



NMJD

Network Movement for
Justice and Development

ANNUAL NARRATIVE REPORT

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Artisanal diamond mining in Kono district with its attendant environmental destruction

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Facilitating community stakeholders dialogue meeting in Njagbwema, Fiama chiefdom, Kono district

APOA	Affected Property Owners Association
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FSU	Family Support Unit
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
KHL	Koidu Holdings Limited
MDA	Ministries Departments Agencies
MSWGA	Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs
NCSF	National Civil Society Forum
NEW	National Elections Watch
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PILIWA	Public Interest Lawyering Initiative for West Africa
VGGT	Voluntary Guidelines on Land and Tenure
WELD	Women Empowered for Leadership and Development

Sierra Leone went to the polls in March 2018 to elect a president, parliamentarians, Mayors, chairpersons of district councils and councilors. Like many other civic groups, a lot of our engagement was focused on the elections, particularly in the first quarter of the year. We engaged the electoral cycle in many ways and at different levels. As a member of the team that facilitated the development of the Citizens Manifesto, we supported civic groups in all the districts of the country to popularize the Manifesto with the view to generating public discussions around it and to using it as the centre of citizens' discussion with political party functionaries. We also worked with different civil society platforms across the country to do civic education ahead of the 2018 elections. We believed that good citizenship should start by knowing your civic rights, roles and responsibility.

As a member of the National Election Watch (NEW), we monitored the entire electoral cycle and observed the elections on polling day. Ahead of the elections, the government carried out redistricting and chiefdom de-amalgamation which resulted in the creation of two new districts, 41 chiefdoms and one region. As a result of this, we now have five regions, 16 districts and 190 chiefdoms in Sierra Leone. This exercise generated confusion and lots of tensions in the affected chiefdoms and districts such as Falaba district, which was carved out of Koinadugu district, and Kamasondo chiefdom, created from Lokomassama chiefdom. We were part of the teams that visited these affected places and engaged the people to find out about what their grievances were. We reported our findings to the appropriate authorities for their actions.

In the eastern region, we worked with other like-minded organizations including women's groups, chiefs and youth to increase women's participation in governance in the three districts of Kono, Kailahun and Kenema. We identified women that wanted to aspire for different positions in the 2018 elections and worked with them to build their confidence and capacity in readiness for the elections. We conducted trainings for them in different areas such as public speaking, resource mobilization, organizing and mobilizing people; we mentored and coached them to be effective in organizing their campaigns and delivering their messages. 26 of these women who benefited from these engagements were elected as councilors in the three districts and two were elected as Members of Parliament.

Further, we identified the inappropriate use of social media as a factor that could cause tensions and conflicts in the 2018 elections. Many Sierra Leoneans today use social media platforms, particularly Whatsapp, which is the most commonly used. But the way some people were using Whatsapp did not engender peace; they used social media to spread falsehoods and hate messages, thereby causing unnecessary alarm and tensions, demeaning the character and image of highly-respected personalities, invading people's private privacy, etc. On the other hand, if used appropriately, social media would promote peace and prevent conflicts. In order to ensure peaceful elections, we worked with the district-level civil society platforms to raise public awareness and to educate the citizens on how to use social media appropriately. For example, the police can use social media to strengthen security, the political parties and politicians can communicate their messages and canvass for support using social media, whilst the citizens can use it to communicate their concerns and aspirations to the political parties and to the government. Citizens can organize themselves around certain advocacy issues and press for social reforms using social media platforms like Whatsapp and Twitter.

We continued our efforts towards reclaiming civil society space which is fastly diminishing and to revitalizing public interest activism in the country. We continued to update the database of active civil society groups, strengthen capacity of civic leaders with appropriate knowledge, skills and tools through training and regular sharing of information and we supported civil society structures across the country to be more effective and more coordinated. We successfully facilitated the setting up of coordinating structures in the two-newly

established districts of Falaba and Karene in the north and north-western regions respectively and they have now become an integral part of the wider civil society community.

As stated elsewhere in this report, we were fully involved in the 2018 electoral cycle; we monitored the process right through the cycle and engaged political parties on their respective manifestos and electioneering campaign promises. The Sierra Leone People's Party emerged victorious in the polls. It is our belief that the SLPP enjoyed a democratic mandate from the electorate to implement their policy commitments as espoused in their manifesto and campaign pronouncements. In its first eight months in office, we facilitated the governance audit of the new administration with the objective of reminding them about their promises to the people of Sierra Leone and to create a forum for citizens to independently assess how good the SLPP have been with their policy commitments. This exercise was carried out in all the 16 districts of the country. We intend to undertake this exercise every six months until 2023.

Also, we are on the verge of writing history. For the first time in the history of our advocacy work in the natural resource sector, we are going to the courts for litigations against KHL and other multinational mining companies for their persistent and comprehensive abuse of the rights of host mining communities. Preparations for this landmark action started last year and continued in earnest this year. The lawyer who we contracted to lead the process and who now resides in the affected communities is near completion in compiling evidence on behalf of the affected victims. Witnesses have been identified and statements obtained from them. The ECOWAS Court who will preside over this case has been fully informed of these developments and they are looking forward to the filing of the case, which will be done sooner rather than later. We are also working in this with NAMATI, PILIWA and the Human Rights Clinic at the University of Makeni.

We thank our partners including the civil society advocacy platforms, the local communities that we worked with, relevant government MDAs and our donor partners for being with us throughout this journey. We would not have been able to achieve so much without your collaboration and support.

No	Strategic activities	Outputs achieved
1.	<i>Establishing, supporting and strengthening community structures in NMJD operational areas</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitated community feedback sessions on the CDA. The sessions resulted in strengthening the communities' ability to catalogue their concerns and perspectives on the rolling out of the CDA for improved communication, transparency and accountability among the Community Development Committees (CDCs), mining companies and the affected communities. Also, the sessions enabled communities to review their action plans for communal beneficiation. • Facilitated (Mining Advocacy Platforms (MAPs) in Bonthe, Moyamba and Kono districts to monitor the rolling out of the CDAs. The information generated from the monitoring exercise was used by the project team to undertake an informed and sustained policy advocacy at both local and national levels. • Trained 27 women on adult literacy and numeracy to serve as facilitators to train other women in their respective communities/savings groups who needed basic knowledge and skills in reading and calculating in order to manage their small-scale businesses effectively. The trainees were drawn from Women's Savings Groups, teachers and village agents in Kailahun, Kenema and Kono. Nine people were drawn from each of the three districts. • Facilitated radio discussion programmes and publication of jingles to raise awareness and to generate discussions on the cultural and social barriers that hinder the participation of women in politics. The radio discussion programmes attracted huge attention from the listening public as evidenced by the number of phone-in calls and text messages. • Facilitated advocacy and lobbying meetings for civil society, Paramount Chiefs and other societal heads for the protection of women vying for elective positions from cultural and social barriers such as the masquerading of all-male secret societies with the intention of frightening women away. • Provided support in the form of transport allowances and food for work for four months for

30 youth in the agriculture component of our sustainable skills and youth empowerment project in Kono.

- Facilitated the holding of zonal executive meetings of women and other community leaders in Kono district. The meetings, which attracted 36 participants (28 women 8 men) including town chiefs of the host chiefdoms, were held in all the four zones that make up the district. Participants from each zone converged in their chiefdom headquarters where they had fruitful discussions on how they could influence the authorities in their respective chiefdoms to support the fight against gender-based violence and other related social injustices.
- Supported women councilors and ward gender monitoring committees to hold quarterly ward-level accountability forums. The forums enabled the people to discuss issues affecting women and girls in their communities and to develop strategies on how to address those issues, as well as how to promote women's participation in political governance in their communities and the country as a whole.
- Facilitated and supported paralegals to conduct mediation and conflict resolution between and among conflicting/feuding parties in the project communities in Kono district with the twin-objective of promoting human rights values and peaceful co-existence.
- Promoted peaceful co-existence between cattle rearers and crop farmers in Lei chiefdom through sustained engagements and conflict transformation approaches. The hostilities between these two groups were (before our intervention) the major source of conflicts in Lei and other neighbouring chiefdoms.
- Organized orientation meeting for civic leaders to discuss our planned interventions to reclaim the shrinking civil society space. The objective of this meeting was to enable civic leaders, who were also committed to strengthening civil society engagements in public interest activism, get a common understanding of the project and to establish clearer roles and responsibilities.
- Facilitated the establishment of civil society district conveners in the two newly-created districts of Karene and Falaba with the objective

		<p>of enhancing public interest engagements in those districts. With this exercise, there are now very active civil society structures in all the 16 districts in the country.</p>
2.	<p><i>Capacity building events for staff, partners and community structures</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitated the process of strengthening the capacity of women aspiring to vie for leadership positions in the local councils, parliament and local authority in the 2018 multi-tier elections in Kenema, Kailahun and Kono districts. Among the women that benefited from this process, 11 contested and won as councilors in Kenema and 13 in Kailahun district, two contested and won as Members of Parliament representing constituencies in Kono and Kailahun districts. Some of the elected women/councilors have been appointed to serve as chairpersons and deputy chairpersons in different standing committees in their local councils. • Organized two days regional training on management of GBV and child protection cases for 30 participants drawn from representatives of CSO, FSU, MSWGCA and CWC. The objective of the training was to strengthen and equip these organizations and institutions with the appropriate knowledge and skills in order for them to continue to address GBV and child rights abuse cases in their communities. It was also aimed at strengthening participants' knowledge and skills on GBV and child protection referral system with the aim of establishing child welfare/ GBV committees (CWCs) that will be tasked with the responsibility of reporting child rights abuses and GBV cases to the appropriate authorities for redress. • Facilitated training, sensitization and education of townships, sub-townships, village leaders and communities about the need to secure customary land rights in accordance with the VGGT Compliant National Land Policy in Sierra Leone. The project which seeks to protect women's land rights in Sierra Leone is implemented in Kandulepiama chiefdom in Kenema district. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitated and supported community consultations and information sharing meetings in our operational chiefdoms in Kono district with the main objective of strengthening chiefdom councils to be inclusive and participatory. The

		<p>mmeetings were held with youth and women’s groups in the chiefdom and the discussions mainly centred on opening up the frontiers of chiefdom governance to enable everyone to participate.</p>
3.	<p><i>Strengthening collaboration, coalition building and networking</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitated dialogue forum for mining companies, MDAs, local councils and affected mining communities on issues of transparency, accountability and management of sub-national transfers e.g. Local Government Grants, DACDF and CDF. The forum led to the re-establishment of District Task Forces to monitor progress on public disclosures. The Stakeholders at the dialogue forums made commitments to support the various district task forces in the discharge of their responsibilities. • Facilitated national public disclosure meeting in Freetown for large-scale mining companies to disclose their annual turnover and remittances to sub-national transfers e.g. CDA, DACDF and surface rent. The National Minerals Agency made the disclosures on behalf of the companies. The main objective for doing this was to enhance transparency and accountability in the mining sector. • Conducted community outreach meetings with the local drama group (Kono Entertainers) on the free healthcare and gender-based-violence-related incidents. All the drama/skit performances were climaxed by questions and answers sessions. • Facilitated the review and development of the new five-year (2018 – 2022) strategic plan of the National Civil Society Forum Sierra Leone. The process involved the review of the vision and mission of the NCSF, as well as its strategic goal, which now focuses on consolidating, sustaining and evidencing a new dynamism for public interest activism in Sierra Leone through collective strategic engagements. The five years strategy has four over-arching areas including consolidating the institutional undergirds of the forum, recovering and guarding civic space, advancing civil society- state engagements and

bringing citizens' voice to bear on political and economic progress in the country.

- Organized meeting of community stakeholders in which five Paramount Chiefs attended. The objective of the meeting was to get the Paramount Chiefs to take actions that would protect women's rights to hold leadership positions in their communities. This could include the development of bye-laws such as the suspension of all male-dominated secret societies during elections campaigns and enforcing full compliance. This was a follow-up action to an earlier meeting held on the subject matter.
- Facilitated collaboration building and information sharing meetings for women's wings of political parties and women aspirants. These meetings were a follow-up on previous engagements between CSOs, women's wings of registered political parties and female aspirants with the main objective of monitoring the extent to which action points developed had been taken forward.
- Worked with other like-minded organizations under the umbrella of the NGO Working Group to campaign for a review of the New NGO Policy, which is very restrictive, intrusive and impinges on the exercise of the freedom of association and freedom of expression. These rights are guaranteed in International Human Rights Law, International Convention on Civil and Political Rights and the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone. The policy was reportedly passed surreptitiously through parliament by the previous government on the last day of the life of the parliament. By all indications, the new government is not in a hurry to review it, hence the engagements around the policy. We have organized regional consultations to raise awareness, educate our colleagues about the traps contained in the new NGO policy and to take a common position that we would present to the Ministry of Development and Economic Planning and other interested agencies.
- Facilitated consultations in five affected communities in Kono district to confirm litigations for advocacy. Prior to that we had consultations with the Paramount Chiefs of Gbense, Tankoro and Fiamma chiefdoms, Affected Property Owners Association (APOA), civil society and media representatives. The purpose of

		<p>the consultations was to inform them about our intentions to institute legal proceedings against corporate mining companies for their consistent and comprehensive abuse of citizens' rights and to introduce the lawyer who would lead that process to them. Consultations were also held with the judiciary of Sierra Leone. This was necessary because the litigations would be filed on behalf of the affected mining communities whose rights were daily abused.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitated meeting of the National Conveners of the National Civil Society Forum Sierra Leone. The meeting was the first after the March 2018 elections and it discussed critical issues bordering on the wellbeing of the country and how civil society would continue to be effective in the pursuit of their mandate. The meeting also developed the framework for the district-level engagements in preparation for the general meeting (General Assembly) of civil society.
4.	<p><i>Research and Documentation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In collaboration with WoME, we launched an assessment report titled: " Assessment of the Impact of Industrial Mining on Women in Mining operational areas of Bo, Bonthe, Moyamba and Kono districts in Sierra Leone ". In collaboration with Women on Mining and Extractives (WoME), we commissioned a research on Violence against Women in mining communities. This research, which is ongoing, is meant to generate information that civil society will use to intensify evidence-based advocacy on the subject matter. In partnership with the University of Sierra Leone and Carleton University in Canada, we held a Gender and Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining Workshop "connecting research with extractive governance" and a policy dialogue on Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining Research findings and recommendations to inform policy actions in Sierra Leone. These meetings took place in Tonkolili district

		<p>and Freetown respectively. The research findings and recommendations were presented and interrogated at various levels. Stakeholders’ understanding of the critical issues that border on formalization of the artisanal gold mining was enhanced. Policy actors were also engaged with the view to getting them to take onboard policy recommendations on artisanal mining in Sierra Leone</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducted research on the impact of industrial mining on women in Bonthe, Moyamba and Kono districts. The research was done within the mining concessions of Sierra Rutile Ltd, Sierra Minerals Ltd and Koidu Ltd mining companies. • Conducted research on gender and artisanal mining (gold) in Tonkolili district in collaboration with Carlton University in Canada and Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone. The objective of the research was to find out the socio-economic challenges that women in the targeted mining communities faced and which prevented them from participating fully in mining activities. We also looked at how mining operations were affecting the livelihoods of women in the affected communities.
5.	<p><i>Implementation of the Organization Development and Change (ODC)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitated the development of an organizational Operating Model that presents how we function as a whole so as to enable us fulfill our strategic objectives as detailed in our 25 years strategy. The constituent parts of MNJD were unpacked to understand how they fit together and the competencies we require to fulfill our mandate. Consequently, strategic priorities, activities and key results were identified in the model as they are the central concern of our organization. All the components are inter-connected and support the services or activities that we deliver. • Facilitated the holding of review and reflection meetings in all our offices. The main purpose of the meetings was to take stock of what obtained in each office in

		<p>terms of projects, programme integration, donors, staff, capacity, management and other relevant areas, get a baseline and determine and agree on action points that would take each office and ultimately the organization into higher grounds. This exercise was followed by a re-orientation exercise, shift of focus and introduction of new ways of working, as well as building on the successes gained and designing new approaches to addressing the challenges that were identified.</p>
6.	<p>Collaboration with Government and Development Partners</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Five mining companies (Sierra Leone Minerals Holding Ltd – Vimetco, Sierra Rutile, Sierra Leone Company- Marampa Mines, Koidu Ltd, Shandong Iron and Steel Group) have all signed Community Development Agreements (CDAs) with the communities where they are operating. This is as a result of series of engagements that we had with relevant government MDAs e.g. Ministry of Mines and Minerals Resources, National Minerals Agency, Strategic Policy Unit and Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development. The signing of the CDAs will help to enhance community development, as well as to strengthen partnership and collaboration between the affected communities and the mining companies. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participated in meetings of Kimberley Process Multi-stakeholders Group in Sierra Leone in which we are serving as Co-chair. The Kimberley Process comprises of government, mining industry and civil society. The objective of the KP is to prevent conflicts diamonds from entering the world market through a certification scheme. • Collaborated with the Government of Sierra Leone to implement the Community Development Agreements (CDAs). We were part of the multi-stakeholders working group that was set up to develop the template for the development of agreements which the individual communities signed with mining companies.

Following several engagements, civic education and awareness raising programmes in our operational communities in the eastern region, many people realized the need and the necessity to support and vote for female candidates contesting for elective positions. One of such activities that we facilitated was the presentation of 24 female candidates contesting for various positions in the 2018 local and parliamentary elections to the communities they were vying to represent. These meetings brought together different community stakeholders including Paramount Chiefs, section chiefs, societal heads, religious leaders, youth and women' groups to discuss critically issues around women's representation in parliament and in the local councils. In all the meetings, the communities accorded the female candidates a warm reception and commitments of support to female candidates were made by strategic stakeholders. Paramount Chief of Sembahun chieftdom, Madam Sallay Gendemeh, herself a woman, applauded the female candidates for braving the stereotypes and the numerous barriers that stood in the way of women. She called on her subjects to support the female candidates. The societal heads also assured the female candidates that they would set aside all activities of their secret societies until after the elections so as not to intimidate or restrict the campaign movements of the female candidates in the chieftdom, whilst on their part, the youth volunteered to provide security and protection from all forms of violence for the female candidates right through their campaigns. These and other conclusions were formalized with a Communiqué between the female candidates and their communities.

For the first time in the history of Sierra Leone, we have been able to establish an up-to-date database of active civil society organizations operating across the country. This has helped to bring civic leaders closer to each other and to work as a cohesive team. Before our interventions, civic groups were operating like islands that were totally independent of each other with no collaboration, no consultations and no solidarity actions. This, to a large extent, undermined our relevance and strength, as evidenced by the fastly diminishing civic space in the country. But the new approach of ensuring that everyone comes onboard, no matter where one operates, is gradually enhancing the reversal of the hitherto narrative. It is now common to see civic society activists from different regions and districts engaging in discussing critical issues that affect their respective regions and districts and the country at large. The district conveners have established Whatsapp groups for the respective districts to ensure regular conversation, consultation, planning and information sharing, which was not happening and which is believed to be one of the factors responsible for the divisiveness of civil society over the years. Aside the district Whatsapp groups, there are also regional and national Whatsapp platforms established to bring civic leaders together on a regular basis. Many a time these social media platforms have helped to share news alerts on upcoming national events, as well as to share experiences. For example, when the Ministry of Finance was organizing budget hearing discussions across the country, civil society activists all over the country participated in the proceedings effectively and made meaningful contributions. Because the discussions started in Freetown before they proceeded to the provinces, the civil society in Freetown shared critical information with their colleagues in the provinces based on what happened in Freetown. This helped to prepare civil society groups in the regions enough to be more effective in discussing the critical issues involved, especially after they have been made to know how the process was organized and where the gaps were. This sharing of information continued throughout the process. Also very recently, the Ministry of Development and Economic Planning was undertaking public consultations for the development of the

country's development plan. But in some districts where the discussions have so far taken place such as Moyamba, Pujehun and Bonthe, civil society activists were not invited to participate in the consultations as they did for other categories of people. The civic leaders in these affected districts posted on the various civil society Whatsapp platforms to share this information and to find out whether it was the same in other districts. The civil society activists in Bo, which is the regional headquarter town of the affected districts, responded promptly by engaging all the key stakeholders that were involved in the process and made them to see reason not to exclude civil society from the process. This is what effective coordination and collaboration can do.

For the very first time also, through our facilitation and support, civil society carried out a governance assessment of the SLPP government since they were elected in March 2018. The assessment was done against the elections promises that the party made to the electorate and the policy commitments of the president in his State of the Nation address at the State Opening of Parliament in May 2018. The assessment was done through focus group discussions that were organized in all the 16 districts of the country. The main purpose of this exercise was to remind the party in governance of their promises and how good they have been to these promises, and to hold them accountable for their policy commitments. The report of this exercise, together with the key findings and recommendations, will be shared with the government and it is expected that it will form the basis of our discussions.

In another related development, our engagements with the civic communities in the newly-established districts of Karene and Falaba in the north-western and northern regions respectively was welcomed by not only civil society activists, but also the entire populations in these districts. These districts were created prior to the March 2018 elections and they were located in communities that lack almost everything in terms of providing good quality social services. The roads leading to these districts and within the townships are terribly appalling; government offices that should give these places the semblance of district headquarters are not there, communications infrastructure is nothing to write home about. Residents of these communities considered themselves cut-off from the rest of the country, as they were neither catered for in the new created districts, nor were they accepted in the old/parent district where they used to be. This was the dilemma the people were faced with. It was in the midst of these challenges that we braved the bad roads and all other related problems to reach out to our colleagues, mobilized and organized them into solid groups. Our physical presence alone gave them hope and real sense of belonging. This belief was further strengthened after we had meetings with them where we discussed the numerous challenges facing their communities, the role they should play in championing public interest activism in their communities. Some of the outcomes of these meetings were the establishment and constitution of district advocacy and coordinating structures in the form of district conveners, development of district action plans for further engagements and the establishments of district Whatsapp groups. As a result, civic groups in these districts now see themselves as part of the wider civil society; they took active part in the just-concluded budget hearing discussions.

The meeting of the national conveners held in Makeni was part of the engagements aimed at preparing civic leaders to take appropriate actions to reclaim our shrinking civic space and to revitalize public interest activism throughout the country. The meeting developed the framework for the upcoming general meeting/assembly of civil society groups operating in the country. During the meeting, the conveners reviewed the five-year strategic plan of the National Civil Society Forum Sierra Leone (2018 – 2022) and made salient recommendations for further discussion and adoption at the general meeting/assembly. Another important issue that was discussed was the capacity of civic leaders in relation to the task at hand. The

meeting did an assessment of the capacity of civil society activists in relationship to what was required of them to be effective and sustainable in their engagements; a comprehensive framework for capacity strengthening was also drafted for further discussion at the General Assembly. The meeting also reflected on the 2018 parliamentary, presidential and local council elections and raised concerns about some aspects of the process, which they desired to be reviewed for the wellbeing of future elections and democratic governance. For example, there were several attempts by the previous government to shift the dates for the elections to suit their purpose and convenience in complete disregard to the legal framework. We were with the view that our laws must be reviewed to include safeguards/guarantees that would make the date for elections and other issues predictable and sacrosanct. Also, the legitimacy of the president is being challenged in the courts by members of the opposition and up to this day the judiciary has not sat on the matter, whilst the president continues to preside over the state and performing presidential/executive functions. We also believed that there must be timeframe within which all elections-related cases must be heard and decided. These and many other issues were not only discussed, but also proposals on how to engage in effective citizens' advocacy around them were made.

Further, the existence of the database of active civil society groups has made it easier for information sharing and for effective coordination. Unlike before the database was established, now we know who to contact in every district when we want to organize a public event, making civic leaders to be more engaged at all times. We saw it happen during the 2018 elections when the National Election Watch used the data to recruit people to monitor the movement of voting materials from the Lungi International Airport to the ware houses of the respective district election offices ahead of the run-off elections. There were lots of tensions, suspicions, accusations and counter-accusations over the movement and security of ballot materials from the airport to the district election warehouses, and from polling centres to the tallying centres. This was going to lead to serious conflicts. At this point, NEW's capacity has been fully stretched, so they turned to the civil society database and did a quick recruitment. The monitoring of this process by civil society helped to restore confidence and quell the rising tensions among political party functionaries. Some of the polling day observers that were deployed by NEW were also recruited using the database. Another group that has found the database useful is the Education for all Coalition. The coalition works with UNICEF on the free quality education programme of the government. They used the database to identify civic leaders in the various districts to organize/anchor their public awareness and education events for them. And what is good about these platforms is that they work with every organization and institution that is seeking to promote the public good.

We facilitated the formation of 57 Women's Savings Groups in our operational chiefdoms in Kenema and Kailahun districts. We supported them with trainings, coaching and mentoring, especially at the inception stage. Every savings group now has enough savings from which they can conveniently loan other members of their communities with minimal interest and clear repayment terms. The main objective of giving out the loans is to help community members settle their problems, rather than to make big profits. The loans are used by the loanees for different purposes, and they are taken by individuals and groups. Individual loans are on a smaller scale and are taken by members of the community to settle their own personal problems ranging from providing food for the families, paying hospital bills to starting small businesses, etc. Because of the success of the loan scheme, the Savings groups are now embarking on large-scale investments such as large-scale rice farming, vegetables gardening and trading on cassava, corn, potatoes and palm oil. They use part of the profits from these investments to share among themselves and to further strengthen their savings. From the savings, they have also started to help their members who cannot afford to pay the school fees of their children and wards with subsidies, whilst others are awarded full scholarships. Each of the Women's Savings Groups has not less than Le10, 000,000.00 (Ten million leones) now in their accounts. This will not have been possible

without the introduction of the savings scheme. Even the women acknowledged that it would have been virtually impossible for them to raise such amounts of money if it were not for the formation of the Savings Groups and the trainings they went through.

Land is very critical in Sierra Leone, especially in rural communities where people's livelihoods depend entirely on the land. This is also the area where a lot of human rights abuses are daily taking place in terms of ownership, access and utilization. At the initial stage of the implementation of the project, the Paramount Chief and some of other her section chiefs expressed fear that the project might cause upheavals in the chiefdom, particularly the aspect that had to do with the voluntary demarcation and documentation of land. They advised against continuing the project in their chiefdom.

"Our communities have been enjoying peace from time immemorial with no land disputes. Demarcating lands at this time will cause upheavals and unrest and therefore, we will not support this exercise here," PC madam Theresa Vebbie of Kandulepiama Chiefdom and town chief Abibatu M. Fofanah of Missila Village said. But after further engagements, they all saw the need for the project.

Together with the targeted communities, we established different committees that were tasked with different responsibilities with the sole objective of ensuring that peace continued to reign supreme in these communities. Among them are 1) community mobilizers whose role is to liaise between the project implementing team and the communities; 2) village area land committee whose function is to monitor compliance with the community bye-laws; and 3) conflict resolution committee which was tasked with the responsibility to resolve conflicts emanating from the land demarcation process. The composition of these committees is very inclusive in terms of women, youth, land owners, land users, etc. Our engagements helped to generate public discussions around land, particularly as it affected women who were largely denied their legitimate inheritance as the testimonies below manifested:

"Since the death of my husband, I have been denied access to all the properties he left behind, which I toiled with him to acquire. His relatives took everything away from us. Even our children have no access to them," Jeneba Moriba, Tupuwama committee said.

"When I separated from my husband after 22 years of marriage that was blessed with five children, I came back home to my family empty-handed. But I was hopeful that they would help me from the proceeds of our father's oil palm plantation. But my brothers and uncles outrightly told me that I was not entitled to anything as long as I have married before. Up to this day I am struggling with my children with no help from either my family or my husband's. Some of my children are no longer attending school because I cannot afford to pay the fees," Kadiatu Yamba, Mathru Village.

"We never had the understanding that women too have a right to their family property even after they have married and settled down with their husbands. Before now, when we came with problems to our families, it was out of humanitarian feelings that they would give us little help. At times, they would just ignore us because as far as they are concerned such help was not compulsory. But now that we have got education on gender equality, property rights, marriage and divorce rights, it's high time we talked to our men folks for a change of attitude". Musa Kharr of Mathru village said.

Our intervention in the Kandulepiama chiefdom has not only engendered public discussions on issues of land and women's customary rights, but also it's caused the chiefs and community elders to start to respect the rights of women to access to land, as well as bringing about a change of the hitherto generally accepted attitude and perception towards women.

Our awareness raising and education programmes including our regional trainings on child rights protection and management of sexual and gender-based violence issues were meant to galvanize public actions to reduce incidents of SGBV and to mitigate the effects. One of the barriers to addressing issues of gender-based violence and child rights abuse was the fact that such matters were considered to be taboo to be discussed in public. As such, affected families were reluctant to report these matters to the appropriate authorities for redress. Even where these matters were reported to the police or other relevant institutions, the commitment to pursue these matters to logical conclusions was visibly lacking. But with our interventions, victims are now more confident to come forward and report cases to our paralegal offices, the police or other institutions for redress as evidenced by the number of cases reported and pursued by the affected people and communities. After these engagements, more people became involved in raising awareness on issues of gender-based violence and child rights in their communities; they held meetings with Paramount Chiefs, town chiefs, village heads, youth leaders, teachers and school going children. As a result of these engagements, men, women, and youth are now more aware of gender-based violence and child rights issues and are more committed now to prosecuting perpetrators of GBV in their communities. For example, the Ward Gender Monitoring Committee in Bendu village, Sandor Chiefdom, refused all the apologies, interventions and attempts made by some key community stakeholders to compromise a GBV case reported to them in which a 40 years old man sexually penetrated three girls of ages 17, 16 and 14. The affected girls were in the care of the alleged perpetrator who subsequently impregnated the 17 years old girl. Below is the table of cases reported between April and June 2018:

Month	Types of cases Reported	No. of cases	Referred to Court	Discharged
April				
	Rape	4	4	2
	Wife battery	1	1	1
	Child abuse (Sexual Penetration)	4	3	2
May				
	Rape	0	0	0
	Wife battery	2	1	1
	Child Abuse (Sexual Penetration)	4	4	2
	Child trafficking	1	1	0
June				
	Rape	0	0	0
	Wife battery	3	3	3

Source: NMJD paralegal centres

Also, our intervention helped to strengthen collaboration and partnership among key stakeholders dealing with issues of gender-based violence and child rights protection issues, including the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, the Family Support Unit (FSU) of the Sierra Leone Police, Civil Society Organizations and human rights advocacy organizations. The trainings and other engagements that we organized for these institutions helped to address a serious problem that used to affect their relationship and impacting negatively on the way they collaborated, which is the lack of clarity on their roles, responsibilities and limitations and the lack of trust. But this was clearly addressed during these engagements resulting in a better working relationship and effective coordination. These institutions are now working individually and collaboratively to popularize and promote compliance with the three Gender Acts and the Child Rights Act, advocate for increased and improved social services for vulnerable groups and the provision of a conducive and secure environment for children to grow and develop. With this strong collaboration among the key stakeholders in the subject matter, more positive results will be achieved.

Our interventions towards promoting women's participation in governance in the three eastern regional districts of Kenema, Kailahun and Kono yielded good dividend as the outcome of the 2018 elections indicated. The choice of the eastern region for this project was deliberate, as this is the region where a lot of restrictions are placed on women to vie or be appointed into leadership positions. Like in the north, women in the eastern region have very little chances of contesting for leadership positions or participate in governance compared to their colleagues in the southern region. This perception that such positions are not meant for women, no matter how versed and capable they are, is animated by religious beliefs, customs and traditions to an extent that it has become a part of the people's daily lives. In order to change this perception which has been ingrained in people's minds, we employed several approaches including consultations, focus group discussions, trainings, mobilizing and organizing, mentoring and coaching, advocacy and lobbying and facilitation with knowledge, skills and financial resources. At the end of the 2018 elections, 26 women councilors were elected to the various local councils in the three districts (11 in Kenema, 6 in Kailahun and 9 in Kono), and two female members of parliament were elected. All of the elected women were part of the beneficiaries of our interventions. And because of the vigorous capacity building events that they took part in ahead of the elections, they have been elected to head or serve as deputy heads of several standing committees of their local councils. We will continue to work with them to ensure that they discharge their functions as councilors and members of parliament effectively and in the best interest of their communities. From all indications, more women will express interest to vie for elective positions in their communities any time the opportunity presents itself.

Councilor Abibatu Farma of the Kenema City Council told our field staff that, she and her colleague councilors were very delighted to be a part of our WELD project, which helped to remove the log from their eyes and for supporting women to reclaim their rights as citizens of this country.

"We will ever remain to be grateful to the WELD Project for broadening our horizons on issues we hitherto lacked knowledge of. They have helped us to be confident and assertive to talk of women's participation in governance at all levels. We consider the kitchen not to be our exclusive place any longer. We demonstrated this in the allocation of positions on the standing committees after the elections. We demanded our quota of

positions and we got it. Some of us are now chairpersons of committees, whilst others are deputy chairpersons. We will use our experience to encourage our colleague women to come out in their numbers and contest for positions in the 2023 elections,” councilor Farma said.

In our quest to bring public interest litigation against corporate mining companies in Kono district for consistent human rights abuses including environmental degradation, we collaborated with other institutions here in Sierra Leone and abroad including Public Interest Lawyering Initiative for West Africa and NAMATI. The people in mining communities in Kono have experienced a lot of sufferings including loss of lives at the hands of mining companies for many years. The state institutions such as the police and judiciary that have the responsibility to protect the rights of citizens appear to be colluding with corporate mining companies to unleash untold sufferings on the poor people. There were instances where harmless and defenseless citizens who came out to protest peacefully against the excesses of mining companies operating in their communities were shot dead and nothing came out of it by way of redress. We have initiated and pursued several interventions in the natural resource sector in Sierra Leone over the years aimed at restoring sanity to the sector and respect for human rights. It was against this background that we are gearing up for public interest litigations against mining companies. With the support of our partners, we have hired a lawyer who is resident in the affected communities in Kono and he’s been working assiduously to establish a clear case for the communities to seek redress(for the very first time) in established courts in Sierra Leone and the sub-region. The necessary institutions such as the judiciary, National Minerals Agency and the Ministry of Mines and Mineral Resources have been duly informed of the process.

So far, the lawyer has trained NMJD paralegals in Kono and orientated them on general Public Interest Litigation related issues and thereby committing them in assisting in the evidence gathering process. The paralegals have brought victims and witnesses affected by the protests of 2007 and 2012 in Kono in which the police fired live bullets and killed protesters. He interviewed and obtained statements and other potential evidence materials from all of them. Among them are: Sia Nyandemoh, the niece of deceased, Aiah Momoh, who was shot dead in December 2007. She too was a victim of the same 2007 protest; Finda Kamanda was a victim of the 2012 strike action in Kono. She was shot on the right leg and she is still carrying bullets with her with its attendant pains; Ibrahim A.S Bockarie, a victim of the 2012 protest and Jonathan AiahYorpor, a witness of fact of both protests have been interviewed and they all vouched to avail themselves and cooperate with us and the courts at all fronts wherever and whenever they are called upon. Cases related to environmental, physical, economic, and social abuses caused by multinational extractive companies in the district and witnesses’ testimonies have been compiled.

This is the first time Kono district is having a resident lawyer who is working tirelessly to use the courts to seek redress and justice for the suffering people. To the people of Kono, the presence of the lawyer in their midst alone brought hope and assurance of the possibility of reclaiming their rights and dignity which have eroded them for many years. Deputy Mammy Queen of Tankoro Chiefdom stated: “The presence of the lawyer in the district has restored our hope to claim our rights with dignity. The presence of the lawyer and our desire to work with him in establishing a compelling case against the mining companies has helped to unite us”.

Our project staff and the lawyer were at the ECOWAS Court in Abuja, Nigeria, recently where they met officials of the court including its president and registrar and other members of PILIWA. They also used the opportunity to compare notes with colleagues and lawyers from other countries with regards the progress they have made towards filing a strong and compelling case to the ECOWAS Court against the defaulting mining companies.

Diamonds are found in six out of the 14 chiefdoms in Kono district. This makes agriculture the mainstay of the economic activities of the district. But in spite of this, agriculture is starved of labour and resources as everyone's focus is on diamond and gold mining. The resultant effect is pervasive food insecurity. Our interventions were, therefore, tailored to ensure that people go back to the farms and till the land to attain food security/sovereignty. Since farming in the district is less profitable when compared with diamond and gold mining, we employed several approaches that would make more people become attracted to the farms. We introduced the concept of multiple cropping of the staple food, rice, as it is the surest way to reduce hunger and eradicate poverty. For multiple cropping to take place, swamps must be developed in a way that they retained water right round the year and the appropriate rice seedlings used. To this effect, we have trained 30 farm families in the development of swamps for IVS cultivation, gardening and marketing techniques. All the trainees have demonstrated confidence and versed knowledge in swamp development, bonding, nursing, preparation of seed beds, transplanting, application of fertilizers, harvesting and post-harvest processing and storage/preservation. In addition, we supported farmers with transport allowances and food for work as a way of encouraging them to undertake farming and enhance food production in the district. All of these actions have led to more farmers doing IVS rice farming and more women engaging in vegetable gardening to augment the meagre incomes of their families. They prepared their food at the site where they worked. Already, youth from the neighbouring communities have also expressed interest in undertaking farming activities and have requested for similar support to help them kick start. One of the key successes of this intervention is the fact that it has made youth in the project communities to start to see agriculture as an alternative to diamond mining with less negative consequences to the environment.

Our paralegal component in Kono has played a huge role in promoting peace and harmony in our operational communities in Kono district. They have successfully mediated conflicts between and among families and communities without any cost involved and provided counseling to feuding parties. Our paralegal centres in Nimiyama, Gorama Kono and Gbense chiefdoms in Kono district have been inundated with complaints made by affected people and communities who believed that their rights have been abused. We deployed the paralegals in the local communities so that they would work with the people and to enable them identify early warning of conflict triggers and to take proactive actions to stop them from manifesting into real conflicts. Among the common cases reported to us for redress actions were maintenance, teenage pregnancy, child abandonment/neglect, and sexual penetration, sexual assault against under-aged girls, extra marital affairs and property inheritance. In total, 143 cases were reported at the three paralegal centres as of March 2018; of which the paralegals amicably settled 104 cases, 19 were referred and 20 are still pending as a result of lack of evidence and witnesses. In Lei chiefdom, the paralegals intervened in the hostility between the cattle rearers and crop farmers and settled it amicably without anyone losing a single cent as it would have been the case if it was mediated by the local courts or police. The cattle rearers agreed to pay some compensation to the crop farmers for the destruction the cattle caused to their crops. The paralegals facilitated the development of community bye-laws to guide the operations of both cattle rearers and crop farmers, and the Community Action Group was set up to monitor compliance with the bye-laws by all parties. With this intervention, both the cattle rearers and crop farmers have been co-existing peacefully.

The research, which we conducted in Bonthe, Moyamba and Kono districts on the impacts of industrial mining on women and their livelihoods, created an opportunity for community stakeholders to sit on the same table and discuss the problems affecting them and their communities. The research came out with striking findings and concrete recommendations directed at government and other relevant agencies. The findings revealed that poverty levels were very high in the affected mining communities in the three districts of Bonthe, Moyamba and Kono with poverty headcount standing at between 50-70 percent. There was a virtual lack of safe drinking water, as the mining operations have destroyed streams and water catchments and polluted other sources of water supply. It was also revealed that women in these communities were sexually exploited by mines workers. The reason for this is that most of those working in the mining companies were not indigenes of these communities, so they paid little heed to the social norms of these host communities. This has resulted in community conflicts and a sharp increase in incidences of teenage pregnancy, school drop-outs and sexually-transmitted diseases (STDs) with Kono district recording the highest and fastest growing rate of HIV and AIDS infections¹. The validation meeting also made room for women and other stakeholders to discuss these findings and how they particularly impacted women and then came up with problem-solving recommendations. One of such recommendations was that the government should cause the review of our existing laws to create provision for co-ownership of our natural resources with the view to ensuring that mining communities and the country generally derive more benefits from their exploitation. As it stands, the mining companies control everything and take the benefits away leaving behind monumental destruction for the communities to grapple with. They also recommended that the government through the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) should develop a comprehensive resettlement policy for the country and policy guidelines on how to use proceeds from the natural resource revenue streams such as the DACDF and CDF to benefit the mining communities.

The Kimberley Process, which is a tripartite arrangement involving governments, civil society and companies, has as its main objective to prevent diamonds emanating from conflicts zones to enter the world market. The KP makes it mandatory that all diamonds entering the world market should bear a certificate of origin issued by authorized agencies of the governments from where the diamonds are coming from. The reason for this is that each time a diamond is smuggled out of the country, the country loses, as taxes will not be paid to the appropriate authorities, and this will ultimately affect the quality of service delivery. NMJD has been a part of this process right from its inception. The KP has, to a large extent, succeeded in reducing the rate at which diamonds were being smuggled out of the country and ensured that diamond exporters complied fully with the requirements of the KP. There are records in Sierra Leone of people trying to export diamonds using fake certificates being detected at border crossings and entry/exit points and forced to comply with the legal instruments. The KP has also helped countries to strengthen internal controls systems to minimize leakages that were causing governments to lose huge sums of monies to graft, monies that would have been used to support the social sector and to reduce the pervasive poverty in the country. Also, our regional approach to the KP has been highly acclaimed by our colleagues in other regions as very successful. Whilst it's difficult for our colleagues in other regions to work together with their governments and mining companies, we (Mano River Union) are finding it less difficult to do so. We have a good working relationship with our governments, mining communities and mining companies within the remit of the KP. We work with mining communities and generate critical information which we share with governments through their authorized agencies and mining companies. We have undertaken series of activities aimed at educating the public about the KP and strengthening the capacities of key stakeholders through training and regular information sharing.

¹ Report produced by Partners in Health

Challenges

- Even though the cattle rearers and the crop farmers are now enjoying peace, they have still not been able to stop the cattle from destroying crops in Lei chiefdom. This might jeopardize the peace which they are enjoying now.
- A lot has been achieved in the area of gender-based violence and child rights. But challenges still remain, especially with sexual-related cases against under-aged children. The project does not have adequate client support provision to facilitate victims and their relatives to the police and to the magistrate courts for prosecution; even to provide victims with lawyers where necessary.
- Poor road network across the country and the poor state of national infrastructure, coupled with the unavailability of guaranteed 4-Wheel drive vehicles is a serious challenge to the effectiveness of our coordination work.
- Even though all-male secret societies were banned during the elections campaigns so as not to disadvantage women aspirants, some secret societies did not heed to the ban and no action was taken against them because the chiefs who were to sanction such actions are themselves members.
- Some members of the Women's Savings Groups took loans from the savings and refused to pay back; some even fled to unknown communities after they have obtained the loans.
- The women aspirants that were supported by the WELD project for 2018 elections formed a caucus through which they met regularly throughout the electoral cycle. But with the elections ended and majority of caucus members did not win, getting women to continue to hold regular meetings and maintain the momentum has become a challenge. The project too does not make provisions for post-elections engagements of the caucus.

Some of the potential witnesses for the upcoming litigations against multinational mining companies in Kono are afraid to come forward and testify. This fear stemmed from the fact that these companies are considered to be too powerful to get away with anything that they do. because of the fact that they are not protected and secure- they are afraid that their lives may be at risk and they may lose their jobs if they are to testify in public, especially those that are working for government and the mining company.

Lessons

- Despite the several engagements that we had with the leaderships of political parties to give symbols to women to contest the 2018 elections, financial status played a huge influence in the award of symbols for the 2018 elections by political parties. Some of the political parties held the view that elections could be won easily by those who had adequate resources at their disposal, hence the reluctance to award party symbols to women.
- Partisan politics affected the attendance of people to meetings and other public events like rallies organized by women aspirants. Many people were afraid to attend meetings and rallies of women candidates that contested the elections under the tickets political parties that were different from theirs for fear of reprisals from their party members.
- Because the process of evidence gathering to commence the litigations is time consuming and slow, the interest and excitement of the affected communities dampen. The longer the process takes, the more the hopes of the people will give way to despair.
- There are some civil society activists that use the platform of civil society to pursue their individual agendas or the agendas of the political parties of their choice. These are the few civic leaders whose activities smear the image of the wider civil society in Sierra Leone.

Section VII: Recommendations

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- The paralegals should facilitate a process where the crop farmers, cattle rearers and other community stakeholders will work concertedly to demarcate lands for cattle rearing from those reserved for crop farming and build strong fences around them to prevent cattle from straying into crops.
- NMJD should engagement their partners including the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs to make provision t for legal aid support to victims of gender-based violence and child abuse. This could help victims to pursue gender-based violence cases to their logical conclusions.
- NMJD to get their partners to support them to procure 4-wheel drive vehicles that will ensure the safety of their staff.
- NMJD should collaborate with community structures to identify and engage those chiefs who did not heed to the ban on secret societies during the elections campaign.
- NMJD should work with the Women’s Savings Groups and the chiefs to ensure that more stringent measures are put in place for taking loans from the savings groups. The objective of the measures is to ensure that people do not run away after they have taken loans without repaying.
- NMJD should work with the women caucus to develop action plans that will see them restart the holding of regular meetings. Regular meetings of the caucus will help keep the momentum and will also encourage more women to com onboard,
- The lawyer should work with NMJD staff in Kono to further educate and allay the fears of victims of human rights abuses who are also the potential witnesses. It could be that their fear to testify in court when the hearings begin is caused by ignorance of the process. A case is as strong as the evidence that is available.

Paralegals Facilitate Justice for Madam Sia Jimmy

In January 2018, 39 years old Madam Sia Jimmy of Kaidu community in Gbense chiefdom reported her fiancée (who was also the town chief of Kaidu) that he seized her entire cassava farm just because she said she did not want the relationship any longer. Before she reported the matter to our paralegal centre in Koidu, she said some elders in the community have made frantic attempts to mediate the issue, but she suspected them of siding with her fiancé who is their male colleague and also a town chief. When our paralegals received the report, they immediately invited her fiancé to the centre, but he ignored the invitation. After he has persistently refused to come to the paralegal centre, our paralegals reported the matter to the senior section chief at Boroma village. The defiant fiancé finally honoured the invitation of the senior section chief. With the support of the paralegals, the senior section chief set up a committee comprising of the paralegals, members of the Community Oversight Committee and Citizens Action Group to look into the matter. With this composition there were very little chances to subvert justice. The matter was heard and resolved peacefully. The fiancé/town chief was requested to rerun the cassava farm to Madam Sia Jimmy with immediate effect.

“I thank the paralegals for their prompt intervention which helped me to get back my cassava farm. I don’t see how I was going to get justice without their intervention. By the look of things, the community elders were afraid to say the truth because they didn’t want to hurt one of their kind. They preferred to hurt me than to hurt him. But I am happy that it ended this way. I thank all those who made it possible,” Madam Sia Jimmy said.

Magistrate Court Sends 32 Years Old to Jail for Sexual Penetration

A 32 years year old man at Boroma village in Kono district whose name is Sahr Ndomaina was alleged to have been sexually assaulting a little girl of the same village called Kumba (not her real name). According to her grandmother, Kumba started complaining of persistent malaria and fever. She applied native herbs on her but the malaria continued. She then took Kumba to the community health facility for treatment. She received treatment for several days, but her condition continued to depreciate as the fever did not respond to the treatment. It was at this stage that her grandmother decided to sit and interview her on her deteriorating health condition.

“It was when I interviewed her that she told me Sahr Ndomaina had deflowered her and that he continued to force her to have sex with him on a daily basis. She said he threatened to kill her with sorcery (Black Magic) anytime she revealed this to anyone. The grandmother and other family members reported this matter to the paralegal centre for advice and to help them get justice. The paralegals facilitated them to report the matter to the senior section chief, Alhaji Machendeh, and the Family Support Unit of the Tankoro police station where statements were obtained from the victim and her grandmother; they also issued her with a police medical form to go to the Koidu Government Hospital for thorough check-up and treatment. When Sahr Ndomaina got wind of these developments and knowing full well the gravity of the offense he had committed, he ran away and went into hiding. The community responded promptly by organizing a search party of youth and other community members. The search party combed the bushes and searched every house and other potential hiding places for six days without giving up. The alleged perpetrator was finally nabbed and brought to the police station. The paralegals followed-up with the police to ensure that the matter was not compromised and that it was speedily charged to court. The police charged the matter to the magistrate court in Koidu. The paralegal centre assigned one paralegal to the magistrate court when hearing started. The perpetrator was

eventually found guilty by the magistrate court and sentenced to seven years in prison. He is now at the male correctional centre in Koidu where he is serving his jail term. This will serve as a deterrent for those who may want to do similar things in future.