and third, there is no more violence. Yet not all children attend school: “Some only attend Arabic school. They stay with the Arabic teachers, and their parents are elsewhere.” A mother argued that all children attended school in the village where the school is situated: “Here we have only one disabled child that has already moved to secondary school.” However, not all disabled children attend school, depending on the severity of disability and the parents’ way of thinking. A mother pointed out that formerly, girls did not want to go to school when they began with menstruation: “Now they know better and keep on with studies.”

MSGs also mentioned less child labour as a success: “Now parents are asked not to let children start work at once when they return from school; they need a little rest after school.” They appreciated having had “a lot of training on the care of children and child labour, allowing us to consider what type of work children

should do, including what children cannot do.” A mother argued: “We only accept less heavy work because we want our children to become better persons tomorrow.”

5.3.3 Challenges

MSGs raised a lot of challenges in securing children’s rights. These challenges directly affected the conditions at the school and in the community. The mothers had benefitted from training provided by SC Pujehun on how to stop violence, but some community members were not happy when told to stop beating children for punishment. The MSGs appreciated SC’s emphasis on training teachers in the Teachers’ Code of Conduct and other community members in CRC. They wanted more training: “We are thankful for the training we have already got, which has made us more open to all this.” It is not always easy to convince parents to stop beating children. Community mobilisation is challenging, and some say: “Who are you to tell me how to raise my child?”

While recognising great success in reducing violence in the schools, more work was needed to combat violence in the community. Most of the MSGs’ preoccupations regarded material conditions and training. In some schools, two classes share classrooms, which made teaching difficult, and there was far too much noise. Further, all mentioned need for qualified pin-coded teachers. They argued that the volunteer teachers still required more support, “particularly the volunteers who come and go.” Six teachers were in one of the schools, and nobody was pin-coded. A mother underlined: “We want all our teachers to be pin-coded. The headteacher, who is pin-coded, has been here for many years, but the others come and go.” One mother meant that SC Pujehun had supported the teachers for three years in “college”, and another underlined that SC should send teachers to “college” for training. An MSG highlighted the need for lodging for the teachers, not least for those from other communities. Most volunteer teachers are males, as noted by one MSG who wanted to have more female teachers.

The mothers frequently raised the issue of the maintenance of infrastructure. Bats were destroying one of the schools, and the foul smell was disturbing. Almost all asked for support to have the school premises fenced, and some mentioned that with electricity, they could use the school for teaching during the evenings. The water pump in almost all the schools did not work, and wells sometimes lacked water. In a couple of villages, the mothers pointed out that the water pump at the school was working, but the community also needed water pumps and latrines. On top of other activities, the MSGs cleaned the school and cooked for the children. Having bigger pots, instead of those they took from home, would spare them a lot of work; likewise, cleaning material would facilitate their work. In one school, a mother mentioned that the children did not come with bowls to eat from: “We walk around and borrow bowls.”

Children’s access to school materials, including uniforms, was a pressing issue. The mothers recognised that certain groups of children were in more vulnerable situations than others, not the least disabled children who needed extra support in school. They also mentioned that orphans needed better care and to be adequately dressed. They urged SC to consider the dire situation of these groups of children; otherwise, they would leave the school. They sometimes lamented that Arabic school students did not attend school. In a few cases, mothers asked for additional food as what they got from WFP was not enough. They would also like more toys, footballs, and a school band for festivities.

All MSGs mentioned the need for better boats to cross the rivers, particularly in the rainy season; a proper boat for the children from the other side of the river was crucial to secure their safety. They also highlighted the need for support for children walking long distances to school. Some children walked up to five hours a day, and many stopped schooling because of the long distances. MSGs asked for raincoats and transport or motorbike support for those from nearby villages. In some villages, many children are out of school because they live on the other side of the river, and parents are afraid of sending them. Mothers noted that there were no preschools in their villages and secondary schools were far away, demanding children to leave their homes far too young.

Some of the challenges mentioned had to do with the community at large. Two MSGs asked for a court building, as seen in other villages. In one of the villages, they had already started the construction. Many asked for a health centre, arguing they had to wait long for a boat when seriously sick. The rainy season was the most difficult in this respect. In one village, a mother said: “There should be some medical care in the school; they should be able to take sick children to care, free of charge.” She pointed out that healthcare for school children was not free: “They call it cost recovery. We want free healthcare for our children.”

Many MSGs asked for support to start a business. “We need income, some business money and farm material,” a mother argued. They complained about the rising prices. They needed corrugated iron roofs to prevent their houses from leaking in the rain. In some MSGs, there were widows without income and unable to fish. MSGs asked for business money for the parents to help them properly care for their children. Finally, one MSG underlined that they wanted action.

5.4 Headteachers and Teachers

The headteachers and the teachers were mostly aware of the differences between SNTV and RTBC; however, some argued that SNTV and RTBC were similar: “Almost the same.” Most meant that while SNTV focused on violence against children, RTBC worked on the rights of the child in a broader sense. A teacher said: “SNTV is about treating children right, no beating, no sexual violence. We teachers have learnt how to educate the children.” A teacher extended the right to be free from abuse in general and sexual violations of women in particular. A headteacher argued that SNTV was about physical and emotional abuse. The headteachers suggested adding economic abuse “suffered by those who cannot pay for their children.”

5.4.1 Support from Save the Children

The headteachers and the teachers were grateful to SC Spain for the schools constructed. A headteacher explained: “The SC has done a lot, lot of things. They built the school and the toilets and trained three volunteer teachers.” Most of the headteachers and the teachers had received training from SC. They had taken part in seminars for teachers and community training. A headteacher recalled having taken part in about seven training sessions. He was happy with the training. They attended training in Pujehun or other central places, where they got accommodation in a guesthouse and the seminars in the District Council Hall. “All the trainings were good,” one teacher argued.

The teachers received various trainings, e.g., on inclusive education, sexual violence, and the Teachers’ Code of Conduct; with support from SC while facilitators from MOBSEE implemented the training.

A teacher pointed out that some teachers had done the teachers’ training but did not have a pin-code. One of the young teachers was unsure if having a pin-code would be possible. Another one explained that he was a volunteer; he was not from the community and was unhappy with his situation, “but there is no other option.” The SC supported him for training with per diem, transport, and accommodation. He had the qualifications but needed to be pin-coded.

Headteachers underlined that SNTV gave information and training about the risks of violence against children. SNTV also helped children travel a long way to school. Children from elsewhere coming to their school were registered, and their families contacted and asked that somebody follow them to school and back home. The children walked four hours a day, and it was not easy to convince the parents. They also got bags, uniforms, and some books.

The headteachers and teachers recognised that SC was central in establishing the MSGs, which are vital for the school, including the women who cook, clean, and care for the children. The CCs are also critical; they have got training from SNTV.

Ten girls on the move got educational materials in one of the schools, e.g., school bags with exercise books, plain sheets, pencils, and geometric circles. The headteacher was grateful for the help the girls got. Another

one said: “The SC has done a LOT, LOT of things. They built the school and the toilets. SC also supported the training of teachers, yet only the headteacher has a pin-code from the MOBSSE. The trained teachers are still to be accredited.”

The headteacher also mentioned that SC supported the school with cleaning materials. SC trained the teachers, aiming to have all teachers with a pin-code. The payments of volunteering teachers varied between schools. “The community pays the teachers. Parents pay Le10,000⁶ (~0,3 USD) per quartile, except during holidays. Yet not all parents can pay. The schools do not get much support from the government, only Le1,600,000 (65-70 USD) each quarter for subsistence, maintenance and part goes to the teacher.” Another headteacher explained: “Parents contribute by paying the volunteers quarterly Le5,000 and something to the headteacher of an individual kind. Quality education should be free for all. The children attend school from age four, and the school feed program (food from WFP) helps.”

5.4.2 Activities

The teachers see themselves as actively implementing the SC’s project, including stopping violence against children in school and the community. “We got training and teach children about violence. We also meet with the community. Some accept what we tell them, others do not. Some have changed their way of treating children, others not. It is a challenge, but we must continue to explain,” a teacher argued. Another teacher provided a similar story: “After training by SNTV, we went to the community to talk with parents about violence, asking them not to beat children.” A headteacher explained: “We talk with parents and ask them not to beat their child like an animal.” A teacher admitted this was difficult: “There are challenges when some parents argue against us.”

A teacher active in the TSC explained that when there is a problem, it mediated between teachers and parents to stop the beating of children: “We also mediate between children who are beating each other.” Teachers found violence between the children to be a problem. “We discuss these issues in class and during lunch hours,” a teacher said.

A headteacher pointed out that SC brought in the idea that there are ways of dealing with misbehaving children other than corporal punishment. They could handle the kids with encouragement and counselling: “This is a process. There might still be some beatings in class, both by pin-coded teachers and volunteers.” If he heard about beatings, he called attention to the teachers and suggested other ways they could apply (Section 5.9.1).

Another activity of teachers concerned with school enrolment: “We ask parents to send their child to school. Sometimes, the parents do not want the child to go to school; sometimes, the child does not want to go to school, sometimes because they have no uniform and feel ashamed.” Nonetheless, a child is allowed to attend school without a uniform.

5.4.3 Success

All headteachers and teachers argued that thanks to the training provided by SC, corporal punishment has almost stopped in schools. A headteacher said: “The SNTV project helped us understand why beating children is not good.” A young volunteer teacher admitted: “I have changed how I think about children and the work; it has changed me.” Another said: “We have changed ourselves. We did some abuse earlier. Abuse is not good.” A teacher underlined that “SNTV educates on how to relate to children. Formerly, we beat them. We used the whip to slash on any part of the body except the head and stomach. Now we have learned how to address such issues and what to do instead of beating.” A teacher said that the project had changed him: “Before, I did not know about CRC. Before SNTV, it was permissible to punish children in school. Now, corporal punishment of children is against the law. We no longer have the whip; the headteacher does not allow that.” A few recently arrived volunteer teachers who did not participate in the

⁶ In 2022, the old leones (SLL) was redominated by three zeros (SLE).

SNTV project recognised its messages and argued that this program was good: “We are against maltreatment of children.”



Figure 9. *Interview with Village Chief, teachers and members of SMC and SSC in Mosineh.*

A headteacher pointed out that SNTVs’ work with sexual violence had also been successful: “Now children or somebody can phone #922 or #116 in case of violations.” Another one meant the helpline was the most important: “People now know about the OSC and the FSU.” The headteachers and teachers also mentioned the Suggestion Box for children to report breaches of their rights without names. According to a headteacher, children report both positive and negative experiences.

Like most other headteachers and teachers, one headteacher held that “violence has stopped in the school. However, some children have difficulties at home. Violence against children is reduced because of the SNTV project.” Instead of beating a child to punish them for misdeeds, one argued: “You can talk to the child and give the task to write something, just to reflect.” A headteacher meant that there were issues facing the community, including corporal punishment and violence, such as rape of girls, forced marriage, teenage pregnancies, and the notion that girls who were developing breasts were ready for sexual relations and marriage: “At first, it was a challenge to address these issues. With consistent messages, people have accepted that beating up children is not how you bring up your child.” Some highlighted that SNTV also increased the awareness of girls’ vulnerability and sexual abuse: “Now we know how to handle it and whom to contact when violations occur.” A teacher meant that before SNTV, children were also more hostile to each other, fighting during lunch hour; this had also decreased. Further, a teacher argued that thanks to SNTV, vulnerable girls faced less bullying. A headteacher meant that disabled children had also benefitted: “Before they were mobbed and marginalised. A child with mental health issues left the class because of bullying but returned to school and gets help.”

Although it was a more significant challenge to counteract abuse of children in the community than in school, some were optimistic and argued there had been improvements. A headteacher claimed: “Children know their rights and responsibilities. The community is also involved; thus, this is a community-led project.” Another headteacher said: “Now, there have been changes. Children are now aware, and they report violations. Several ways can be used to change people’s behaviour – it is a gradual change. Such change is good and not that complicated.”

Headteachers and teachers recognised increased school enrolment, partly explained by the WFP’s provision of food and the school’s child protection activities. In that vein, a teacher argued: “Before the project, the beating was part of the mentality, own thinking. If we could not beat the children, there would be no education. Now they are protected in school.”

5.4.4 Challenges

The headteachers and the teachers recognised that the lack of pin-coded teachers is a huge problem; without teachers, there is no school for children. Volunteer teachers have a complicated situation. Some have gotten

support through SC to become accredited, yet they have not become pin-coded teachers. They ask for more help in training the teachers to earn certificates as teachers, while the pin-code is the government's responsibility. The teachers need salaries, and there are difficulties in raising money among parents to pay the volunteers. In some schools, teachers and community members suggested that staff accommodation would help, not least for volunteer teachers from outside the village. In one village, the community has already started to build housing with three rooms for teachers; however, they lack the funds to finish it.

Headteachers and teachers were concerned about the risks of children travelling to school. The canoes are not secure enough during the rainy season, and children have drowned: "We need more advanced boats than we have today." For those walking, there are threats, like snakebites and other wild animals. They highlighted the increased abuse against girls when travelling. Help with a raingear and bicycles would be good.

In some schools, there are only three classrooms; thus, two classes join in one room, and the classrooms are crowded. They divide the classroom into two parts without walls, and noise makes teaching difficult. A headteacher said: "We need more classrooms, and there is no response from the government." One community has built a new traditional building of local material with two classrooms. The SMC agreed to support the building as part of the emphasis on "leave no one behind".

The teachers reported that enrolment had increased and said almost all the schools were crowded with students, yet there were out-of-school children. In contrast to other schools, a school in a semi-urban area lacked students. All argued that the food provided by WFP to the children in the school had its role in increasing enrolment; however, the food was not enough for all the children.

The teachers frequently raised maintenance of the school facilities as a challenge, and there were requests for direct support from SC. A headteacher said that the government funds came late, and it would be good to have SC bridging the gap: "We need funds for maintenance and repair, e.g., the reeling is roasted with holes that are dangerous to the children." Many mentioned the need to repair the water pump, and one headteacher had estimated the cost to be about Le800,000 (~34 USD). A headteacher confirmed: "The water pump does not function, so children fetch water from the river. The toilet door is roasted."

Lack of electricity is a problem in all the schools. One teacher pointed out it was particularly urgent "before the final examination when the students study a lot." Volunteer Services Overseas (VSO) had supported digital education in a few schools with tablets and a solar panel: "If it breaks down, they repair it."

Security was a challenge, especially in semi-urban schools: "There are thieves who come at night doing damages and steal books, buckets, spades, and the food from WFP." The same school also needed a fence around the school, which was a security issue but also to mark the school premises. A teacher complained about the toilets: "We had a pit latrine, but we had to close it. We need more toilets, and none is specifically for teachers."

There are reports about difficulties arranging sport-related activities: "We have difficulty raising the net for volleyball because of the sand. We have tried to use cement, sand, and palm kernels to stabilise the poles, but in vain." Further, the balls received are destroyed.

Secondary school is lacking. Students who want to study after the first six years must go long distances to Pujehun, and those living in the riverine area must move away from home. After grade 6, there is a national examination for those who want to continue to junior high school. Those who complete continue to the third level of three years in a senior high school. These students take the West African examination to go to university. All students who aim for higher education are in a precarious situation due to a lack of secondary schools.

The headteachers and teachers appreciated the contribution of the MSGs to the functioning of the schools and the well-being of the children. They called for some support for the mothers whose work was voluntary.

They also pointed out the lack of health facilities. One headteacher said: “We are far from the hospital and need a first aid kit, and we need training on how to use it.”

5.5 School Management Committee (SMC) and Safe School Committee (SSC)

A SMC and the SSC members recognised SNTV as a laudable project, which they received with appreciation. They tended to see SNTV and RTBC as the same, yet they recognised the main components of both projects.

5.5.1 Activities of the School Management Committee

There are seven members, males and females, in the SMC, always including the headteacher and often the Village Chief. A headteacher pointed out that SMC had more professional members while more community members were in the SSC. SMCs held various meetings each academic year depending on the school and discussed what it needed to do. In one school, they had meetings twice a year, i.e., at the end of the school year and when the school resumed its work. In another school, there were three meetings yearly: at the beginning, midterm, and end. In still another school, SMC met at least twice quarterly. They discussed the school’s work plan and how it was managed. They faced challenges with delayed funds from the government. In such cases, in one village, the SMC requested a loan with an interest rate from the Village Saving Scheme, directed by one of the members of the SMC, and paid back when the government had provided its due fee. This loan is, e.g., for office equipment, stationery, school register books, etc.

The chairman of one of the SMCs emphasised that it included the village chief: “We work together, very effective work.” The chairman and the Village Chief meet monthly to discuss school issues, such as the school’s fencing: “This has resulted in us planting flowers around the school to demarcate the limits of the premises. They also help the students in the rainy season. We are fully involved in extracurricular activities, sports, athletics, football, and volleyball. We also monitor the WFP food, and that the food is given to the children and that it is enough for all.” Another SMC member described the activities: “We work on school development plans and how to improve learning, and we decide on actions with timelines. We also keep an eye on children of parents who are away; in that case, the children do their own business and do not attend the school.”

SMC members explained that they got training on violence and the importance of school, and then they informed the community. They had attended several SC training sessions, including training on the Teachers’ Code of Conduct with MOBSSE and TSC facilitators: “We meet at the end of the academic year and again when the school resumes its work. Yet, the frequency also depends on need.” Members inform the community on matters of importance for the school and cleaning of premises, and monitor relations between teachers and children, explained a member. The SMC check the teachers, and when children do not come to school, they visit the parents and ask for an explanation. We have organised awareness campaigns attended by many people who appreciated the work. They encouraged school enrolment and informed that education was free and that parents should not abuse their children: “There is a one-to-one approach in the community to inform on what happens, including police actions.” Then, there were specific steps to take to report serious violations.

SMC and SSC work together on specific tasks, such as keeping the school premises clean: “There are risks; thus, we clean the premises and ensure that the children are in school and outside playing. We also look for objects that can harm children and hurt them.”

5.5.2 Activities of the Safe School Committee

According to an SSC member, they interview students, teachers, and parents to identify and list risks. The school would, e.g., need security lights during the night. They also monitor the school premises during holidays to avoid burglary. Another said: “We try to identify risk areas and find a solution. For example, we

called attention to a big hole near the school from the construction period: “We have filled it to avoid accidents.”

SSC members communicate with the children and encourage parents to send them to school. They also monitor the teachers so that they do not beat the children. SSCs secure roads for children from other communities to avoid snakes: “If bitten, children will not come to school.” They also help with crossing points of the river to secure the children on the way to school. They also bring children who do not attend school back to school and talk to parents to encourage them to send their children to school.

A headteacher informed that the SSC had implemented a dress code in his school, the members observed the school, and it functioned like a watchdog. They go around the premises and do risk mapping for safety using SC tools. Children also identify risks. One said that the government also sends censors quarterly to check the schools, i.e., before school starts, one month after the start, and, in total, three times per academic year.

SSC has received training from SC to facilitate their work.

5.5.3 Success

The SMC and SSC members consider SNTV as a successful project. They argued that since it started, teachers had stopped beating children, and parental violence and violence between children had decreased. The SMC member regarded SC’s work as positive: “It is good to relate to children. It promotes unity and love between parents and children.” Another member said: “Physical beating before was not good. It is better to talk with the children. In case of the need for discipline, it is better to let them sit and read, not use the whip.” One said that there had been a case of sexual violence 7-8 years ago: “This has now ceased, and since the project has not occurred.” Still, another SMC member meant that introducing the project to the population was not too difficult, with 200 people signing a contract about not beating children.

In another village, an SMC member explained: “We had problems in the community; there have been cases where parents and caretakers mistreated their children with extreme punishments, smacked them resulting in wounds.” An example given was that of a parent who had put the hand of a child on fire as a punishment. Thanks to interventions supported by SC, SMC evaluation participants claimed such malpractice was reduced or now even non-existent: “We educate the children and community members of risks, such as sexual abuse and violence.”

A member argued that SC had provided the school with play materials (part of RTBC); zipping ropes, games, and volleyballs helped reduce violence during lunch intervals, contributing to play rather than fighting. They also recognised the Suggestion Box as an effective tool in reducing violence: “Parents are afraid their children will report them. We tell them about the helplines and teach them how to call. If they do not have a phone, they borrow one.”

The members of SMC and SSC knew how to report severe violations in #922 and the Family Support Unit of the Police in Pujehun. An SMC member explained: “We must accept not to beat children, and in case of violations, we fine the family.” In case of violations, children borrow a phone and report the incident or report in the Suggestion Box: “Some children do not want the SMC to know and report themselves – we are happy with that.”

The members of SMC and SSC also recognised that formerly, the parents did not accept the importance of education, as they did not value education and training. While acknowledging a few out-of-school children, a member stated: “Now children attend school, also disabled ones.”

All committee members were concerned about children travelling to school, particularly in the riverine communities: “There are risks as we are surrounded by water. Water comes close to the fence in the rainy season.” In one village, they had established a FP in each of the five communities using the same school, ensuring the children were safe when they went to school.

5.5.4 Challenges

Travel to school and back home is risky for many children. Children come paddling on canoes in the riverine communities: “We have only small boats. We need modern types of boats during the rainy season.” The evaluation participants said support was needed for those walking long distances; they needed raincoats and transport. In one village, the Chinese made a borehole 10 feet deep: “The borehole is a risk for children.” A nearby secondary school was lacking for those who wanted to continue their studies beyond class 6.

The situation of the volunteer teachers is problematic: “We advocate for volunteers who lack salaries. The project should provide funds to the teachers.” A SMC member expressed his satisfaction with the school building, “but we need accommodation for the teachers. Feeding them is also challenging; they cannot have the WFP food.” SC had trained some teachers, but becoming a pin-coded teacher was difficult: “To keep the teachers, we suggested the parents pay Le10,000/child/quarter (~0.42 USD). This situation was difficult. We only received Le250,000 (~10 USD). People did not pay, and the teachers went on strike.”

Many mentioned the need to fence off the school. “People come in and damage things; latrines are open, people come, locks are destroyed, we need security for the premises.” One SSC member in a semiurban community argued: “Where the children are playing, the motorbikes are driving. As a last resort, the MSGs planted flowers to mark the size of the premises. Other issues mentioned were bigger pots for cooking the school meals: “MSG members take their pots from home, but these are small when cooking for many children.” One SMC member mentioned the lack of a school band, which children had requested, in an anonymous letter in the Suggestion Box.

The evaluation participants said there was a need for more classrooms in some schools that used the same classrooms for two classes simultaneously. In contrast, one school in a semiurban area wanted to enrol more students: “We talk to parents, but there are five other primary schools in the area, and the parents can choose.” Members pointed out the school lacked electricity or solar panels, and maintenance was urgent. Water pumps were not always working properly, which resulted in a lack of drinking water. Lack of water also affected the toilets.

While recognising girls as a vulnerable group, the SMC/SSC members were concerned about other vulnerable children independent of gender, including orphans and children with a disability, who needed support. Some also mentioned the need for business money or income-generating activities: “We are a poor community; there is no money, and we have water around us, but there is no business. We need business money.” One member asked for a formal building for the village court. Finally, an SSC member asked that SC would continue and extend their work.

5.6 Focal Points (FPs)

Establishing FPs was a lesson learned from the SNTV. Those responsible are usually one male and one female and teachers. They have received special training on the site and some outside the community: “We liked it very much, good training”, and it also helped them shift their attention to the community. Also, they became more aware of ongoing violence among the children themselves and how to address it.

If FPs were aware of child abuse in the school or the community, they find the appropriate reporting channels, e.g., to the headteacher, VC, SMC, and the toll-free lines. One raised the issue of so-called “secret societies”, i.e., initiation rites for girls. By national law, girls cannot marry before 18 years of age: “It was a problem before, but not anymore.” One reported a recent case of sexual abuse of a 12-year-old girl by an 18-19-year-old boy in the community. He was reported to the police and got a jail sentence.

FPs are responsible for children’s play, organised within the school hour, mostly at lunchtime, about 40-90 min each time. They educate them on using the toys provided and the rules of different plays. Games

mentioned include six-cup games, zipping rope, adjai, jump cross lines, football, play with stones, Zero to 24 and alphabet games.

The FPs lamented the lack of financial support and highlighted the lack of small balls to properly divide the children into teams, team shirts and better playing grounds. The need for basketball was also frequently mentioned. The maintenance of the materials poses a problem as the environment is harsh on the materials, and the balls get easily destroyed. They also echoed the children, calling for a school band.

5.7 Local authorities

During the field visit, we met village chiefs in all the villages (one was the Area Chief in Pujehun town) and one Paramount Chief (PMC), i.e. one responsible for one of the 14 Chiefdoms in Pujehun District.

5.7.1 Paramount Chief (PMC)

The PMC appreciates SC's work as it benefits children in the community and the school: "It is important for children. I am happy to have them as partners, but we need more." For example, the PMC wonders why SC only supports one of two schools in one of the communities under the PMC's responsibility.

According to the PMC, SNTV and RTBC emphasise positive parenting. Nonetheless, the PMC acknowledges that some parents have complained about project activities. For them, disciplining children is a cultural issue and the parents' responsibility. The PMC emphasised: "You must be correct when raising your children. Yet, at times, they need to be disciplined, like standing or kneeling, but they should neither be hurt nor killed."

The PMC emphasised: "Teachers cannot beat children; some did that before, but now they have stopped the practice." Likewise, people understand many vulnerable children are living in the communities: "Initially, when the project started, we said there were no vulnerable children in our community. Now we understand there are many. Things were happening that we didn't like." The PMC mentioned violence, theft, and adults abusing children and older children (>15 years): "We are happy that the project came to help us in this situation, and it has now improved. We have taken part in seminars and the sensitisation work." Further, the project calls people together, which is excellent. SC has brought the notion of CRC to our community. "Now people in the village know – both boys and girls have rights."

The PMC pointed out a lack of preschool in the communities and a need for more schools: "We have two primary schools in the village and a secondary school, but the junior high school building is broken down." Thus, there is no junior high school (for those aged 13-15) in the village, and the children must walk 6-7 miles to attend secondary school: "While walking, there are accidents, e.g., motorbikes, cars, or snakebites. There are also reports that girls have been sexually abused on their way to school." Additionally, child pregnancies have been a problem, and substance abuse among young people is a recognised challenge, including Kush (cannabis): "There is much poverty in the village, and we need funds. It is a difficult task to raise children." Finally, the PMC thanked for the support provided: "We appreciate the support we get."

5.5.2 Village Chiefs (VCs)

In most communities visited, the Village Chiefs (VCs) participated in the SMCs and/or SSCs. They recognised that SC Spain had initially supported SC to build schools in their community. Later, SC introduced SNTV and RTBC, which did not feel strange despite one working on infrastructure strengthening while the other two focused on changing the behaviour of parents and other adults towards children: "There is not much difference between these two projects." Both are doing good things in their respective communities. SNTV teaches us children's rights and encourages them to go to school: "It is their right." They had participated in seminars organised by SC, either in their village or centrally in the District, and sensitisation work.

The VCs said that things were happening in their respective communities they did not like before the project started, such as violence, abuse, stealing, and adults taking advantage of older children (aged 15+). The situation is now different: “We are happy the project came to help us. Children should not be victims of violence. Our role is to protect them.” One said he had been beaten as a child by an adult. He would not want children in his community to suffer the same abuse he had experienced.

The VCs said the project has brought the community together towards a common cause of having children attending school: “We are pleased about the project activities.” Before it was launched, we were “in darkness” about human and children’s rights. The project has changed that and the way we take care of our children. “Both boys and girls have rights.” We were beating children, but now that is less frequent. Children also fought among themselves. Compared to before, children get the best and most nutritious food, not the father or mother, and they even have “quality time” with their families.

Some were against the activities in the beginning, and said: “I bring up my children.” People now understand the importance of what the project is doing. There is less beating of children in the community; nonetheless, people know there are “stubborn people.”

The construction of a school in the community has resulted in children attending and coming from within the school’s catchment area: “Now all children attend school.” Before the project, teachers were beating children, and children did not want to go to school, but teachers’ beating of children does not happen anymore: “The community has been moulded in this way to change behaviour.”

VCs mentioned the ability to recognise vulnerable children as a success of the SC work. Before the project activities, we had the idea that there were no vulnerable children in our community: “Now we understand that there are many.” Vulnerable children are those with physical challenges, mental health problems, disability and suffering from diverse health issues, e.g., sight and hearing: “In our community, a girl aged 14 has a problem speaking clearly.” In one instance, a VC reported that there was a Village Saving Association from which they had taken loans to assist vulnerable children.

If there is a problem, the VC is informed, e.g., regarding beatings of school-attending children. “If I hear about the beating of children, we talk to those involved and even fine them if parents do not change their behaviour. The Suggestion Box helps, as well as the toll-free numbers, in fighting violence in the school and the community. The VCs also emphasise there are bylaws to engage in what is right or wrong regarding child upbringing in their respective communities. They understood beating or shouting bad words affected children’s learning.

Some VCs called attention to the fact that some schools are congested with too many children. Some schools also need maintenance work. There is a lack of teachers, and there is a lack of accommodation facilities for them. The WASH facilities must be repaired, i.e., the water pump and latrines. They also lamented the lack of junior high schools and secondary schools.

Travelling to school was a frequently raised issue. Children must walk long distances to reach school; some even arrive on small canoes with a high risk of capsizing. There are also reports of children who have drowned on their way to school, e.g., one 7-8-year-old girl as recently as last September 2023, and another one in 2021: “We need lifejackets for the children who cross the river.” Some requested first-aid kits for the school because “children get fewer.” Without a health centre or hospital, it is difficult not to be able to help.

Finally, the VCs highlighted the pervasive poverty in the communities and their need for livelihood support. At the same time, they expressed appreciation for what SC was doing in their respective communities.

5.8 Other interviewees

5.8.1 Non-participating school

One of the villages had two primary schools, and one had not benefitted from the SC project activities. Teachers from that school emphasised that there was a lot of violence in the country; most important was domestic violence. They did not use beatings in the classroom. They said it was good to have a project to fight violence. Yet, the teachers felt marginalised as they were not included in the SC project work: “We were surprised. We hear a lot about the project.” Irrespective, they know children’s rights and have material on violence that the government has provided, and they adopted it in December 2022. Further, they attended United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the FSU workshops.

5.8.2 Preschool

During the field visit, we interviewed two teachers in a preschool near one of the ten SC-supported schools. They cared for 30 children aged 3-5 years, supported by one assistant. They used the play method in their work, e.g., singing, dancing, and playing. Some parents complained because they wanted their children to sit, study, and learn the alphabet.

The preschool teachers said they knew nothing about SNTV and had never heard about CRC. Irrespective, they never use violence against the children in their care: “We can deal with misconduct differently, e.g., by having the children calm down.”

5.8.3 Health staff

During the field visit, we visited community health posts in three target school communities; in one, both health staff were away on training—community members who had left built these posts to support their community. One of the three posts had pin-coded nurses; the others were volunteer nurses. In addition to the community members where they lived, they attended to the healthcare needs of people in the catchment area communities, some about five miles away, including deliveries and childhood vaccinations.

The nurses knew about the SNTV and RTBC, but SC Pujehun had never invited them to participate in training sessions despite their interest. They only saw posters, banners, and flyers on the project activities.

One of the nurses said she had not attended to a child who was seeking care following violence. However, she knew of substance abuse, e.g., Jamba, but then outside the village in the bush. There was also some alcohol drinking.

5.9 Themes

The following two themes emerged because of project activities. We want to highlight them, particularly with a summary of interviewees’ understanding of dealing with children with behavioural problems when corporal punishment is excluded as a disciplinary method and how to understand the term girls on the move and vulnerability.

5.9.1 Alternative punishment

While the interviewees were involved in preventing violence against children, not the least corporal punishment and overall protection of children, most admitted it was not always easy to change the minds of community members. Why should they stop beating a misbehaving child? How should they raise their children if they are not allowed to punish them for bad behaviour?

MSG members mentioned increased stubbornness, still worse behaviour, and running away from home as adverse effects of corporal punishment. A child highlighted that beatings could kill children.

MSGs, teachers, and SMC/SSC members several times mentioned that parents could take food away from their children. In one of the villages, children said parents did so increasingly, but they had complained, and it stopped. Two MSG members commented that instead of beating, parents gave “two spoons of food

instead of three.” They also mentioned that parents would tell the child to go to sleep or calm down. Still, members of the MSG and SMC/SSC meant that an alternative to beating was to take something attractive from a misbehaving child. A member of a MSG explained that it was much more painful not to be allowed to go out and play with friends than to be beaten.

The mothers in one of the groups believed in parental encouragement instead of flogging. “Encouragement is most important,” one argued. The SMC and SSC members, concerned with punishment in school, also recommended talking to the children, and one of them said: “You should engage with the children, talk to them; that is the best option. You can also give them a task, writing down something to correct.” They also point out that some children are stubborn, “but if they play football, they stop and do not need punishment.” Another said: “You let them sit. “And another argued: “You can give them a task, writing down something to correct.” A headteacher commented: “If they are working with stubborn children, they call them up in front of the class.” A teacher argued they had stopped using the whip: “It was not good. In the case of stubborn children, we call on them in front of the class and repeat what the teachers have been teaching; they are also asked to write their name on the board several times.”

5.9.2 Girls on the move and vulnerability

There was confusion regarding the concept of girls on the move, and its implementation caused discontent and a feeling of unfairness. Those who recognised the term argued almost entirely that the idea embraced girls travelling from a neighbouring community to the school. In line with that, a teacher said: “Those are the ones who come from the neighbouring communities on their way to school.” Another teacher argued: “Some children walk 1-3 hours to come to school, and again when returning; they all need support.”

A few mentioned more long-term migrations from a village as characteristic of the girls on the move. A nurse said the girls on the move headed for Pujehun. Likewise, a member of the SMC said: “Girls on the move come from far-away communities and need help to some extent, counselling, and guidance. These girls are a responsibility of the MSG.” Nonetheless, no member of the MSGs mentioned that responsibility, despite being systematically asked about their activities of importance for the project, yet the lists of activities were long.

According to a teacher, “there was dissatisfaction with how SC distributed the educational materials. Some received materials, while others did not. There were not enough bags.” Another one argued that the girls were prioritised based on SCs definition of their vulnerability: “There is no difference between boys and girls. Yet, all the girls were supported while only a few of the most vulnerable boys identified by the SC got something.” Staff told those who did not get anything to wait until the next round: “They understand that those who are vulnerable need to come first.” Likewise, a headteacher pointed out that SNTV was a one-year pilot project, an answer also forwarded by SC staff in Pujehun.

While the concept of girls on the move tended to be unnoticed, misunderstood or cause some tension, awareness about children’s uneven level of vulnerability was noticeable. Interviewees, including children, were concerned about children who dropped out or did not attend school. According to one of the headteachers, additional vulnerabilities to gender included health problems, visual impairments, and mental health issues. SMC/SSC and MSGs were concerned about orphans and children with a disability which needed support.

The project activities resulted in new thinking about vulnerability. A member of SSC argued there was a lot of vulnerable children: “In this village, they are 12. One has a hand problem; another has eyesight and other visual impairments. One girl in class has difficulties in hearing and cannot speak.” A SMC member said: “There are vulnerable children to whom SC provided school materials as part of the project BFC. There were criteria: orphans, disability and children who must go long distances to school.” Another SMC member reflected about disabled children: “Some have hearing or visual issues; for others, there are problems with mental health or epilepsy.”

The children were also concerned about disabled children and poverty, arguing that some children did not attend school because of poverty; also, there were children, more so boys than girls, who must work for the survival of their families. Likewise, the PMC, MSGs, and VCs admitted they had realised that many children living in their communities were vulnerable for various reasons.

5.10 Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs (MOGCA), Pujehun

OSC in Pujehun town is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs (MOGCA). The OSC works with sexual abuse cases in all the Chiefdoms in the Pujehun District. It has good working relations with SC staff in the Pujehun Field Office, including partner meetings: "Both work for Sierra Leone children to be successful in life." OSC staff has participated in training sessions organised by SC Pujehun but have also been facilitators. SNTV project work was coordinated with OSC, as both support children less than 18 years of age who have been sexually abused.

Staff informed that the toll-free hotlines are functional. Each new report to the hotlines is referred to respective district directors before reaching the OSC. Sexual abuse cases may be referred directly to the OSC, or cases emerge first after contacting the FSU of the police. In the first six months of 2023, the OSC has worked on 63 cases, primarily girls, who had been sexually harassed or raped with sexual penetration. There is no information on whether SC Pujehun's work in the ten targeted schools and the attached communities has had an impact on the number of cases of sexual abuse.

When a victim seeks services, OSC staff emphasises a welcoming attitude and offers both psychosocial and medical services. A midwife from the government hospital in Pujehun town provides the services; staff of OSC may also become involved as one staff member is a nurse/midwife, and one is a social worker. They closely watch victims' body language, make them feel comfortable, offer medical examinations, and give them food and clothes. Later, there is a follow-up by a doctor or nurse/midwife. At times, the victim is admitted to the hospital if the victim is not living in a safe place.

Staff highlighted that in addition to SC Pujehun, they work with World Vision and Street Children of Sierra Leone, a national NGO, on SGBV and sexually abused victims. These organisations support victims with transport, food, clothing, dignity pads and toiletries. OSC staff also emphasised they did not go to the victims' communities because, in such a case, the victims might never return to seek services.

Early marriage in Sierra Leone is a problem, particularly in some rural communities. The Government now forbids girls younger than 18 years to marry, and early marriage is classified as rape.⁷ However, most of these cases are resolved in the communities without intervention by the OSC staff.

The staff of OSC would like to get more support from SC Pujehun, which is only working in four out of 14 Chiefdoms in the District. They would like to provide victims with temporary shelter in Pujehun town to stay for up to 90 days following the abuse. The victims need financial support, first temporarily, then long-term, and must be encouraged and supported to attend school.

OSC staff would like to see SC Pujehun help them with equipment (e.g., computers), support for community sensitisation activities, and monitoring with monthly reports.

5.11 Ministry of Basic, Secondary and Senior Education (MOBSSE), Pujehun town

Interview with Mr Alimany Kamara, Deputy-Director of Education, Pujehun District. Mr Kamara has an extensive track record of working in Sierra Leone's education sector and has worked in Pujehun District since 2013.

⁷ Data from Unicef (2022) indicate that 8.6% of girls marry before reaching 15 years of age and 21.0% before the age of 18.(17)

Mr Kamara said he was pleased with SC's work in Pujehun: "SC is doing marvellous work. They have reached out to the most distant and difficult villages. Working with these villages is laudable, doing something others are not ready to do."

Mr Kamara participated in meetings with SC Pujehun, and it informed him and his staff at every level of the project implementation. SC are cordial in informing and updating their work. He appreciated the collaboration, which significantly impacted the target communities. He had visited one of them (Kassay) and witnessed what they were doing for the communities.

Mr Kamara pointed out that several partners are working with MOBSSE. One example is a new project, Global Partnership for Education (GPE). It is to provide 2m-5m USD for maintaining educational infrastructure in Sierra Leone; for 2022, 33 schools enjoyed support compared to 19 schools in 2023.

Mr Kamara emphasised it was an excellent investment to train volunteer teachers to have teachers' certificates, even if they could not get pin-coded immediately at completion.

Finally, Mr Kamara informed that MOBSEE needed support, including implementing their educational program according to timelines: "We have no funds and need a partner to collaborate with us."

5.12 Family Support Unit (FSU), Pujehun town

FSU is a unit within the Police in Pujehun District responsible for 12 out of 14 Chiefdoms. The staff emphasised that the unit was a law enforcement agency that informs people about national and international laws on children's rights.

FSU is responsible for cases of domestic violence, including SGBV. There are about 7-8 cases per month; of those, five to six are sexual abuse cases. The Line Manager attends to the reported case of sexual abuse, writes a report, and issues a medical request form for OSC. There is a good collaboration between these two governmental entities, and OSC reports on referred cases. Yet not all cases are reported to the FSU. Some of the reported cases have reached the High Court of Sierra Leone.

Staff informed us they had participated in training sessions run by SC Pujehun and one had also been a facilitator. They also know about the SNTV and RTBC projects.

The staff lamented their working conditions. The unit was not child-friendly, and the office lacked all the equipment to run correctly in sensitive cases concerning people's right to privacy. For example, they must go to a commercial provider to photocopy legal documents. Further, there is a lack of vehicles and motorbikes. Thus, there are accounts of support from SC for, e.g., transport costs. However, SC staff never accompanies the police to the homes of victims or visits their communities escorted by the police. In a final plea, the staff highlighted the need for a new Child House and Counselling.

6 Evaluation Questions

The TOR (Annex 1) identified five evaluation domains linked to evaluation questions the Collaborating Partners expected the evaluator to consider; the classical domain of 'Impact' was deliberately excluded, considering the short-term context of SNTV. Below is our discussion of the five domains outlined in the TOR and related evaluation questions, based on our findings during the field visit (Chapter 5).

6.1 Relevance

Was the project in line with the needs of the target group?

Building schools in the target communities as part of the BFC project laid the foundation to implement a project of the nature of SNTV. It transformed the possibilities for children in distant rural communities to access education, at least in eight of the ten school communities that had no proper infrastructure before

that project.⁸ Most of the teachers were not pin-coded, i.e., certified teachers on government payroll; thus, they were volunteers with minimal training in teaching. There are reports that initially, the school environment was characterised by physical beatings, including using the whip, in the classroom. Through local and more central training sessions, e.g., in Pujehun town, the teachers and volunteers all confirmed the importance of the project activities to increase their and the community's awareness of the negative consequences for children who experience beating. They were pleased with the training.

To sum up, the SNTV addressed an emerging problem in the newly built schools with teachers using physical violence to discipline attending children.

Did the project harmonize with authorities' priorities in Sierra Leone, SC Iceland's policy and priorities in Icelandic development cooperation?

As reported elsewhere (Section 3.8), the project activities harmonise with Iceland's Development Policy, emphasising safety, power, and control over one's situation. It also aligns with the policy of the SC Sierra Leone office on children's safety, education, and protection. The project is also guided by an emphasis on human rights, children's rights, gender and identified groups of vulnerability. All the components are evident in the project document and the implemented work in the target school communities.

During the implementation of project activities, there has been a great emphasis on informing all the stakeholders in the communities, i.e., teachers and members of the CCs, MSGs, SMCs, and SSCs, as well as traditional leadership and the community at large, about children's rights and their right to live a life free of violence. From our discussion with children, they are also outspoken about their rights, particularly their right to education. They were also clear that they did not like to be beaten in class or at home. According to them, violence had declined in the school while it was still a problem at home. Community members also expressed similar sentiments. The teachers also agreed that the project activities had changed their way of handling disciplinary issues in class, avoiding physical punishment of the students.

To sum up, it can be concluded that the support given is in harmony with the policies of the collaborating partners.

Were the actions and results in line with the project goals?

The overall objective of the pilot was to ensure that girls and boys of school-going age, including girls on the move, were safe and protected from violence, such as SGBV, in and around schools. These goals were linked to three specific results and 19 specific activities to be implemented, here discussed separately under its expected results.

Results 1

- Activity 1.1. *Use Safe Schools Context Analysis Tool in the ten target communities.*

Members of the SSCs all told us about their work to improve the safety in and around the school. However, evaluation participants did not recognise any specific tool to use in this work. Instead, the SSC members cleaned the school compound as needed, identified risks for children, and acted on those. For example, they filled the holes in the school premises, cleaned the bush to help the children who had long distances to school to avoid snakebites, and identified persons from communities in the school's catchment area to follow their children to school. They took this role seriously, as there were reports of snakebites and drowning of children on their way to school.

- Activity 1.2. *Conduct awareness-raising events and workshops with duty bearers on harmful traditional practices and norms that affect children in the community, with a specific focus on those affecting girls and SGBV and identification of girls on the move.*

⁸ The Pujehun town has several alternatives for children to attend school. In Blaama Massaquoi there was another school (Catholic), while there was no proper school infrastructure in Sorbeh-Grima before the BFC.

Numerous reports show that this activity was implemented by the project staff as expected.

- Activity 1.3. *Create linkages with existing projects to enrol girls on the move within the selection criteria age into schools.*

The girls on the move concept was unclear for the interviewees and probably irrelevant in the project implementation setting. We did not identify any linkages with existing projects on this issue.

- Activity 1.4. *Review and strengthen existing child friendly feedback mechanisms, referral pathways and reporting structures for child protection and SGBV cases.*

There are numerous reports that project staff implemented this activity as expected. Children reported satisfaction with the Suggestion Boxes, and they and other community members recognised reporting channels for SGBV, including the toll-free numbers #922, #116 and #8060. They were also frequently seen in most communities; many cited these three numbers by heart.

- Activity 1.5. *Review and support community-based child welfare committees, led by women, with men supporting and girls and boys engaging as appropriate.*

In contrast to the baseline study, there is plenty of evidence that community committees such as CCs, MSGs, and SMCs are functional and active in all the communities. The committee members we spoke with were all engaged and verbal about their work in the committees, conscious of success but also needs, and expressed a sincere willingness to contribute to the wellbeing of their respective communities. SC staff has also given appropriate support to the committee members.

- Activity 1.6. *Engage parents/caregivers of girls on the move via positive parenting sessions to raise awareness on the protection, educational and appropriate care needs/support for girls on the move.*

Accounts by interviewees confirm that many sessions were held in the communities to raise awareness of violence against children, child protection and children's educational needs, including sessions on positive parenting. However, the support for girls on the move was not as well targeted as expected, one reason being the unclear definition of the concept. Also, out of 252 identified girls on the move, only 70 got some support with educational materials due to a lack of funds. Community members also felt the distribution was unfair, leaving out children (boys and girls/families) who should have benefited from such support. For staff, the distribution was personally challenging, leaving them feeling unfair and unable to act appropriately.

- Activity 1.7. *Engage women's groups, local authorities and community volunteers on the protection of girls on the move against violence, and abuses.*

Our interviewees gave numerous accounts of initiatives to increase awareness of child protection, but not particularly to girls on the move. Once again, this is partly explained by the diffuse concept of girls on the move.

To sum up, in line with Results 1, there were systems/structures for school safety, child protection and prevention of violence against children in place, and these had been developed and supported, as described above (Activity 1.1-1.7)

Results 2

- Activity 2.1 *Review and support Safe Schools Committees with children, parents and teachers using existing school structures, with an equal gender representation.*

In all our interviews with community members, irrespective of their participation in the formal school committees or traditional leaders, all reported initiatives to make children's attendance at school safe. There had been initiatives to clean the school compound, clear bushes to protect children on their way to school (e.g., from snakebites) and help them cross the river on boats. All

accounts on the work of the SSCs gave evidence of genuine engagement in the safety of school-attending children.

- Activity 2.2 *Conduct participatory risk and capacity mapping, including participatory mapping with girls and boys.*

We did not hear any particular accounts of systematic participatory risk and capacity mapping. Yet, the school committees worked together to secure the safety of children and identified several settings of risk, followed by action to remediate the situation to the degree possible for them (e.g. see picture on the front page of the report). All were verbal on the task and engaged to protect school children from harm, both boys and girls.

- Activity 2.3 *Update and implement risk-informed school improvement plans, with a specific focus on enhancing the protection of girls and preventing SGBV.*

We are unaware of risk-informed school improvement plans to protect girls from SGBV. Nonetheless, all we spoke to were keen to protect children, particularly girls, from such experiences. Most reported no cases of such abuse in their communities. Nonetheless, evaluation participants talked about sexual abuse cases, and at least one led to arrest and jail sentence for the perpetrator. People also gave evidence to recognise the formal reporting channels for suspected cases. They were also aware that girls were most at risk, while they admitted that boys also experience sexual abuse.

We met professionals at the OSC of MOGC and the FSU who informed us about addressing reported cases. Mainly, OSC had appropriate mechanisms to help victims. In contrast, the FSU, as a department within the police, said they only filled in the requested forms in preparation for an eventual further judicial process; they complained about a lack of staff and office space to attend to children who reported sexual abuse correctly.

- Activity 2.4 *Provide capacity building to teachers and school administration on the Code of Conduct.*

There are numerous accounts from teachers, pin-coded or voluntary that SC staff had held such sessions. They were much appreciated and facilitated by professionals from the MOBSSE and TSC.

- Activity 2.5 *Update/create school-based reporting and referral mechanisms, including identification of SGBV focal points.*

In the communities, we identified FPs of both sexes at work. Those we talked to were well-oriented on the issue and appropriate reporting channels.

- Activity 2.6. *Train teachers and SMC members to understand the protection and educational needs of girls on the move including protection against violence in schools.*

This activity suffered from a clear definition of girls on the move. What can be confirmed is that the teachers with whom we talked, and the SMC members, were well aware of the problem of sexual abuse and domestic violence and took it seriously. We were also made aware of early child marriage, i.e., marriage before the age of 18, now by law prohibited in Sierra Leone. The evaluation participants told us that this did not happen any more in the communities we visited. Of additional interest is that the OSC highlighted on its door that child marriage was to be considered a rape.

To sum up, in line with Results 2, we have evidence that children, school administration, teachers and parents are genuinely engaged in school safety management, as spelt out (Activities 2.1-2.6). Further, those we met and talked to expressed knowledge of and concern for protecting children from sexual violence. That applies also to children coming from neighbouring communities to attend school.

Results 3

- Activity 3.1 *Train teachers on child rights, risk management and safety, violence awareness and prevention, egalitarian gender norms and positive discipline, reporting and referral mechanisms.*

Numerous teachers have received training in children's rights, risk and safety management, and violence awareness. They were also outspoken on the importance of gender equality and the importance of using non-violent disciplinary practices in school.

- Activity 3.2 *Train girls and boys on child rights, risk management and safety, violence awareness and prevention, egalitarian gender norms and positive discipline, reporting and referral mechanisms.*

The children we met talked about child rights and safety issues. They were also aware that they should be protected against violence, both in school as well as at home. Children told us about incidents of violence at home. At the same time, they confirmed that violence in school was rare yet had not disappeared in all the schools.

- Activity 3.3 *Create and support girls' and boys' clubs in target schools, including social and emotional learning.*

There are numerous accounts that children have received diverse support in the ten target communities through the CCs. They showed genuine interest in the well-being of schoolmates and understood that some children lived under more financial and/or social constraints than others and wanted to do something about it.

- Activity 3.4 *Create safer social connections or networks for girls on the move integration into children's clubs in school / community and empower them to understand their rights.*

This activity suffered from the vague definition of the girls-on-the-move concept.

- Activity 3.5 *Use the Bellanet approach to conduct activities in girls and boys clubs.*

This activity was not implemented as planned in the project proposal for SNTV.

- Activity 3.6. *Conduct local/district advocacy on the protection, care support and educational needs for girls on the move among local council authorities, line Ministries and service providers.*

This activity suffered from a clear definition of girls on the move.

To sum up, in line with Results 3 (Activities 3.1-3.3), there is clear evidence that community members are aware of the importance of safety in school and do something about it. They are also verbal on the importance of preventive actions against sexual violence and at ease when informing of available reporting channels, including the children. Activities 3.4-3.6 were not implemented as planned.

What lessons can be learned from the project for future work?

An important lesson for future work is that implementing a project aiming to change people's minds to increase knowledge of and respect for children's rights and their right to a life without violence is difficult without attention to the physical infrastructure of the school setting. The project benefitted greatly from the work of BFC, with new school buildings and WASH facilities. For the community members, they do not make a distinction between funds from Spain or Iceland. Nonetheless, they recognise the concepts of SNTV and RTBC, and some can even tell the difference; yet they told us these two projects are more or less the same, with the latter more focused on play and protection than SNTV. For them, this is the same project run by the SC Pujehun Field Office and launched with much-needed construction work. Thus, BFC paved the way for the village children to enjoy their right to quality education. A natural next step was to support teachers in engaging in a non-violent manner with their pupils. It is in this context the project SNTV stepped in. New structures reinforced the message of the right of children to attend class without suffering physical beatings by teachers. This new emphasis of SC Pujehun was supported with appreciated training sessions; some said they had participated in "many, many good training sessions". Evaluation

participants universally lauded the work as an excellent, “a very good project”, and people appreciated what SC Pujehun had for their community.

That said, there are worries about maintenance issues and the wear-down of infrastructure. The climate is challenging; many children are in each class, and school benches wear down quickly. Most latrines are in good shape, while some need minor maintenance. The water pumps are in dire need of repair. The same applies to the material given to each school to foster children’s play. One lesson learned is that this needs attention. Thus, a physical inspection is necessary, and a work plan for maintenance needs to be elaborated. In some cases, community members could do some maintenance work. Yet, that should not be seen as voluntary community work but instead as a paid input to reinforce people’s livelihood in their villages.

Another lesson learned is the distribution of educational materials needs revision. Evidently, despite efforts to distribute a limited quantity of educational materials (uniforms, bags, pens, paper, geometrics, etc.) with a keen eye on those most vulnerable, the emphasis on girls on the move, an ill-defined concept in the setting, was not well received. Nobody can define the concept differently than children attending school from neighbouring communities. Evaluation participants pointed out that some boys were also vulnerable, and interviewees called our attention to this issue, including children. One potential solution would be to give all children educational materials when they start school or start in grade 2 as a price for completing the first school year and to stimulate their studies. Further, a new round of distribution might be for those who start grade 4 or five. These are issues that need further discussion within SC Sierra Leone.

To sum up, lessons learned relate to maintaining infrastructures constructed by SC Sierra Leone. There is no way the community members can support the associated costs, either with voluntary community work or their own funds.

To what extent was the project’s design suitable for meeting the needs of key stakeholders and beneficiaries?

Based on our findings, detailed in Section 5, the project was, to some extent, meeting the needs of the key stakeholders and beneficiaries. First, the new schools in the ten communities and their emphasis on training teachers to become pin-coded, funded by SC Spain, were well received. Second, the project SNTV fitted well into the new school setting and ongoing discussion in Sierra Leone to make corporal punishment against children forbidden under the law (Section 6.2). In 2023, the Government has prohibited the practice in schools by law, and work is underway to ban it in other settings as well. Third, all those interviewed talked eloquently about the importance of child protection, engagement with children, support for those in need and overall, the priority for children to be protected from violence. Finally, the project’s design supports implementation with staff that diligently attended to each of their designed communities. A weakness is the lack of attention to the need for maintenance of structures built by an earlier SC funder in the same communities, emphasised by all groups of interviewees.

6.2 Coherence

First, the project SNV perfectly fits the earlier project BFC. The location of the target school communities was guided by a selection of the MOBSSE and in line with national policy. The MOBSSE highlighted that the project was addressing needs among the most disadvantaged communities in the Pujehun District and the country. Thus, the project aligns well with national priorities.

At the request of SC Sierra Leone, SC Iceland initiated the project SNTV in 2021 to protect children from violence, particularly in schools and at home. The project aligns with Sierra Leone’s national priorities, evidenced by the recently adopted policy against corporal punishment in schools in 2023 (18). Yet, there is still no law in place against violence against children in the home, day-care, and alternate care.⁹ Nonetheless,

⁹ Corporal punishment is lawful under the right “to administer punishment” in article 3 of the Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act 1926 and the provisions for “reasonable” and “justifiable” correction in article 33 of the Child Rights Act 2007.

work has been underway in recent years to change these laws, including in the ongoing revision of the constitution.

There are no other organisations in the project settings that are working on the issue of violence against children. On the other hand, the Canadian VSO is working on digital education in the project schools, a much-appreciated activity by the children.

To sum up, the project gives evidence of both internal and external coherence in the setting with no duplication of efforts; on the contrary, the intervention adds value to other ongoing activities.

6.3 Effectiveness

See how and whether the project achieved its goals compared to the original document. What factors had a decisive effect on whether the project achieved its goals or not?

EQ3 To what degree was the program implemented as intended, and if not, why?

EQ4 To what degree was the program able to achieve its stated objectives.

EQ5 To what degree can the program be assessed as being of value to its key stakeholders?

EQ6 To what degree can the program be assessed as being of good quality?

The project goals in the original project document were to ensure that girls and boys of school-going age were safe and protected from violence, including SGBV, in and around schools. The specific objective/outcome was reduced violence, including SGBV, against boys and girls in target schools. The project's aim was to be achieved through three defined Results. Later, with additional funding from Sweden, a new target group of beneficiaries was added to the project, i.e., girls on the move, and incorporated into Results 2. The above-cited expected results were linked to specific activities, in total 19 across all three desired results. As described in section 6.1 above, most of the intended 19 activities were implemented with favourable outcomes, supporting the project's overall goal of reduced violence.

In our discussion with stakeholders, including children, mothers, teachers, members of school committees and village chiefs, all gave evidence that violence had reduced in each of the target school communities. This impact was felt mainly by children in the school setting who reported experiencing fewer physical beatings compared to before; this was, however, not unequivocal, as there were a few accounts of children still being beaten by teachers. The teachers described they applied alternative methods to maintain discipline in the class. Still, there were accounts of bullying among children, including bullying of disabled children and violent behaviour against each other in play and their interactions.

There are numerous accounts that violence against children in the community has decreased to some degree; it was, however, acknowledged that this was difficult as some parents were stubborn and continued with physical beatings as a method of child upbringing. Some parents also felt the idea of children growing up without violence was an idea from abroad and not adapted to the culture in Sierra Leone and had raised the issue with the traditional authorities. Despite their overall approval of protecting children from violence, more work is needed to fight physical beatings of children in the target school communities.

SGBV was a recognised concept among all interviewees, and project beneficiaries recognised this was a problem in their communities, affecting primarily girls but also boys. The beneficiaries of the project activities knew about reporting channels in such cases. For example, the evaluation participants talked about how they had successfully used these channels for reporting.

The members of the SMCs and SCCs all described eloquently their work to improve the safety of children in and around the school. The work included cleaning the premises and identifying settings that risked the safety and well-being of the school-attending children. All were acutely aware that children coming from catchment area communities were at risk from snakebites in the bush and drowning on their way to school. The evaluation participants supported this with their work to decrease such risk, e.g., by clearing the bushes

along the path to school and having a FP to help the children cross the river on small canoes to attend school. There were reports of one recent drowning that resulted in proactive preventive actions.

The later inclusion of girls on the move into project activities suffered from a clear definition of the concept adapted to the setting. Thus, this component caused some discontent among the beneficiaries. Evaluation participants pointed out that there were also boys who were vulnerable and in need of the extra support some girls received. Further, distributing educational materials to this group of girls was incomplete and challenging for community members and staff who were assigned the task of implementing it.

For SC Pujehun, the project has been of value to the organisation. It stepped in when the former funder terminated its activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Rather than continue with infrastructure expansion, the project activities addressed a recognised problem in the school setting, i.e., physical beatings of children. It has also been of value for staff on payroll in their daily struggles to find meaningful work to support themselves and their families. For them, the project has been of value and strengthened their professional standing in child protection work.

It can be argued that the project has been of good quality, judging from interviews with diverse direct beneficiaries of project activities. They all praise the actions and their importance for them and their community. They recognise that violence against children is a problem in their communities, including SGBV, that threatens their health and well-being. Project activities have thus contributed to increased awareness of child protection in target communities with claimed fewer beatings of children in school compared to before.

The partners are to be praised for their fidelity to the project plan. As discussed above, there are indications that SC Pujehun successfully implemented most of the planned activities. Yet, a vaguely adapted definition of girls on the move made the effort only partially successful.

To sum up, based on our findings, presented in Chapter 5 and Section 6.1 on the relevance of project activities, the evaluators conclude that SC Pujehun implemented the activities effectively and as intended with overall good results in line with the original project document. It was also of value for the organisation and staff and of good quality for the beneficiaries. That said, the later addition of a new beneficiary group (i.e., girls on the move) needed a better definition adapted to the setting.

What factors had a decisive effect on whether the project achieved its goals or not?

Based on our discussion with the beneficiaries and other stakeholders, a decisive factor for the successful outcome of the project activities rests on qualified and dedicated SC staff in Pujehun. Our visits showed that the evaluation participants highly appreciated their work. They regularly visit the target communities and sleep over in the villages as needed. They know the setting and speak the local language. Supported with project funds, they worked on awareness campaigns in the community. They also supported the school committees, CCs and MSGs. In addition, SC Pujehun helped the teachers with training in and outside their community on the Teachers' Code of Conduct, with facilitators from the MOBSSE and the TSC. The training was uniformly well received, and there were requests for more. Evaluation participants pointed out that as volunteering teachers come and go, there is a constant need to train new teachers.

What the project lacks for continued success is funds for maintenance. These need to be maintained to continue with the momentum gained with the construction of new schools. It is not reasonable to expect that the work should be done and funded by community members who themselves are poor and struggle every day for survival.

6.4 Efficiency

Examine the use of project resources, especially resources related to the project's impact.

EQ7 To what extent was the program implemented efficiently?

Table 1 (Section 3.7) shows that most project funds were operational costs or almost one-quarter of all funds. Additionally, about one-third of all funds were allocated to implementing activities related to Results 1-3 and cross-cutting activity costs (2%). Further, monitoring and evaluation costs of MEAL activities were costly (6%). Thus, almost 2/3 of the project costs are linked to activities conducted by staff in the Pujehun District. Staff costs (national and support staff) take just above one-fifth of all project costs. The small funds on equipment (4%) and project supplies (4%) are of interest. Nonetheless, these costs are not well defined in the available project documents which make a proper evaluation on efficiency difficult.

There are 12 MEAL indicators defined for the project activities (Annex 5). Evidently, some of the indicators demand great and costly efforts to get reliable information, e.g. the first three indicators and need well-defined research plan, or revision.

From the above, the evaluators conclude that the project implementation is human resource intensive, coupled with expensive operational costs in difficult-to-reach communities. There is a need for transport on demanding roads in addition to costly and lengthy boat trips. Also, staff needs support while working in the field.

It is open for discussion if SC has efficiently used the available funds. Irrespective, based on the evaluation, the project results for SNTV are positive and give evidence of well-implemented project activities by project staff. The project document lacked attention to the need for continuous investment in the infrastructure, which is out of the control of SC staff in the Pujehun Field Office. As explained earlier, the new infrastructure paved the way for the successful outcome of project activities; SC Sierra Leone should have given the need to maintain the infrastructure more attention. For example, some of the WASH facilities were not functional, and maintenance of this component should be considered part of children's right to health and well-being (Art. 6).

To sum up, as it stands and based on available information, we conclude that the Collaborating Partners effectively implemented the project at a high cost, somewhat negatively affecting the efficiency of the project activities.

6.5 Sustainability

Assess how it is possible to increase the changes of the project's sustainability so that the community can take over the management of the project.

EQ8 To what degree is there an indication of ongoing benefits attributable to the project?

The project has implemented activities that might lead to long-term, sustainable impacts. It has supported actions to ensure that children who attend school do so without the risk of physical beatings by teachers. The evaluation gives myriad examples of the primary objective of the project activities being successful. They would not have enjoyed these benefits without the project activities, which might benefit them in school and when they build their families. Community members also gave evidence of interest in child protection and vivid examples of that interest.

Nonetheless, there is still more work to do regarding reducing children's interpersonal violence, including bullying, as well as in the community. Further, attention to SGBV needs continuous efforts to protect children in line with their rights. Thus, the project addressed issues that require continued nurturing to become sustainable in the long term gradually. Some new teachers become volunteers and need training, and new children enrol in school every year. Also, new parents abound and need support. Thus, the main goal of project activities needs more organised work for long-term sustainability. The Collaborating Partners cannot expect a pilot project of one year's duration to result in long-term sustainability except possibly for those who directly benefitted from its work.

The infrastructures built by SC Spain are robust and well-constructed. Yet, maintenance issues have already called for further action. There is no possibility that community members can sustain these structures,

neither short- or long-term, risking that the children in these communities will not be able to enjoy their right to quality education. Thus, such input needs to come from the government or through project funds; to begin with, available funds within the ongoing RTBC might need revised budgetary planning to secure minimal maintenance of these structures for short- and medium-term sustainability.

To sum up, the project setting is plagued by prolonged and pervasive poverty. Without outside funding, it is not a realistic option for the community to take over project costs and continue with child protection activities to the same extent as during this pilot project.

7 Conclusions

The pilot project SNTV, in focus in this evaluation, was implemented by SC Sierra Leone by its Field Office in Pujehun District in the south-eastern part of the country in the period 1 October 2021 to 30 September 2022. It was a continuation of the project BFC, funded by SC Spain in the period 2018-2021, characterised by infrastructure strengthening with the construction of primary schools and WASH facilities in ten communities, thereof seven in rural and hard-to-reach rural riverine villages. The overall objective of SNTV was to ensure that girls and boys of school-going age, including girls on the move, were safe and protected from violence, including SGBV, in and around schools. The intended outcome of the project was reduced violence, including SGBV against boys and girls in target schools. Following a framework agreement with MFA, signed in March 2022, and considering the overall progress of the pilot project and the results of a baseline study conducted in the project area in June 2022, the Collaborating Partners signed a contract for a new project, RTBC, in the same ten schools in Pujehun District, with a duration of three years (1 October 2022 to 30 September 2025).

The evaluation that this report builds on was conducted in Pujehun District and the capital Freetown in the period 11-29 November 2023. The conclusions of the evaluation of SNTV, a one-year pilot project in focus in this report, build on observations of the two evaluators during the field visit in addition to analysis of project documents. An important observation is that evaluation participants tend to think of the project BFC, SNTV and RTBC as one project implemented by SC Pujehun. They recognise and value the infrastructure strengthening component of BFC and the focus of the two subsequent projects, SNTV and RTBC, on prevention of violence against children and securing children's rights in schools and the communities. It is challenging to isolate the direct outcome of the pilot SNTV in this setting of continuous work by SC Pujehun with different funding partners; thus, the observations made during the field visit and following conclusions rest to some extent on the work and outcome of all three projects, while the focus is on SNTV whenever possible.

First, evaluation participants agreed that the work implemented under the banner of SNTV to reduce and stop violence, particularly corporal punishment, of children in schools had been successful while work to reduce violence in the communities was more challenging, however, not without success. Bullying and fight among children was recognised as a problem, including harassment of disabled children. Preventive efforts to counteract ongoing bullying are ongoing and need strengthening. Violence between children is also meant to have reduced in schools but seen as more difficult to deal with in the community. Findings indicate that community members have become aware of the negative impact of violence against children and corporal violence is claimed to have decreased. That said, research indicates that psychological/emotional violence is prone to increase when corporal violence against children is reduced. The findings of the evaluation indicate that teachers and community members need to be trained and supported to apply alternative disciplinary measures that are not harmful to children. Further, the findings indicate a high awareness about sexual violence and the need to react when this happens. All groups of interviewees, including children, recognize reporting channels in such cases and the toll-free hotline numbers.

Second, school enrolment has increased, and efforts are ongoing to “leave no child behind”, including an encouragement to vulnerable and children with disabilities to attend school; there were accounts of success

stories about disabled children's schooling, but also the opposite. Evaluation participants believed that less violence in the schools had some role in increased school enrolment of both girls and boys, while the crucial factor was food provided by WFP, but also parents more positive attitude towards education.

Three, there are indications that school enrolment was higher in the villages where the schools are located than in the more faraway villages within the catchment area of each school. Reasons for this uneven attendance include long distances on walking paths that pose danger to young children, e.g., snakebites but also sexual violence. Further, crossing rivers paddling on small canoes is dangerous and there are recent accounts of children having drowned on their way to school. Evaluation participants, not least the children, identified pervasive poverty as an additional factor for non-attendance. Still, some parents value agriculture more than education. Others are reluctant to enrol their children, fearing the associated costs despite enrolment is at no cost to them. Further, residential students in Arabic schools whose parents live elsewhere, normally do not attend the public school. Nonetheless, there are examples of fruitful collaboration with the Arabic school teachers who have intervened to have all their students also attend the public school.

Four, in the project document for SNTV, the concept of girls on the move refers to girls aged 6-12 who do not live with their biological parents, e.g., orphans, and have missed out on their education because of movement or relocations. Many evaluation participants did not recognise this concept, others meant that girls on the move were the most vulnerable girls who had to travel a long distance to attend school. Irrespective, just over one-fourth of girls identified as on the move was provided with school materials and other support to encourage their school attendance. The support caused tension considering that boys in similarly dire situation were excluded.

Five, most of the teachers in the target schools are volunteers and without formal teacher's training. Evaluation participants, including children, recognized and appreciated the support provided to train the teachers, as part of BFC to become certified teachers and within SNTV training on the Teachers' Code of Conduct. Their relationship with the children had become better and without flogging in class. There were teachers who recognized their change of mind after the training regarding their relations with children. The importance of helping the volunteers to become pin-coded, i.e., public servants, was underlined by all participants.

Six, there is clear evidence to that the CCs, MSGs, SMCs and SSCs are all functional and active in their respective work. This contrasts to the finding in the baseline study, indicating progress in the project work. The children in the CCs were vocal about their rights and the problems they faced in attending school and came with proposals for actions; they were particularly keen that the teachers should be properly trained and supported. The mothers in the MSGs play a crucial role in helping the children to successfully attend school and look after their wellbeing. They are responsible for school meals provided by the WFP, and bring with them their own cooking utensils, despite the difficulties that entails. The SMCs/SSCs are also working for the wellbeing of children and have regular meetings and work for children have the education they are entitled to and to be safe in school and while on their way to school.

Six, the village leaders and community members were pleased with the project activities and wanted more of the same. Issues raised included expanding the current infrastructure and its maintenance (e.g., WASH facilities), and accommodation for teachers. Assuming the ongoing project activities as being composed of three components of the same project, i.e., BFC, SNTV and RIIBC, as perceived by the evaluation participants, it begs the question of maintenance of infrastructure. It is imperative to immediately start to elaborate a plan for maintenance of the current infrastructure. Poverty is pervasive in the project area and the implementation of CRC is not to be fulfilled only by changing people's minds. There is no way the communities can themselves take on the responsibility for a proper maintenance of infrastructure built by SC Sierra Leone. Such a requirement might result in withdrawal of children from the schools, and thereby hamper their right to education.

Finally, the evaluators conclude that the project activities, including the pilot SNTV, have been successful in the setting, of value for the implementing partners and of quality for stakeholders. It has contributed greater community awareness on children's rights to protection and to live a life without violence.

8. Recommendations

1. Work with all the communities in respective school's catchment area for wider reach-out with awareness on child protection and CRC;
2. Continue with already successful implementation of activities against violence of children, including SGBV, considering that new children are annually enrolled in school;
3. Train teachers and community members in appropriate alternative disciplinary practices that can substitute physical corporal punishment;
4. Explore the possibility of developing programmes on local radio stations on CRC, including children having a life without violence, in which children, mothers and community members at large are given an opportunity to raise their voice on matters of concern to them in their local language;
5. Intensify work to have volunteer teachers certified and pin-coded;
6. Continue with regular training sessions for volunteering teachers on the Teachers' Code of Conduct considering the high turn-over-rate of volunteering teachers;
7. Train teachers and community members in recognising ongoing bullying and other inter-personal violence among children, including children with disability, and how to counteract it;
8. Explore options to support the volunteer teachers with accommodation;
9. Strengthen children's extra-curricular activities with revision of the play component of RTBC, aiming for more robust playgrounds for children in the community and adding musical and sport components to project activities;
10. Revise the MEAL indicators for the project activities;
11. Elaborate a Work Plan for maintenance of infrastructure and explore the possibility to furnish each school with solar-driven lights;
12. Search for solutions for children who walk long distances or paddle on canoes on their way to school;
13. Strengthen support to the MSGs, for instance, with appropriate cooking utensils, cleaning materials and more training in CRC;
14. Support vulnerable groups of children with school materials in a gender-sensitive way based on clear criteria;
15. All activities should be gender-sensitive and environmentally sound; and
16. Explore ways for livelihood support for the target school communities and catchment areas.

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Reducing Violence and Protecting Girls and Boys in Schools in Pujehun District in Sierra Leone



Barnaheill

**Terms of Reference for evaluation for Barnaheill – Save the Children
Iceland's project in Sierra Leone.**

The project is financed by the Icelandic Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

1. Inngangur

Barnaheill - Save the Children Iceland (SC Iceland) supported a project, financed by the Icelandic Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA), in Pujehun district in Sierra Leone from September 2021 – September 2022. The implementation of the project was in the hands of Save the Children in Sierra Leone. Total initial budget for the project was 193,972 USD or 24,634,444 ISK. After a fundraising campaign in Autumn 2021 the project's budget was increased to 203,570 USD.

The overall aim of this project is that Girls and boys of school-going age are safe and protected from violence, including SGBV, in and around schools. The project's specific aim is to reduce violence, including SGBV, against boys and girls in target schools. After the fundraising campaign focus on girls on the move was added to the project and the aim of the project read as following: aim of ensuring girls and boys of school-going age are safe and protected from violence, including SGBV, in and around schools, with a specific focus on the most marginalized populations in Pujehun, Sierra Leone.

2. The project's activities are as follows:

- Activity 1.1. Use Safe Schools Context Analysis Tool in the 10 target communities.
- Activity 1.2. Conduct awareness-raising events and workshops with duty bearers on harmful traditional practices and norms that affect children in the community, with a specific focus on those affecting girls and SGBV and identification of girls on the move.
- Activity 1.3. Create linkages with existing projects to enroll girls on the move within the selection criteria age into schools.
- Activity 1.4. Review and strengthen existing child friendly feedback mechanisms, referral pathways and reporting structures for child protection and SGBV cases.
- Activity 1.5. Review and support community-based child welfare committees, led by women, with men supporting and girls and boys engaging as appropriate.
- Activity 1.6. Engage parents/caregivers of girls on the move via positive parenting sessions to raise awareness on the protection, educational and appropriate care needs/support for girls on the move.
- Activity 1.7. Engage women's groups, local authorities and community volunteers on the protection of girls on the move against violence, and abuses.
- Activity 2.1 Review and support Safe Schools Committees with children, parents and teachers using existing school structures, with an equal gender representation.
- Activity 2.2 Conduct participatory risk and capacity mapping, including participatory mapping with girls and boys.
- Activity 2.3 Update and implement risk-informed school improvement plans, with a specific focus on enhancing protection of girls and preventing SGBV.
- Activity 2.4 Provide capacity building to teachers and school administration on the Code of Conduct.
- Activity 2.5 Update/create school-based reporting and referral mechanisms, including identification of SGBV focal points.

- Activity 2.6. Train teachers and SMC members to understand the protection and educational needs of girls on the move including protection against violence in schools.
- Activity 3.1 Train teachers on child rights, risk management and safety, violence awareness and prevention, egalitarian gender norms and positive discipline, reporting and referral mechanisms.
- Activity 3.2 Train girls and boys on child rights, risk management and safety, violence awareness and prevention, egalitarian gender norms and positive discipline, reporting and referral mechanisms.
- Activity 3.3 Create and support girls' and boys' clubs in target schools, including on social and emotional learning.
- Activity 3.4 Create safer social connections or networks for girls on the move integration into children's clubs in school /community and empower them to understand their rights.
- Activity 3.5 Use the Bellanet approach to conduct activities in girls and boys clubs.
- Activity 3.6. Conduct local/district advocacy on the protection, care support and educational needs for girls on the move among local council authorities, line Ministries and service providers.

3. Reasons for evaluating

As is stated in the project proposal, a final external evaluation of the project should be conducted at the project end time. This was a one year pilot project aimed at being the foundation for a long-term continued support to SC Sierra Leone.

The results and recommendations from the evaluator can be a guide for future support from SC Iceland to SC SL. The evaluation will provide lessons learned and possible improvements of SC Iceland's work in Sierra Leone. The evaluation will also benefit Save the Children International as well as partners in the field. A summary of lessons learned from the implementation of the project is therefore important for all parties.

4. Methodology

The evaluation shall be evidence-based and based on accepted methodology. The evaluation shall assess how well the project's objectives have been achieved in terms of various factors, e.g. inputs, actions and results. Efforts shall be made to summarise lessons learned from the project that can be used in SC Iceland's future work and continued support in the area.

This is a final evaluation and therefore it is important that the evaluator familiarises himself with data already available on the project, in addition to data gathered in the field. The evaluation is based on secondary data and documents, interviews and focus group interviews with beneficiaries and stakeholders in the capital of Sierra Leone Freetown and in 10 locations in Pujehun in Sierra Leone.

It is important that the evaluator meets as many beneficiaries and stakeholders in the field as possible. The evaluator shall follow accepted standards regarding evaluations, including to maintain impartiality in his work, show sensitivity to local culture and social values, and ensure participants' confidentiality.

5. Factors that will be evaluated – evaluation questions

The evaluator shall evaluate the following factors:

Relevance: Was the project in line with the needs of the target group? Did the project harmonise with authorities' priorities in Sierra Leone, SC Iceland's policy and priorities in Icelandic development cooperation? Were the actions and results in line with the project's goals? What lessons can be learned from the project for future work?

Coherence: How well does the project fit into work already being conducted in the field? Was the project in line with other projects?

Effectiveness: See how and whether the project achieved its goals compared to the original project document. What factors had a decisive effect on whether the project achieved its goals or not?

Efficiency: Examine the use of project resources, especially resources related to the project's impact.

Sustainability: Assess how it is possible to increase the changes of the project's sustainability and that the community can take over the management of the project.

In addition to the aforementioned factors, it is important to keep the following factors in mind when conducting the evaluation:

Human rights, gender equality, non-discrimination, the environment, technology, finance, knowledge building, policy, social and cultural aspects.

6. The evaluator

The evaluator shall have a university education, extensive experience and knowledge of development issues, especially in the field of violence against children, preparation, monitoring and evaluation of projects. The evaluator shall speak and write excellent English.

7. Timetable

As this is a final evaluation, it is recommended that it takes place in Sierra Leone in April 2023. The estimated time for the evaluation is 30 days.

- Four days for general preparation: reading documents, preparing fieldwork and other planning.
- Fourteen days for fieldwork to Pujehun Sierra Leone (with travel days).
 - The evaluator is responsible for arriving in Freetown before decided start date.

- SC Sierra Leone will arrange for all travel in country in consultation with the evaluator and SC Iceland.
- 12 days for analysing data, report writing and presentation of the final report.

All planning and data analysis will be conducted in close cooperation between the evaluator, representatives of SC Iceland, SC Sierra Leone, and the Icelandic MFA. A local consultant will not be recruited, but a translator will be consulted as needed, and a representative from SC Sierra Leone will assist the evaluator during fieldwork.

A consultation group will be appointed for this evaluation with representatives from SC Iceland, SC Sierra Leone, the Icelandic MFA and the evaluator to discuss the design of the evaluation before it takes place and its results after it has been conducted.

The final report with recommendations shall be submitted to SC Iceland before June 2023, along with a presentation to the association's board.

8. Fieldwork

The evaluator will work closely with SC Iceland and SC Sierra Leone while planning the fieldwork. A detailed fieldwork plan will be conducted in cooperation with evaluator, SC Iceland and SC Sierra Leone.

9. Reporting and submission

The evaluator must submit the following:

- Initial report, listing the methodology and approach for the evaluation.
- Participate in a consultation group meeting before the evaluation takes place.
- Draft final report.
- Participate in a consultation group meeting before finalising the final report.

Following the evaluation, the evaluator will submit a final report to SC Iceland. During the writing of the report, SC Iceland will have the opportunity to present its comments regarding the report's content. The report shall be written in English to be of the best use to all stakeholders.

Annex 2: Travel Plan for Field Visit

November 2023

	Activity	Time
Sat 11	Arrival to Freetown	
Sun 12	Weekend	
13	Save the Children Country Office, Freetown Departure to Bo, Bo District Accommodation in Bo	10:30-12:30 12:30-17:00
14	Save the Children Field Office, Pujehun District	08:00-15:00
15	Blama Massaquoi Sorbeh-Grima	06:30-17:30
16	Messima	07:50-18:30
17	Gondama	07:50-17:30
18-19	Weekend in Bo	
20	Saama Njagbema Accommodation in Pujehun	08:00-18:30
21	Kombpi	08:00-19:00
22	Kassay Makina/Mosineh	07:00-20:30
23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pujehun Islamic Mission School • One Stop Centre, Ministry of Gender and Children • Family Support Unit • Ministry of Basic, Senior and Secondary Education • Save the Children Field Office, Pujehun 	08:00-17:00
24	Debriefing Save the Children Field Office, Pujehun Arrival in Freetown	08:00-11:00 17:30
25-26	Weekend in Freetown	
27	Planned meeting with Sulaiman Sesay, Save the Children Country Office (cancelled because of shootings in Freetown)	14:00
28	Meeting, Save the Children Country Office	10:30-10:45
29	Departure from Freetown	15:00

Annex 3: List of People Met

Pujehun Town

One Stop Centre, Ministry of Gender and Children

- Mr Kalilu J. K. Swaray, social worker
- Ms Aramata Safiatu, nurse/midwife

Ministry of Basic, Secondary and Senior Education (MOBSSE)

- Alimany Kamara, Deputy-Director of Education

Family Support Unit (FSU), Police Department, Pujehun District

- Ms Patricia Lombek Kobba, Assistant Superintendent of the Police (ASP), Support Officer
- Mr Momah Musa Gbah, Line Manager
- Mr John Sylvalie
- Mr Alex Jusu Mbayo

SC Field Office

- Mr Amara Massaquoi, MEAL Manager, +232-78908000
- Mr John Swaray, Project Manager, Right To Be Child, +232-78257882
- Mr Ansumana M. D. Kamara, MEAL Officer, +232-78244978
- Ms Dora Bangura, Project Officer, Right To Be Child, +232-78547260
- Mr Moses Forey Kamara, Project Officer, Right To Be Child, +232-76303687
- Ms Mary F. Sanuah, Project Officer, Right To Be Child, +232-76854220
- Ms Massah G. Senesie, Project Officer, Right To Be Child, +232-76741825

Translators

- Mr Brima Sannoh, Media House(s), Malen Community, Pujehun District
- Ms Ruth Sowgi Tucker

Driver

- Mr Mohamed Kemoh

Individual Interviews and Focus Groups in Ten Target School Communities

Children's Clubs

- About ten girls and ten boys in each of the ten target school communities, with more children attending each session

Mothers' Support Groups

- Ten groups with a total of 82 women. When they did not attend, some women left the village to harvest rice or attend the weekly market day

Headmasters and Teachers

- Six pin-coded Head-Teachers
- Two pin-coded teachers
- 25 volunteering teachers

SMC and SSC

- 13 Committee members

Local Authorities

- One Paramount Chief and ten village chiefs (7 individually and three as part of SMC)

Other Schools not included in the project work

- Primary school – five teachers

Preschool

- Two female teachers

Health Facilities

- Three nurses

SC Freetown

Debriefing meeting

- Mr Francis Oppong, Programme Development Quality Director
- Ms Dorothy KnoxGoba, Senior Awards Lead
- Mr Isaac Masumbuko Bahogwere, Acting Director of Programmes and Operations

Others

- Ms Michelle Massasquoi, Awards Officer Sierra Leone
- Ms Ngozi Browne, Awards Coordinator
- Almany Deen, Security Officer

- Mr Sulaiman Sesay, Human Resource Administrative Officer

SC Iceland

- Ms Kolbrún Pálsdóttir, Director, International Projects

Annex 4: School enrolment

Target Schools in Pujehun District by Chiefdom and catchment communities

By sex for student enrolment and pin-coded and volunteering teachers

Target Schools in Pujehun District and catchment communities																
No	Community	Chiefdom	Name of School	Catchment communities	Pupil Enrollment			Total Teachers			Number of Pin coded Teachers			Number of Volunteers Teachers		
					Boys	Girls	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1	Kassay	Mano Sakrim(MSK)	Pujehun District Council Primary Sch.	Balayhun, Gbeseh, Mabohun, Mathahun, Bolleh, Ghana-one, Nugjaboh, Lahaguimie	139	113	252	5	1	6	0	0	0	5	1	6
2	Gondama	Yakemoh Kpukumu Krim(YKK)	National Islamic Mission	Dorkabu, Kigbon	113	84	197	4	0	4	1	0	1	3	0	3
3	Kobompi	Yakemoh Kpukumu Krim(YKK)	SLC Primary School	Marley, Gbongboma, Laa, Gambia, Manowoi, Dorkabu	99	75	174	4	1	5	1	0	1	3	1	4
4	Njagbema	Yakemoh Kpukumu Krim(YKK)	Sierra Leone Youth Muslim Movement Primary School	Kakama, Modaoma, Meana	44	61	105	2	1	3	1	0	1	1	1	2
5	Messima	Yakemoh Kpukumu Krim(YKK)	Pujehun District Council Primary Sch.	Tobanda, Fulawovahun, Kigbon	139	137	276	4	1	5	1	0	1	3	1	4
6	Sorbeh-Grima	Kpanga	St Patrick Primary School	Mokengi, Gombahun, Soso, Kpekedu, Sembahun, Kamala, Gangama, Golahun.	150	194	344	4	4	8	0	1	1	4	3	7
7	Pujehun	Kpanga	Sierra Leone Muslim Brotherhood Primary School	Kebawana, Konaleh, Komala, Tungay.	82	106	188	3	2	5	3	0	3	0	2	2
8	Saama	Yakemoh Kpukumu Krim(YKK)	Sierra Leone Church Primary School	Bo-Sowunde, Fikudor, Gambia, Musei, Wuyoh, Dimeni.	104	110	214	7	1	8	3	0	3	4	1	5
9	Blama Massad	Gallines	Islamic Call Society Primary School	Konabu, Bangorma, Gongo, Sahn, Juring, Kulaka	130	133	263	6	1	7	1	1	2	5	0	5
19	Mosineh	Mano Sakrim(MSK)	Pujehun District Council Primary Sch.	Ghana-one, Nugjaboh, Kpekema, Gbongeh	130	150	280	4	1	5	0	0	0	4	1	5
Total					1130	1163	2293	43	13	56	11	2	13	32	11	43

Annex 5. MEAL Indicators for Say No To Violence (SNTV)

Project Title	SAY NO TO VIOLENCE		
Project Duration (Months)	12		
Current Month	12		
Expected Progress	100%		
SOF	72400807		
Locations	Pujehun		
Project Start Date	Oct.21		
Project End Date	Sep.22		
INDICATORS			
	Indicator Type	Data Type	Disaggregation
% of children attending school who report experiencing any type of violence in the last 12 months, disaggregated by violence type, age, gender, disability and girls on the move.	Outcome indicator	Quantitative	Boys Girls
% change of children reporting feeling safe in and around school disaggregated by gender, age, disability and girls on the move	Outcome indicator	Quantitative	Boys Girls
% of reported case of violence, including SGBV against children that are referred appropriately in target schools	Outcome indicator	Quantitative	Boys Girls
# of child welfare committees established and/ or supported	Output indicator	Quantitative	Committee
# of people reached with awareness raising on harmful traditional practices and norms that affect children in the community, with a specific focus on those affecting girls including girls on the move and surrounding SGBV disaggregated by gender and age.	Output indicator	Quantitative	Male Female Boys Girls
# of risk informed/context appropriate school safety plans developed by the school safety committee	Output indicator	Qualitative	Safety plans
# of girls on the move reached by interventions or inclusion into education	Output indicator	Qualitative	Girls
# of teachers reached by capacity building on the protection and education needs of girls on the move	Output Indicator	Qualitative	Male Female
# of target schools with updated and/or newly implemented school-based reporting and referral mechanisms for child protection and SGBV cases	Output indicator	Qualitative	Schools
% of Teachers in target schools demonstrating improved competencies on child rights, risk management and safety, violence awareness and prevention, egalitarian gender norms and positive discipline, disaggregated by gender	Outcome indicator	Quantitative	Male
	Outcome indicator	Quantitative	Female
% of children in target schools demonstrating improved competencies on child rights, risk management and safety, violence awareness and prevention, egalitarian gender norms and positive discipline, disaggregated by gender, age and disability	Outcome indicator	Quantitative	Boys Girls
	Outcome indicator	Quantitative	Girls
# of girls on the move participating in project activities	Outcome indicator	Quantitative	Girls
# of children in target schools reached with social and emotional learning including integration of girls on the move through girls and boys clubs, disaggregated by gender, age and disability.	Output indicator	Quantitative	Boys
	Output indicator	Quantitative	Girls

Result 1

Indicator 1.1 # of child welfare committees established and/or supported

Indicator 1.2 # of people reached with awareness-raising activities on harmful traditional practices and norms that affect children in the community, with a specific focus on those affecting girls and surrounding SGBV, disaggregated by gender and age and girls on the move

Result 2

Indicator 2.1 # of risk informed/context appropriate school safety plans developed by the school safety committee.

Indicator 2.2 # of target schools with updated and/or newly implemented school-based reporting and referral mechanisms for child protection and SGBV cases.

Indicator 2.3 # of teachers reached by capacity building on the protection and education needs of girls on the move.

Indicator 2.4 # of girls on the move reached by interventions or inclusion into education.

Results 3

Indicator 3.1: % of teachers in target schools demonstrating improved competencies on child rights, risk management and safety, violence awareness and prevention, egalitarian gender norms and positive discipline, disaggregated by gender.

Indicator 3.2: % of children in target schools demonstrating improved competencies child rights, risk management and safety, violence awareness and prevention, egalitarian gender norms and positive discipline, disaggregated by gender, age and disability.

Indicator 3.3: # of girls on the move participating in project activities.

Indicator 3.4: # children in target schools reached with social and emotional learning through girls and boys clubs, disaggregated by gender, age and disability.

Indicator 3.5: # children in target schools participating in Bellanet activities, disaggregated by gender, age and disability.

See the Final Report on SNTV submitted to MFA in November 2022 with more detailed numerical information on each indicator.