

## **Strengthening local capacities to improve governance, accountability and public participation in six border districts in the Mano River Union countries**



### **Civil Society Experiences - Lessons Learnt**

A Governance and Transparency Fund Project

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# 1. GTF Project in West Africa

## Introduction

Since 2008, Conciliation Resources has been working with the West African Centre for Capacity Building (CENCAD) and the Institute for Research and Democratic Development (IREDD)<sup>1</sup> in the Mano River region to increase ‘government accountability in conflict zones through public participation in policymaking’. Conciliation Resources’ five-year project, funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) under its ‘Governance and Transparency Fund’ (GTF), has focused on four regions, each of which suffer from weak governance structures and have been characterised by persistent insecurity<sup>2</sup>.

Drawing on relationships developed with civil society partners in West Africa since 1996, Conciliation Resources has been able to engage with marginalised communities in developing an in-depth conflict analysis and identifying potential routes to sustained peace. This report has been drawn from shared learning sessions between Conciliation Resources and its partners and highlights processes and lessons learnt in implementing the project.



Photographs in this report depict members of the District Platforms for Dialogue from all three countries participating in the West Africa Conciliation Resources GTF end-of-project workshop, which took place 21–23 January 2013 in Bo, Sierra Leone. © Conciliation Resources/Clare Richards

<sup>1</sup> Formerly known as the Liberia Democratic Institute (LDI)

<sup>2</sup> This project formed part of a wider GTF project implemented by Conciliation Resources across three other regions, including Uganda and South Sudan, Georgia/Abkhazia and Fiji.

## Context - governance in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea

More than ten years since the end of civil war in the region, wealth and decision-making powers remain the preserve of a powerful few in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia. Whilst the destruction of infrastructure through war has attracted high levels of government and donor investment to restore community services, in some cases introducing these for the first time to marginalised border areas, significant numbers of citizens continue to be excluded from decisions around how these public funds are spent and monitored. Communities living in marginalised areas across the three countries continue to suffer from poor access to healthcare, education, communication, housing, trade and job opportunities.

In these regions, a lack of open and accountable decision making has contributed to a rise in tensions between communities, particularly between local authorities and youths, which occasionally result in violent protest and the destruction of property. In border regions, where the root causes of the civil war can be traced to a lack of opportunity and engagement in political, social and economic decision-making, this is a significant cause for concern.

Communities in these regions suffer not only from irresponsible practices by local authorities and large extractive companies, unreflective of the needs and demands of the people, but also lack the tools and skills to effectively advocate for change, for example to environmental safety, job opportunities for young people and greater recognition of women's perspectives in policy implementation.

Governments in the region have acknowledged these fault lines and have begun to respond by increasing communication with affected communities. However, many of these strategies are largely ineffective due to a lack of consultation with communities on the ground. For example, in Sierra Leone, local councils are, under new decentralisation legislation, required to post information relating to decision making and reporting of public fund expenditure on local notice boards. However, a high number of individuals in border districts are illiterate and are therefore unable to access this information relating to the expenditure of their local taxes.<sup>3</sup> (Link to Liberia-Ivorian border visit report)

Similarly, the 2004 'Local Government Act' in Sierra Leone has significantly changed the way in which power is decentralised and resources are managed at the local level. A blurred division of responsibility between previously existing forms of government, including the ward councils and chiefdom councils, and the newly established local council, has significantly contributed towards tensions between decision makers and confusion amongst community members as to how good governance is monitored and implemented.

In Guinea, after more than fifty years of autocratic rule, the new democratic government has, since its election in 2010, sought to bring gradual change to the governance of its prefectures by developing its legislative functions and holding elections to legislative positions. However, discussions over how to implement such a structure have been in a deadlock for the past two years as opposition parties continue to reject the modalities and capacity of the electoral commission to conduct free and fair elections. Guinea's local government structures are not yet developed, however some form of governance is being implemented under each prefecture. Governance is still centralised, for example

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<sup>3</sup> See Paul Koroma's article 'Decentralisation and peacebuilding in Sierra Leone', *Accord Issue 23: Consolidating peace in Sierra Leone and Liberia* (2012) p 30 - 33

much of the local policy continues to be dictated by national priorities as opposed to the interests of local communities.

By contrast, in Liberia, decentralisation has come much further since the end of the civil war. Local governance is currently implemented through county officials appointed by the President, district chairpersons, city mayors and paramount chiefs. A decentralisation policy, clearly outlining the roles and responsibilities of each level of governance and building in monitoring mechanisms, was adopted by the Liberian cabinet and launched in January 2012 by the President. At present, the policy is awaiting approval of the senate to be passed into an official legislative instrument. However, border regions remain significantly less politically and economically developed than central administrative areas.

## **Project purpose in West Africa**

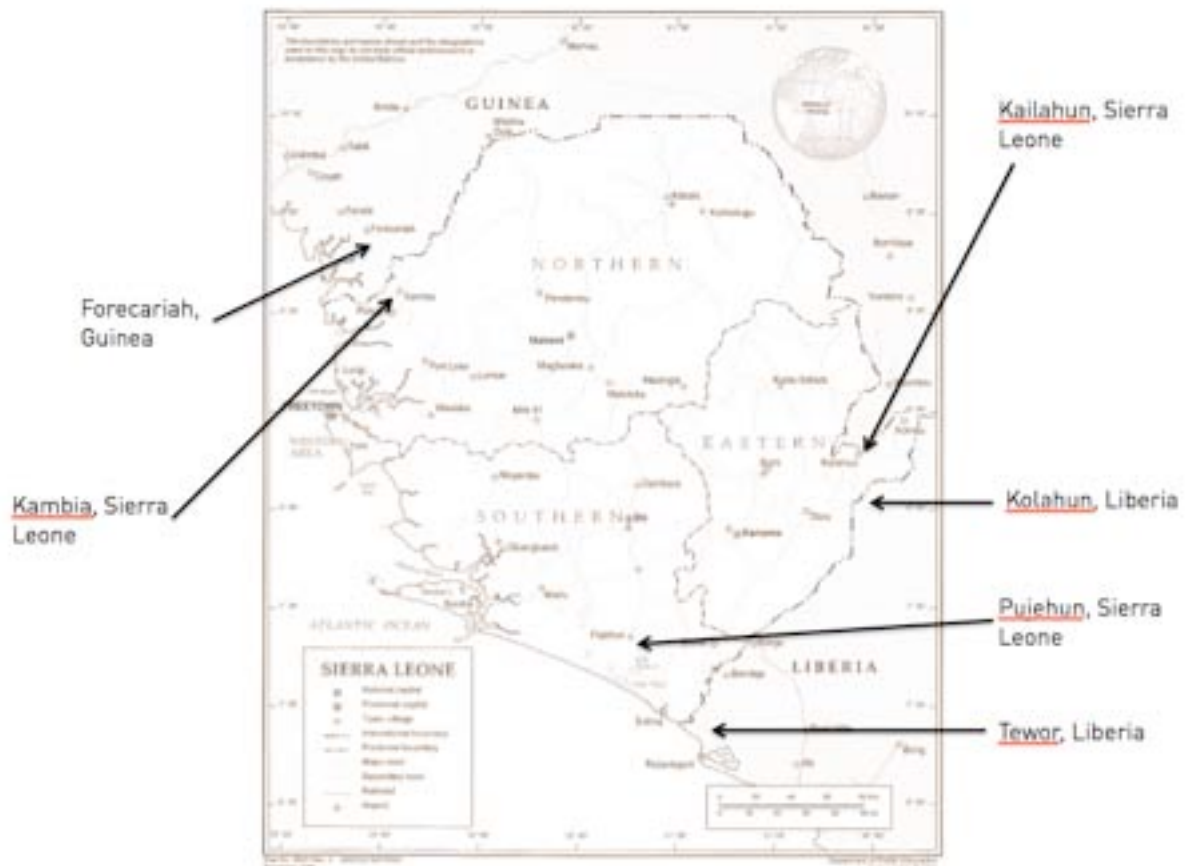
In implementing this project in West Africa, Conciliation Resources aimed to encourage more effective and responsive governance of marginalised border districts by increasing public participation in policy making and in so doing, contribute towards a more sustainable peace in the region.

Increased public participation at the local level in border district decision-making is complementing efforts of national NGOs and anti-corruption institutions to mitigate exclusion. For example, the Social Accountability Tool developed to monitor government infrastructure development and local spending in Tewor District, Liberia, is supporting the border community to engage with local authorities and service providers in ensuring that the needs of local people are met.

Conciliation Resources worked with two civil society partner organisations with widespread reach in isolated border districts to support communities in developing dialogue facilitation skills and equipping them with tools to advocate for good governance. Working with CENCAD, based in Sierra Leone and also present in the borderland of the Forécariah prefecture of Guinea, and with IREDD in Liberia, the project targeted communities in six-border districts:

- i) Sierra Leone: Kailahun, Kambia, and Pujehun Districts;
- ii) Guinea: Forécariah Prefecture
- iii) Liberia: Tewor District in Cape Mount County, Kolahun District in Lofa County;

## Map of Conciliation Resources' GTF Target areas



## Key Issues

The project focused on a number of key issues:

- Preventing outbreaks of violence arising from tensions around corrupt practices by government authorities and other key actors in the governance of the districts, particularly concerning the management of public funds.
- Raising awareness amongst communities of their rights and responsibilities to demand government transparency and accountability.
- Improving the capacities of community-based organisations to act as leaders with the required skills to monitor governance and accountability at the local and district level.
- Building capacities of marginalised community people and empowering them to participate in decision-making around issues of governance and accountability at the local and district levels.

## Achievements

Key achievements of the five-year project can be identified in each of the three countries in which it was implemented:

Sierra Leone	Guinea	Liberia
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women and youth in border communities now access information to participate in policy implementation in their districts.</li> <li>• Local officials are empowered to be accountable to citizens using various channels e.g. radio debates on “Council Hour”</li> <li>• Civil society facilitated dialogues empowered stakeholders to work collaboratively.</li> <li>• Political party actors committed to non-violence during elections as a result of civil society facilitated sessions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women and youth in border communities now access information to participate in dialogue with mining companies and local government authorities.</li> <li>• Tensions between youth and elders, and people of different ethnic backgrounds were resolved as a result of civil society facilitated dialogues in communities.</li> <li>• Private companies are beginning to account to communities through civil society facilitated dialogue sessions and access to policy documents.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Civil society and communities now access information from government institutions for evidence-based advocacy.</li> <li>• Local government officials now account to citizens through facilitated community meetings, radio debates, etc.</li> <li>• Women and youth participate more effectively in policy discussions and make recommendations for change.</li> <li>• Youth now lead dialogues to mitigate tension in communities</li> <li>• Private companies are beginning to account to communities through civil society facilitated dialogue sessions and access to policy documents.</li> <li>• Government is now becoming responsive to border community needs.</li> <li>• National policy actors now recognise the role of civil society in border regions and have begun to consult them.</li> </ul>

## 2. Methodology



### Capacity development through partnership

The partnership between CENCAD, IREDD and Conciliation Resources was centred on building capacities in both peacebuilding and organisational management. Key areas of capacity development included conflict analysis, advocacy, facilitation, dialogue, programme design, communication strategy, and narrative and financial reporting. With this support, local partners were able to work with community-based organisations to create safe spaces in which to discuss and develop activities promoting accountability and government responsiveness. At the national and multi-national levels, the partnership with Conciliation Resources also lent partners leverage to engage constructively with government actors, complementing local governance-strengthening activities.

In order to ensure that priority areas of capacity building were being effectively targeted, Conciliation Resources and its partners using a “Joint Partner Capacity Assessment tool” completed each year to measure progress against a set number of key capacity building indicators; nine core peacebuilding capacities and eight core organisational management capacities.

Partner-learning sessions, facilitated at the local, national and regional level formed a central element of Conciliation Resources’ capacity development approach. Joint partner review and planning sessions were held every six-months and provided a moment to conduct regional and country specific context analysis to inform partner plans and strategies for implementation. Post-planning meetings were organised with donors, government officials and other practitioners working in the field to share findings, concerns and plans in the target districts.



## District Platforms for Dialogue

A baseline study of the impact of conflict on governance and accountability was conducted in 2009/10 by CENCAD in four districts of Sierra Leone identified as isolated border areas that had significantly suffered from the civil war. The findings of CENCAD’s report, entitled “Challenges of Decentralisation in Sierra Leone”, revealed a lack of information and understanding about decentralisation at the local level, specifically around roles and responsibilities of citizens and local authorities under the 2004 Local Government Act. A lack of access to policy information and opportunities to engage with decision makers left civil society actors and local communities struggling to be heard in policy circles, especially where they were working alone in marginalised border areas.

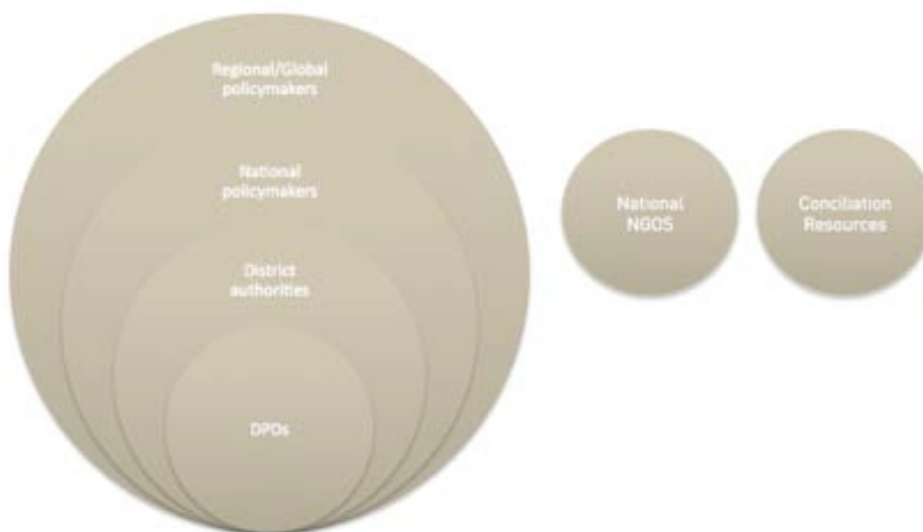
### The Concept of the DPDs

In order to promote widespread local participation in governance and develop local ownership of accountability tools, Conciliation Resources supported its partner organisations in establishing advocacy platforms in each of the six border districts.

The DPDs are a network of volunteers drawn from community-based organisations, activists, women and youth groups who came together to create a “voice” to engage policy actors and community leaders on change. This collaborative and unified effort is capable of having a greater impact in holding government actors accountable to local communities and created a space for communities to listen, inform and discuss governance issues with decision makers, thus leading to more informed policy making. (See Diagram 1 – Direction of change DPDs below)

Through the project, Conciliation Resources worked with 41 local organisations across the region, that continue to support communities to raise concerns and dialogue for policy change. The first three DPDs were established in 2010 in Kailahun, Kambia and Pujehun in Sierra Leone. Other DPDs were established in Forécariah, Guinea, and Tewor and Kolahun, Liberia in 2011.

**Diagram 1: Direction of change: DPDs**



DPDs undertook a capacity building programme designed and facilitated by Conciliation Resources' partners, covering advocacy skills, dialogue facilitation, conflict transformation, non-violence, and how to monitor and articulate gaps in policy implementation. The DPDs in-turn sensitised community members around civic rights and responsibilities and the need to hold community leaders and district officials to account.

The main functions of the DPDs initially included:

- a) Sharing learning from the Local Governance Act 2004 and the Chieftaincy Act, outlining the different roles between local leadership and citizens.
- b) Explaining the functions of the councils to communities and the importance of the social contract between government and citizens.
- c) Facilitating communities to assess their governance situation and raise concerns for response from local leadership.

Over time the roles of the DPDs increased to include mediation of local tensions, for example between the police and bike riders in Kambia district and between mining companies and communities in Tewor district in Liberia.

The involvement of ward counsellors and local chiefs in town hall meetings was central in that they have significant influence in encouraging local communities to participate to a greater extent on governance matters. Moreover, they are in a position to lobby national decision makers to bring about changes in policy relating to governance process. The participation of women and youth groups in platform discussions marked the opening of an important space in which marginalised groups, who have fewer opportunities to join conversations of governance and decision making, were able to voice their interests and grievances.

## Quantitative Impact

The figures shown in [Annex 2](#), collected in a participatory exercise during an end of project workshop, reflect the growth in numbers of DPD members per region since their establishment<sup>4</sup>. Given the steady rise in member organisations throughout the three years analysed, the group predicted that by year 10, there could be as many as **1,080 individuals** involved in DPDs throughout the region. *(See Annex 2 for DPD growth figures)*

## Social Accountability Process

The diversity of the DPDs as loose consortiums fosters a wide range of advocacy and communication skills. These tools can be used to address a broad audience and are shared amongst the DPD member organisations.

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<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that although the project was established in 2008, the first DPD was not established until 2010.

One such tool, the Social Accountability Process (*see feature box on page 12*), was developed in 2011 by Conciliation Resources' Liberian partner IREDD, in partnership with the Tewor and Kolahun DPDs. The tool allows communities to monitor the management of public funds and the relationship between private enterprise and local government. By requesting information through the 2008 Freedom of Information Act and bringing local stakeholders together in meetings facilitated by the platform, the DPDs have been able to build trust and transparency between service providers and service users at the local level, advocating for transparent accounting for the County and Social Development Funds.

The tool is a significant indicator of the extent to which decision-making at the local level is participatory and in accordance with national development policy. Any concerns as regards the quality of governance are raised in bilateral meetings with contractors, mining companies and responsible district officials. Community dialogue sessions are also organised to enable district officials and contractors to explain discrepancies and decisions taken. (*See Annex 1 for a Step-by-Step Guide showing each process involved in using the Social Accountability Tool.*)

The tool has therefore created a space in which community members can effectively and peacefully challenge local authorities' accountability to them over the disbursement of public funds and the provision of local services. In a regional assessment workshop organised in January 2013 in Bo, Sierra Leone, Conciliation Resources' Liberian partners observed a clear change of approach in the Tewor and Kolahun regions where the social accountability tool has been implemented:

1. **Community Consultation:** Communities in the districts of Kolahun and Tewor feel a greater sense of ownership over the use of the County and other development funds. Community members are able to voice their concerns over issues of social responsibility and demand a response from the officials or companies in a safe and facilitated space in DPD meetings.
2. **Reduced Corruption Levels:** Local officials, government authorities and private companies have become more accountable thereby less prone to corruption. Engagement with local authorities who understand the oversight that communities have developed overtime has contributed towards an increased uptake of accountability in the target districts.
3. **Changes to National Policy:** In response to IREDD's report indicating high levels of corruption and poor community involvement in the disbursement of the County Development Funds, the Office of the President suspended the scheme to review its implementation. It has currently re-instated the fund with a strategy for accountability and supervision. This also led to the change of the County Superintendant at Voinjaman. The government has shown that it acknowledges the need for strong accountability and oversight mechanisms to be built into the system of fund management. The DPDs, with IREDD's support, have been able to put their recommendations to national Ministries, such as the Ministry of Internal Affairs specifically the Governance Commission, through the Civil Society Organisation platform on Decentralisation and Governance advocacy network, they have established with key allies in government and through regular engagement with local authorities.

### **Liberia's County Development Funds (CDFs)**

Since 2008, the Government of Liberia has been working with UNDP to strengthen the capacities of local governments to administer national development policies across Liberia. This has taken place within a framework for decentralising a degree of governance over certain fiscal and administrative duties. Under this strategy, local districts were provided with CDFs intended to build the capacity of local governance institutions and implement development projects based on the needs of each county. The participation of local communities in deciding how these funds are to be allocated for maximum impact and effectiveness is key, not only to ensuring that communities receive the services they most need, but also in supporting communities to become actively involved in governance in their region and increase interaction with more responsive local authorities.

For reference see: <http://www.lr.undp.org/ldld.htm>

## **National Level Policy Dialogue**

Taking the lessons learnt at the district or local level to national policymakers was a critical element of this project, delivering evidence of policy practice to decision makers based in capital cities to strengthen national development and governance legislation and processes. The DPDs have engaged on three particularly important regional issues:



### **Working with Office of National Security**

The Office for National Security has established committees at the district level to gather and analyse data relating to incidences of local conflict. This relationship started in the later part of 2011. The DPDs have since engaged significantly with the ONS, particularly in border regions such as Kambia and Kolahun to monitor cross border criminal activity and establish early warning systems in areas of tension between youths and local leadership. As a result the district security committees have now identified the un-official crossing points, which are often used by criminal gangs to extort from travellers and border communities and are now monitoring to reduce the insecurity of travelling through these points. E.g. in one of the crossing points at Kambia a police post has been established.

### **Local Government Exchange**

Conciliation Resources has worked with partners to facilitate greater regional understanding of decentralisation by engaging with officials responsible for drafting decentralisation legislation and facilitating a visit of local government officials from Kolahun and Tewor district from Liberia to Sierra Leone. These learning exchange encouraged policymakers to map out interests and confront the challenges that they have faced head on with other individuals also engaged in decentralisation in a

post-war region. The strong historical and cultural linkages between communities residing in the Sierra Leone/ Liberia and Sierra Leone/Guinea border areas contributes to similar challenges in terms of governance, resource management and citizen-state relationships.

### **Mano River Union Discussions**

Throughout the project, Conciliation Resources and its partners have held regular meetings and sharing sessions with the Mano River Union Secretariat on strengthening governance and human security in border regions. In a meeting held in 2013, partners presented the DPD model to a number of policymakers including the Deputy Secretary General of the MRU Secretariat. A key area highlighted for collaboration between the MRU Joint Border Security Committee and the DPDs was the focus on confidence building within the border districts. The MRU has established approximately 8 Border Community Committees and is exploring ways in which the DPDs, with their ability to bring key stakeholders together, could support this process.

## **3. Stories of Change**

The following stories of change were captured through varied narratives and written sessions in experience sharing exercises and finally in an end of project workshop held in January 2013 in Bo, Sierra Leone. They reflect the key ways in which the work of the DPDs has contributed towards creating spaces for peaceful engagement amongst a wide variety of stakeholders (communities, local authorities, traditional leaders and private businesses) in the target areas. These stories demonstrate how more effective engagement between communities and local authorities through improved governance practices can have a significant impact on tackling the root causes of violence. The stories of change fall broadly into five categories, each of which demonstrate a different way in which DPDs have been able to approach and improve governance practices at the local level.

### **Empowerment and community voice**

DPDs trained and sensitised communities on existing policies and their impact on the development of communities in order to minimise political violence based on misperceptions of roles and responsibilities. Communities used policy guidance around the dissemination of public funds to demand accountability from local government authorities through town hall meetings and radio discussions. In five of the target districts (all except Forécariah) a "District" or "Council Hour" continues to be allotted for discussions with government officials. Council Hours are convened by radio stations at the request of DPDs for officials to respond to key issues of concern that community members have raised with the DPD. Radio phone-in sessions allow the wider public to raise issues with the district officials and comment on their responses.

In Tewor district, Liberia, the district chair with the support of the DPD has also instituted District Coordination Meetings which, as of 2012, legislative members have regularly attended. In empowering local communities to challenge governments in these structured and peaceful sessions, DPDs have been able to encourage communities to constructively engage with those responsible for delivering this change.

## Promoting peaceful elections

Bringing communities and local authorities together in platform meetings has been a critical space for engagement, particularly during moments of heightened tension, for example election periods. This had a significant impact on the levels of violence experienced in a number of border districts in Sierra Leone in the run up to, and during, the October 2012 elections.



As the story of change from Pujehun shows (*see following page*), the DPD in this district played a significant role in encouraging political party representatives, communities and particularly at-risk youth groups, to voice their grievances and concerns in peaceful and open dialogue sessions.

The DPD was able to facilitate this open space, encourage key figures to adopt messages of peace and increase the degree to which voters engaged critically with election manifestos. Throughout this process, the ability of the DPD to monitor potential areas of election violence by bringing members representing differing communities together to share analysis and networking with DPDs in neighbouring districts ensured that strategies could be targeted for maximum effectiveness.

### STORY OF CHANGE

#### Tewor DPD: Clean water and Mining Companies

**Context:** The Matamo River runs through Tewor District and services eight major communities in the district with drinking water, fishing and a means of washing clothes. When this river became polluted with waste from a large resource mining company nearby, communities along the river noted an increase in skin diseases and pollution related illnesses. The DPD was approached by the community as a platform for engaging the large mining company in preventing further pollution and supporting healthcare required by members of the community.

**Strategy:** The DPD carried out an impact assessment of the extent to which the river had become polluted and the linkages between this poor waste management and illness among the communities who approached the DPD. It identified a need to engage the district and county commissioners to lobby the Minister of Mines and put pressure on the mining company to provide safe drinking water.

**Change:** Local authorities successfully engaged with the Ministry of Mines and the mining company in question to provide safe drinking water to the towns. The communities now have one hand-pump to every 250 people. There is a need to provide more pumps than this but the DPD feels confident that through the communication channels established, they may be successful in securing these through further negotiation. Debate still remains over who benefits from resource mining in the district and how local people can be better engaged.

## STORY OF CHANGE

### Pujehun DPD: 'Free, fair and non-violent elections in 2012'

**Context:** In previous elections, Pujehun district has been identified as a 'hot spot' for election related violence. For example, during the 1982 elections, violent incidents were recorded in twelve chiefdoms throughout the district. In the following 2007 elections thirty-five houses were burnt down, cases of caustic soda being splashed on gathering crowds were recorded and farm land was severely damaged.

**Strategy:** In an effort to prevent a repeat of this violence in 2012, the DPDs from Kambia, Kailahun and Pujehun districts in Sierra Leone met with CENCAD and identified four 'conflict prone zones', including Pujehun, Masang, Kendema and Kambia and developed the strategy of

1. **Early Warning Systems:** DPDs implemented early warning systems signalling potential electoral tensions in conflict prone zones. The Pujehun DPD involved political parties, traditional leaders, military representatives and communities in these analysis sessions and encouraged them to make a joint pledge for peaceful elections.
2. **Dialogue:** A town hall meeting was organised to create space for local citizens to debate aspects of major party political manifestoes and was attended by the local and ward councils as well as representatives from the All Peoples Congress Party (APC) and the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP). Meetings such as this also create an opportunity for citizens to become actively involved in the political processes that affect them, rather than going through traditional chiefs, for example.

Impact- The collaborative nature of the meeting and the focus on peace and development inspired the confidence of the community in the political institutions represented.

#### Change:

1. **No violent incidents** were recorded on Election Day and levels of violence in the listed conflict-prone communities were considerably lower than in previous years. The SLPP's contestation of elections results has been destabilising in the political arena but has not resulted in any violence in Pujehun, a stronghold of the party, in Kambia, Masang or kendema. The DPD effort at getting political party leaders in these communities to commit to non-violence contributed to achieving this.
2. **Higher numbers of women and youth** were involved in the elections. Their involvement at the town hall meeting allowed them to advocate for more effective policies to bring about change in governance of and accountability to marginalised groups. Women were also encouraged to stand for political positions. Eleven women were nominated to positions in local government in Pujehun. All received backing from their respective political parties, which have been male dominated in the past, and only one was elected. Similarly, young political actors have become more involved in the elections, contesting at least one position in the Pujehun district alone. The DPD highlighted that they consider this to be a particularly dramatic achievement, as youths were heavily involved in much of the electoral violence of the past.

## Empowering women and youth

About 900 youth and women from communities in the six marginalised border districts targeted in the project are now empowered to demand accountability from district authorities and mining companies. In Forécariah district in Guinea for example, youth and women representatives now regularly attend consultative meetings with district authorities and mining companies. In 2012, a youth representative from the DPD in Kambia district, Sierra Leone, was elected to the position of District Youth Coordinator, providing young people in district with a channel to access and participate in key decision-making within the district.

This change has also been echoed across other target areas. For example:

- Higher numbers of women and youth were involved as candidates in the local and national elections in Pujehun district.
- Women and youth were encouraged to stand for election to the local council in Kailahun.
- There is now a general increased public awareness and understanding of the importance of women's participation in decision making in the target districts especially in Forécariah and Kailahun.
- Increased understanding amongst young girls in the community on issues of teenage pregnancy in Kolahun.
- Pregnant teenagers receive education in Kolahun, hither to they would be asked by teachers to stop going to school.





## **STORY OF CHANGE**

### **Sierra Leone Kailahun DPD: Participation of women and youth**

#### **Context**

Women are not well represented within Kailahun district, where traditional views about their engagement in political decision making dominate. Similarly, youth groups are viewed with some suspicion, not least because in the lead up to the civil war, youth in this region played a central role in the violence. Politicians are frequently accused of manipulating youth groups to promote violence and use insulting messages that undermine opposition members.

#### **Strategy**

The DPD implemented a 5 point strategy through awareness raising and advocacy in order to encourage a widespread change of attitude towards the involvement of women in local politics in Kailahun district:

##### **1. Encourage women and youth to become elected to the local council**

- a. Facilitated a 'decentralisation meeting' with a large number of other civil society organisations to make space for women and youth representatives to have their say. Discussion focused around the important role that women and youths can play in fostering peaceful elections. From 2010 to 2012, four additional women have been elected to the Local Council and five additional youths have been elected (these are all above the age of 18).

##### **2. Training on Local Government Act**

- a. DPDs raised awareness around the provisions in the Local Government Act for women and youth in becoming involved in local political decision-making through community education programmes.

##### **3. National Youth Voice meetings**

- a. Facilitated a number of meetings to raise awareness of youth within the community of a national youth campaign, the 'National Youth Voice'. Through this campaign, local youth groups can engage with each other across different regions on their involvement in political decision-making, building peaceful channels to local authorities through collective action. Since this meeting, a number of youth organisations have engaged with the National campaign, exchanging experiences and views with others in neighbouring districts on common challenges.

##### **4. Women's Manifesto**

- a. Joined another platform to develop a manifesto aimed to promoting women's voices in local political decision making. The document was produced in time for the 2012 Sierra Leonean national elections to support women to stand for political positions and advocates for the 30% quota for women in the government that is being discussed to be enacted and built upon. The platform engages with women's groups throughout the community to promote participation and create collective pressure on government to transform this quota into law.

##### **5. Quelling youth violence during election time**

- a. Held meetings with Chiefdom representatives in the run up to the 2012 National Election on engaging with youth groups peacefully as a preventative measure against youth initiated electoral violence.
- b. Established a drama group, bringing together young people from across the community in role-playing the dangers of violence and educating youths and adults on the wider impact of violent acts.
- c. Provided lobby and advocacy training for youth groups on how advocacy tools can be used as a peaceful means of bringing change to their communities. Youth groups, using this training, worked with radio broadcasting stations to promote messages of peace during the elections and encourage other young members of the community to adopt peaceful tactics of protest and demonstration.

## Engagement with district officials

Significant improvement has been observed in relations between civil society organisations in the project's target areas and local authorities through the establishment and work of the DPDs. Increasingly, local authorities in these districts are calling upon DPDs to facilitate dialogue between communities and families in conflict, and work together with the DPD to encourage a culture of accountability at district level.

### STORY OF CHANGE

#### Sierra Leone, Kambia DPD: Accountability Measures

**Context:** The DPD identified a significant gap in the accountability of local councils to communities in the Kambia district around resource management. Kambia district is amongst the most fertile regions of Sierra Leone, with a predominantly agriculture-based economy. Issues surrounding resource distribution are therefore particularly sensitive and can cause tension among individuals who feel their livelihoods are threatened.

#### Strategy:

1. **Taking council to the people**  
Facilitating meetings with planning officers and community members to explain how resources are currently allocated and used by the government. This was an important opportunity for local community members to raise their concerns and make demands from the planning officer, expressing priorities.
2. **Town Hall dialogue**  
Calling on district ministries and finance officers to share government analysis of how resources were allocated and used.
3. **Bridging Information Gap**  
DPD radio programme broadcasts (these have been running since 2010) reporting on activities that they are engaged on in an effort to be transparent with the communities they are working with in explaining their engagement with authorities and facilitation of dialogue.

Council members are also involved in these weekly radio programmes. This represents a considerable shift in approach on the part of council authorities who were previously suspicious of engaging with the media and using radio programmes as a free forum to discuss council activities.

"The DPDs are now our district mediators, they even mediate the tensions between we the district authorities. In Kolahun, the tension between the District Commissioner and the County Development Committee Chairman is now over, thanks to the DPD, we now even travel and work together."

*(County Development Committee Chairman – Voinjaman County, Liberia).*

"Fear is the enemy to progress. We used to fear to demand for information and accountability of County Superintendant and the Legislature because we were afraid and did not know how to do this. We now use the radio and letters to invite the County Superintendant and the Legislature to our Monthly Coordinating meetings in which we account to the citizenry."

*(Commissioner Madeline Fambulleh, Tewor District- Cape Mount, Liberia).*

## **Engagement with mining companies**

Working through the DPDs has enabled district authorities to engage mining and other extractive companies on issues such as strategies for mitigating environmental risks and demanding social corporate responsibility. In Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea, mining contributes a substantially to the GDP of the area. It is alleged that lack of transparency on the resources earned from mining and other extractives led to the discontentment of the citizens and the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Therefore the DPDs put in efforts as community leaders to demand accountability in this sector in their districts. In Tewor District, Liberia, for example, the DPDs joined hands with the district chairperson to conduct intensive monitoring exercises to ensure that mining companies were operating within signed agreements and that they were consulting communities in deciding on projects under the cooperate social responsibility of the companies. The engagements were very successful and are a result, ten culverts (smaller bridges) are being constructed to link communities in the district. Elsewhere, in Kolahun district of Liberia, district officials have successfully engaged a local mining company to provide safe drinking water. Communities now have one hand-pump to every 250 people within the mining area.

## STORY OF CHANGE

### Guinea Forécariah DPD: Mediating with Mining Companies

**Context:** The Forécariah Platform evolved against a backdrop of 50 years of ethnic division implemented under Ahmed Sékou Touré, which continued to a degree under Lansana Conté's rule. The effect of these autocratic rulers was felt strongly at the local level, forcing families to separate on the basis of political differences. Guinea is an extremely resource-rich country and has attracted numerous large mining companies that operate in the area. In the Forécariah sub-prefecture alone, there are four major mining companies and six sub-contractors currently actively mining. Although their activities bring significant environmental, economic and social change to the communities living in these regions, there has been little effort by the local government or the mining companies themselves to inform local citizens of these projects. Cases of violence within the local communities in Forécariah have been recorded, where communities feel aggrieved by a lack of information and employment opportunities from the mining activity.

At its inception, the DPD conducted workshops in local communities to build understanding of citizenship and encourage citizens to become more involved in local decision-making.

#### Strategy:

1. **Purchase of the Mining Code:** The DPD became very aware in its early consultations with the four major mining companies in the district that few community members or company representatives had a clear understanding of the national Mining Code, outlining which processes of accountability mining companies should follow. The DPD therefore bought copies of the Mining Code from the local government and carried out a number of exercises with local communities; analysing the articles of the Code, ensuring that those living around the mines were aware of their rights as citizens and supporting them in articulating their concerns in a peaceful manner.
2. **Engaging local government:** One of the biggest challenges that the DPD has faced is in engaging with the local government, which was, initially, hesitant to become involved in managing the relationship between the communities and the mining companies. The mining contracts were issued from the national level and some local authorities appeared to be confused as to their role in the process. Through meetings and workshops on the Mining Code, the DPD encouraged local government representatives to meet with representatives from local communities, to listen to their concerns over environmental damage, and use to the terms of the Code as an instrument to respond.
3. **Employment Opportunities in Mining:** Many mining companies fail to consult local communities when recruiting for positions in their companies. This causes tensions amongst local youth who suffer from poor education and a lack of employment opportunity. The DPD established contact with the mining companies and re-iterated their social responsibilities in this regard, as outlined in the Mining Code, which states that companies must recruit from the community where relevant skills and capacities exist. The DPDs are keen to push for mining companies to go one step further and train young people in some skills areas to qualify for positions in their companies.
4. **Use of traditional governance structures:** The DPD includes representatives from all major ethnic groups and from religious divides. It works to foster greater understanding between all groups and to realise their commonalities as 'Guinean citizens' but also uses the recognised ethnic leaders to spread these messages to the local level.

## 4. Challenges in project implementation

Over the five years of implementation, the project has experienced challenges at different levels, particularly around generating sufficient political will from local authorities and private companies to engage with communities through the DPDs. These challenges can broadly be divided into two categories; those experienced in the work of the DPDs and those experienced at the partnership level between local partners and Conciliation Resources:

### Conciliation Resources & National Partners

**Achieving long-term impact by mobilising a critical mass equipped with the relevant skills to demand accountability in a post war context requires more than a five-year timeframe.** Notwithstanding the five- year duration of the project it was challenging to foster adequate political will to accept the project approach. With more time, a lot more can be achieved, especially at the level of policy dialogue and policy change.

**Building trust and relationships:** A great deal of time in the first two years of the project was spent building trust and strong relationships with partners and communities in order to implement the project. This was achieved through constant support via email and telephone to partners and approximately twelve weeks per year of face-to-face engagement, training, reviewing planning and field visits with partners in region. Bi-annual review and planning sessions provided an opportunity for partners to jointly evaluate achievements, challenges, and ways forward in changing contexts and therefore strengthened partners' ability to plan and manage implementation of the project.

**Conceptual challenges:** Initially the project encountered a high degree of scepticism from policymakers at district and national level, who felt threatened and questioned the relevance of the work to peacebuilding. This challenge was overcome by facilitating a greater number of conflict transformation and peacebuilding training sessions for both the community actors and district officials, and organising exchange and study visits for district officials from Liberia to Sierra Leone, emphasising the importance of collective dialogue. However, this was only realised in the early part of year three of the project after sufficient relationship building had been established with policymakers and local leaders.

## **District Platforms for Dialogue Level**

In a joint partner project evaluation workshop held in Bo, Sierra Leone, in January 2013, partners and DPDs outlined six key challenges in implementing the project:

**1. Sustaining Cooperation, Collaboration and Communication between member organisations:** DPDs are constituted of a number of local civil society organisations, community groups and activists, many of whom have similar objectives and seek funding from similar sources. Challenges are often encountered in the different ways in which these organisations operate and their individual goals.

**2. Engaging policymakers, particularly to request information from policymakers at a national level.** Many of the DPDs continue to feel as though this area of the project could be improved through strengthened communication with, and capacity building from, partner organisations based in capital cities. As national policy information remains centralised and infrastructure linking border districts with capital cities is poor, DPDs struggle to obtain relevant policy information to strengthen their efforts at the district level.

**3. Lack of capacity to mediate tensions at different levels:** Some DPDs noted that their local communities are increasingly calling on them to intervene in inter-community tensions. District officials also sometimes request the assistance of the DPDs to mediate between mining companies and communities. At present, few DPDs feel capable of mediating so directly within these conflicts and have called for training and skills development in this area.

**4. Limited safe space for dialogue meetings:** Particularly in regions such as Forécariah in Guinea, where the political environment is still highly militarised with limited space for open dialogue with government officials.

**5. Financial Sustainability:** Particularly as regards continuing this work into the second half of 2013 and 2014 after the end of the GTF funded project.

**6. Political constraints:** Electoral processes delayed or shifted the focus of project activities, for example in Liberia in 2011 and Sierra Leone in 2012. During these periods, the DPDs became involved in bringing together members of opposing parties to clearly explain their manifestos and pledge their commitment to peaceful elections. Although this represented a slight shift in focus, DPDs and partners embraced this as an opportunity to advocate for the inclusion of good governance practices and greater public participation in decision-making in the political party manifestos. In Guinea, tensions around the election of the legislature affected the ability of the partners to demand accountability beyond the district level.

## 5. Lessons Learnt



A number of key lessons can be said to have emerged from the project in assessing the responsiveness of governance in border regions, how to most effectively engage with key stakeholders on this issue and how best to bring about change at the community, district and national levels:

1. **Working with, and empowering, local actors to develop tools and skills, enables them to develop confidence to engage and demand accountability of local government officials.** Removing relationship barriers between these actors has enabled them to jointly influence national actors and policies. Joint capacity building and conflict analysis has enabled and local authorities and district officials to trust and work with civil society for change.
2. **Conflict sensitive dialogues create safer spaces** in which both communities and local officials are able to engage.
3. Working with civil society at the local level has led to the creation of a critical “voice” in marginalised cross-border regions, **demystifying** the idea that government officials are not accessible or responsive and encouraging a joint approach to peace.
4. **Making policy documents available and sensitising local populations** to understand and use them demystified the idea that only the elite understood and worked with these policies. Lack of information obstructs the ability of local actors to demand accountability or the right and capacity to participate in decision-making. With relevant information local actors are able to assess their situations and identify ways to demand accountability and demand the space to participate.
5. The role of the DPDs as **impartial bodies that can mediate tensions is a much-needed role** that provided access to both district officials and mining companies.

6. **Good governance at the local level**, including broad public participation and transparent decision making, can reduce violence in border districts.
7. **Volunteer spirit and activism** at the local level can create a powerful voice to influence changes in governance and policy implementation, with a low level of support from capacity building organisations.

*'Everyone is full of enthusiasm; we started from nowhere - we have reached somewhere together'*  
(Amos, Kailahun DPD)

8. **A wide gulf continues to exist between the border and central regions** in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia. Local government authorities and civil society networks at the local level must take up key policy messages to national policy-makers.

9. **Collaboration for Success.** The end of project workshop, which brought together DPDs from across the three countries, highlighted opportunities that have been missed in the project for greater collaboration. There were calls for increased exchange of ideas through visits and more joint meetings, especially as CENCAD in Guinea has developed capacities for translation, overcoming language barriers between DPDs, joint advocacy at the regional level and more bi-lateral work on joint border crossings.

*'If the various countries were collaborating more then we would have done better as a region'*  
(Jonathan, Kailahun DPD)

10. **Crosscutting issues.** Swapping stories of challenges and the themes that DPDs are working on has shown that similar issues of poor governance exist across all three countries. DPDs also reported that examining common themes strengthened the links between DPDs and highlighted potential areas of collaboration.

*'Looking at themes connecting our organisations and platforms, for example looking at how we each tackle issues of gender' Good to have a citation here*

11. **Strength in numbers.** Analysing the joint impact of all DPDs has exemplified the potential for greater achievement using the DPD methodology if replicated further. There were calls from many DPDs to bring more organisations on board by developing existing platforms and establishing new ones.

*'Seeing the statistics helped to see what all the organisations are doing as a whole, the whole impact and strength of voice' (Samoca, Kolahun DPD)*



## 6. Building foundations for future change

In August 2013, four months after the end of the GTF project in West Africa, the DPDs continue to thrive at the local level and have, in utilising the capacity building training in securing funding support, project management and peacebuilding analysis, and are **starting to navigate this path** to secure funding from alternative sources to continue their work. This has allowed them to continue to work with local authorities and other key stakeholders to increase the effectiveness of development initiatives in border regions and diversify the key monitoring and advocacy skills developed through the GTF project. Examples of this include:

- **Security and Human Rights Monitoring, Pujehun**  
The Pujehun DPD is working with the British High Commission in Sierra Leone to mobilise two communities in the district to engage with local security forces on issues of community and border security and the rule of law. The project has provided at least 25 local DPD activists with the training and skills to effectively monitor breaches of the law relating to issues such as trafficking and human rights abuses and facilitated dialogue with local security authorities.
- **“Girl-child” education, Kambia**  
CARE in Sierra Leone approached the DPD Kambia to facilitate work with local authorities to strengthen the quality and delivery of girl-child education in the district.
- **Election monitoring, Guinea**  
The Forécariah DPD has been supported by the UNDP to organise civic education and advocate for non-violent local elections.
- **DPDs and Border Community Security:** All DPDs indicated they now had the capacities to focus on advocating and facilitating dialogue for improved border community security in the MRU sub region.

### The Voice Network

Conciliation Resources, IREDD, and a number of the DPDs have been working with the Voice Network, based in Bo, Sierra Leone, to build on the model of the DPDs in forming a partnership of organisations across the MRU sub-region for the consolidation of regional peace and security. The Voice Network, initially established in February 2011, aims to build constituencies across the borders of the MRU member countries to monitor and advocate for improved security and standards of living in border regions. By increasing the communication between DPD members, through regular text messages and telephone calls, the network aims to increase the awareness amongst border communities of developments in neighbouring regions, for example of spreading security threats. Facilitated visits and meetings will also create a space for shared learning between these community organisations on advocacy strategies and successful initiatives for improving security governance in these regions.

These projects exemplify how the methodology developed throughout the project could, with continued capacity development and advocacy training, be applied and adapted to continue to strengthen governance in border areas in West Africa.

**“If we want peace to remain in our country, then we have to maintain it”**

*(DPD member, end of project workshop, Bo, January 2013)*

## Annex 1 – Social Accountability Tool

### Step-by-Step guide

IREDD, in partnership with the DPDs in Tewor and Kolahun districts, developed a social accountability tool to enable them and the communities gather data to monitor the management of public funds and accountability of mining companies. By requesting information through the 2008 Freedom of Information Act and bringing local stakeholders together in facilitated dialogue meetings, the DPDs have been able to build trust and transparency between service providers and service users at the local level, advocating for transparent accounting for the County/ Social Development Funds.



#### Step 1: Community Awareness Forums

IREDD and the DPDs raised awareness of border community people to Liberia's Right to Information Law of 2009, which entitles citizens to access information relating to procurement processes of publically funded processes. With this level of awareness, the DPDs acting as community leaders are able to access information including bills of quantities, quality stipulations, timelines for completion of the different levels till finished, and payment schedules. Writing to local authorities and companies using the Freedom of Information Law requesting project documents, contracts, payment vouchers and other documentation for the purpose of monitoring and verifying adherence to the terms of the contract agreement by the companies.

### **Step 2: Mobilisation & Capacity Building of the District Networking Group**

Building the capacity of volunteers from community-based organisations, and local activists from youth and women's groups in monitoring and evaluation as well as and advocacy skills.

### **Step 3: Monitoring Development Projects, Service Delivery and Mining Projects**

By organising town-hall meetings, DPDs make intended government development targets and amounts of funding disbursed to the districts accessible to community members detailing approved locations for projects and the role and activities of extractive companies in these contracts. Communities then nominate volunteers to work with the DPDs in monitoring projects with extractive companies and producing reports on operational activities against intended government development targets and guidelines. This includes visits to project sites, physical verification of work done and quality of work and interviewing community members.

### **Step 4: Verification Meetings**

DPDs request meetings with respective government officials at the district or county levels, such as their Chairman of the County Development Fund, the District Chairperson, the Paramount chief, and or the City Mayor, to clarify or verify the findings of their investigations and explore allegations of mismanagement made by community members. This often involves visits to the capital, Monrovia, or assistance from IREDD to engage with government ministries at the national level.

### **Step 5: Community Dialogue & Media Sessions**

Dialogue meetings are organised between community members, local government representatives and company officials to discuss concerns raised by the people and, where possible, identify ways forward. Sometimes radio discussions are organised for the respective government officials to respond to phone-in from the general public raising concerns.

### **Step 6: National Level Policy Meetings**

IREDD in working with the DPDs raises issues from the two target districts through press conferences. During the course of the Project, IREDD was able to organise about 9 of these media conferences especially in the 4th and 5th years. Sometimes, IREDD went with the members of the DPDs to the Lower House to meet with the Law Makers and representatives from Tewor or Kolahun Districts in the House to discuss some of the emerging concerns.

### **Step 7: Follow-Community Meetings**

These were meetings organised by the DPDs to track progress made and to trace the changes made as a result of the joint advocacy.

## Annex 2 – Quantitative Impact: DPD Figures

DPD/ Country	Year 0	Year 1	Member orgs	Individual members	Year 2	Member orgs	Individual members	Today:	Member orgs	Individual members	Total number of people	Projection for Year 10:	DPDs/ Region (additional)	Member orgs	Individual members	Total number of people	
Guinea	2009/ 2010	2011	7	14	2012	13	26		13	26	229		10	143	286		
Liberia																	
Cape Mount	2010	2011	8	20	2012	8	20		8	20	106		1	20	40		
Lofa County	2010	2011	10	21	2012	10	21		10	21	138		4	28	56		
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>18</b>	<b>41</b>		<b>18</b>	<b>41</b>		<b>18</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>244</b>		<b>5</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>96</b>		
<b>Sierra Leone</b>																	
Kambia	2009/ 2010	2011	13	26	2012	13	26		13	26	562		2	30	78	1686	
Kailahun	2010	2011	10	20	2012	12	24		12	12	-		2	40	80	1200	
Pujehun	2009	2010	20	25	2011	15	18		18	18	212		-	45	540		
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>43</b>	<b>71</b>		<b>40</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>774</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>698</b>	<b>2886</b>			
<b>TOTAL REGION</b>			<b>68</b>	<b>126</b>		<b>71</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>1247</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>306</b>	<b>1080</b>				

\*NB: not all members come to all meetings; sometimes an organisation will send one representative, on other occasions they will send one. Thus the figure is an estimate