REBUILDING HEALTH SYSTEMS
TO SAVE MOTHERS AND CHILDREN
ADVANCING PARTNERS & COMMUNITIES, SIERRA LEONE
PHOTO JOURNAL
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ADVANCING PARTNERS & COMMUNITIES

Advancing Partners & Communities is implemented by JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc., in collaboration with FHI 360. The project focuses on advancing and supporting community programs that seek to improve the overall health of communities and achieve other health-related impacts, especially in relationship to family planning. Advancing Partners & Communities provides global leadership for community-based programming, executes and manages small- and medium-sized sub-awards, supports procurement reform by preparing awards for execution by USAID, and builds technical capacity of organizations to implement effective programs. Learn more about Advancing Partners & Communities at advancingpartners.org.

In Sierra Leone, from July 2015 to July 2017, the project worked through a grant from USAID’s Ebola Response and Preparedness funds to support the Ministry of Health and Sanitation (MOHS) in the implementation of its recovery priorities outlined in the 2015–2020 Health Sector Recovery Plan (HSRP) in five districts. The project’s goal is to strengthen critical community-based non-Ebola health services, with emphasis on reproductive, maternal, newborn, and child health (RMNCH) services. The project was implemented by JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc. in collaboration with FHI 360 and in partnership with Action Against Hunger, Adventist Development and Relief Agency, GOAL, International Medical Corps, and Save the Children.

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JSI RESEARCH & TRAINING INSTITUTE, INC.

JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc., is a public health management consulting and research organization dedicated to improving the health of individuals and communities. JSI collaborates with government agencies, the private sector, and local nonprofit and civil society organizations to improve quality, access and equity of health systems worldwide.

FHI 360

FHI 360 is a nonprofit human development organization dedicated to improving lives in lasting ways by advancing integrated, locally driven solutions. FHI 360 serves more than 70 countries and all U.S. states and territories. FHI 360’s work is grounded in research and science, strengthened by partnerships and focused on building the capacity of individuals, communities and countries to succeed.

Photos: Abdul Samba Brima and Tolu Jethro Bade

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On the outskirts of Sierra Leone’s capital Freetown, the Benguima Grassfield community is rife with poverty and deprivation. In a country where the maternal and child death rates are among the highest in the world, a functioning health facility can be a life saver. Through the Advancing Partners & Communities project, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) provided support to revitalize the Benguima Grassfield Maternal and Child Health Post (MCHP) with infrastructure renovations, improved access to water, sanitation, and solar electricity, as well as capacity building of health professionals and community health workers. The improvements come at a critical time as Sierra Leone recovers, along with its neighboring countries Guinea and Liberia, from the worst Ebola outbreak ever recorded.

“This facility was not conducive as a peripheral health unit (PHU), because it lacked proper delivery room, [there was] no water or toilet facility, and the building badly needed repairs.”
—Doris Kargbo, MCH Aide and Facility In-charge

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1 The World Health Organization (WHO) estimated in 2015 that Sierra Leone had the highest maternal mortality rate in the world with 1,369 deaths per 100,000 live births.
Doris Kargbo, a Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Aide and Facility In-charge of Benguima Grassfield MCHP, is excited and positive about the future of her work and her community. The renovations undertaken at her health facility allow her to provide better care for her patients.

With the completed renovation work, improved infection prevention and control (IPC) measures, and the trainings that health facility staff received, Doris feels confident and happy to attend to patients on daily basis.

“I am happy that the building has been renovated; there is a great difference now compared to before. We now have toilets both outside the facility and inside the delivery room, there is water, solar light, which makes deliveries safer especially at night. This really makes work easy for me and my staff.”

Doris Kargbo, MCH Aide and Facility In charge
As a result of the improved facility, the community is increasingly seeking services at the health post. Doris records health facility attendance at the PHU, and the data shows that outpatient visits have increased from 3,078 in 2013 to 4,256\(^2\) in 2016, which is a 38 percent increase. Doris is seen as both a health service provider and a teacher. The type of training she and her colleagues have benefited from enables them to mentor mothers and patients on healthy behaviors.
As a health service provider and a teacher, Doris is constantly educating mothers that a healthy start in life begins at birth.

“In one of the trainings from Save the Children, we received a booklet that shows the type of diseases and the treatment for each. I use this manual to train the community health workers (CHWs) on immunization and other outreach programs. The manual has nutrition guidelines to help us provide advice to mothers on the dietary needs of their children.”

Doris Kargbo, MCH Aide and Facility In charge

A baby born at Benguima Grassfield MCHP.

Doris Kargbo, MCH Aide and Facility In charge, checks an infant’s weight.
Children come to Benguima Grassfield MCHP for health checks.
Not all children in Sierra Leone survive their fifth birthday. The under-five mortality rate is one of the highest in the world, with an estimated 120 children per 1,000 live births dying before the age of five.³

Health workers join hands at the Benguima Grassfeld MCHP.

“We have received training from JSI and Save the Children. We now know how to communicate and provide health advice to our people. We forward whatever information we get from the community to the facility. This helps the facility understand the health needs of the people and also prepare for any health emergency.”

Hannah B. Sesay, Community Health Worker

To help reduce maternal and child deaths in the Benguima Grassfield community, Doris has managed to establish and maintain a good relationship with the community. Doris is a member of the Facility Management Committee (FMC)—a critical link between the PHU and the community to ensure that community needs are served. The trust and friendly relationship that Doris enjoys with the community is essential for the support she receives from the FMC and the community health workers (CHWs).

A community health worker at Benguima Grassfield, Hannah B. Sesay received training during the recent roll-out of the new CHW policy, which was developed with support from the Advancing Partners & Communities project.
Doris says of the community health workers, “they work very well with us. They live inside the community; the people know and trust them. This matters greatly because CHWs are best suited for outreach and providing health advice to their own people.”
Twenty-year-old Aminata Kamara resides in Benguima community and frequently takes her five-month-old daughter, Abibatu, to the facility for treatment. She is happy and full of praise for the care and health tips that Doris and her staff provide to mothers during clinic days at the facility. “They treat us well; they give us medicines without asking for money.”
“She in particular,” Aminata says of Doris, “is like a mother to us; she provides medical advice and often gives us words of encouragement to seek treatment whenever we feel unwell. She talks to us really nicely and that gives us zeal to come here for treatment.”
Safety at the facility is much improved with access to water 24 hours a day and proper disposal of medical waste. The project provided a borehole and solar submersible pump for running water; an incinerator for the burning of medical waste; and ash, sharps, and organic pits. With these improvements, Doris and her staff can now practice proper infection prevention and control, making her community more resilient in the event of a future outbreak and contributing to overall global health security.
“Patients who come for treatment now have access to constant water in the toilets, in the labor room, as well as outside the facility for regular hand-washing. Before, it was difficult for us to practice effective water, sanitation, and hygiene and IPC. We are happy that this worry is over.”

—Doris Kargbo, MCH Aide and Facility In-charge
Patients are waiting to be seen by health staff at Benguima Grassfield MCHP.
Doris Kargbo, MCH Aide and Facility In charge, measures the height of a patient.

“The health staff and community people remain ever grateful for the USAID support, as there is a marked improvement in health service utilization at the facility after the renovation work.”

Doris Kargbo, MCH Aide and Facility In charge

ABOUT THIS STORY
Benguima Grassfield MCHP is located in Western Area Rural District near the city of Waterloo. The facility provides health services to eleven catchment communities with a total population of 3,481. Health services are provided to the general population with three priority categories: children under five, pregnant mothers, and lactating mothers. The facility needed substantial repairs in order to be adequate for health service delivery. It had a leaking roof, no running water, it lacked a working incinerator and a pit for sharps and organic wastes, and it had no latrine and no light.

The Advancing Partners & Communities project supported Benguima Grassfield MCHP with the addition of a borehole and solar submersible pump; a total replacement of the roof structure and ceiling; and interior and exterior plastering, painting, and tiling in the delivery room. The existing ventilated windows were replaced with steel windows. The project also constructed an incinerator, a sharps pit, and a pour flush latrine for staff and patients. In the delivery room the project installed two sinks, a shower, and a flush toilet.

During a two-year period starting in 2015, the Advancing Partners & Communities project collaborated with Sierra Leone’s Ministry of Health and Sanitation to improve access to quality health services in Sierra Leone during the post-Ebola recovery phase. The project revitalized 305 health facilities, providing various levels of support. These initiatives have improved health services for 2 million Sierra Leoneans and strengthened health facilities, making them more resilient in the face of potential future outbreaks.
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