

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION (RFI)

Request For Information (RFI) No.	RFI-636-21-CELGA-03
Release Date	June 17, 2021
RFI Closing Date & Time	July 12, 2021 at 08:00 AM GMT
Activity Title	Civic Engagement in Local Governance for Accountability (CELGA) in Sierra Leone
Submission must be emailed to	conakryoaa@usaid.gov
Posting Websites	https://www.grants.gov https://beta.sam.gov https://www.usaid.gov/guinea https://www.usaid.gov/sierra-leone

Dear Interested Parties:

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in Guinea & Sierra Leone, hereby issues a Request for Information (RFI) in regard to the Civic Engagement in Local Governance for Accountability (CELGA) in Sierra Leone. The RFI intends to:

- Allow stakeholders and interested organizations to provide information and suggestions on the upcoming activity; and
- Explore innovative approaches to better partner with international and local actors to respond to the host country's needs and meet the USAID/Guinea & Sierra Leone's development objectives.

This is a Request for Information (RFI)/Sources Sought Notice is issued solely for information, research, and planning purposes. It does not constitute a Request For Proposal/Application, an invitation for bids, or solicitation. This RFI does not commit the U.S. Government to issue a solicitation. Furthermore, USAID/Guinea & Sierra Leone is not at this time seeking proposals or applications and will not accept unsolicited proposals or applications. If a solicitation is issued, it will be announced on <https://www.grants.gov> or <https://beta.sam.gov> in the coming months. It should be noted that responding to this RFI will not give any advantage to any organizations in any subsequent procurement. Proprietary information should not be sent.

You will receive an electronic confirmation acknowledging receipt of your response. Hard copy responses are not required and are discouraged. Consider the following when preparing your suggestions/comments to the draft concept paper:

- Please ensure that your organization is aware of the Civic Engagement in Local Governance for Accountability (CELGA) in Sierra Leone (Attachment A).

- Please provide feedback, including comments, questions, recommendations in the Concept Paper tracker spreadsheet (Attachment B). The spreadsheet has two tabs; the first tab has issues for consideration. The second tab must contain your organization's contact information (i.e., telephone, website, and address) and the primary point of contact (name, title, phone number, and email address).
- Please suggest any missing ideas or innovative approaches that could potentially increase the Development Impact of the proposed activity: Feasibility, Sustainability Potential.

Interested parties are requested to respond to this RFI by email attachment on the closing date and time shown at the top of this cover letter to conakryoaa@usaid.gov. The subject line of the email must read, CELGA. Please ensure your comments are concise and specific.

USAID/Guinea & Sierra Leone is in no way obligated to utilize submitted information or issue a solicitation as a result of this RFI. USAID/Guinea & Sierra Leone is not obligated to procure any of the services described herein, nor should the release of this request be construed as such a commitment on the part of USAID/Guinea & Sierra Leone.

Thank you for your interest in USAID/Guinea & Sierra Leone's projects.

Sincerely,

Robert A. Trimble
Contracting/Agreement Officer

ATTACHMENT A – Draft Concept Paper

Civic Engagement in Local Governance for Accountability (CELGA)

USAID/Guinea and Sierra Leone
Office of Sierra Leone Coordination (OSLC)

I. INTRODUCTION

The United States Agency for International Development in Guinea and Sierra Leone (USAID/Guinea and Sierra Leone) anticipates awarding a projected five-year activity of up to \$10.5 million that will support democracy and governance objectives in Sierra Leone.

Overall purpose

The overarching activity purpose is to strengthen the social contract between local governments and citizens in Sierra Leone by fostering increased accountability of local-level decision-makers to citizens on issues of importance to the community. The objectives of this activity are to:

- Increase effective and informed citizen and civil society participation in local government and political processes, and
- Bolster the capacity of local governance institutions to provide critical services and be more transparent in their processes.

II. BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM ANALYSIS

Sierra Leone is a low-income country of approximately eight million people. In 2001, Sierra Leone emerged from a devastating 11-year civil conflict in which an estimated 70,000 people died, and approximately a third of the population was displaced. Twenty years on from the end of the conflict, Sierra Leone has made real progress across the full spectrum of development, including in security and governance.

In USAID's 2021 Country Roadmap, when compared against other emerging democracies, Sierra Leone ranked high on civil society and media effectiveness, about average on open and accountable governance, and low in citizen and government capacity. Since 2002, Sierra Leone has held four consecutive national elections that were largely seen as credible and twice resulted in the transfer of power between the two major parties. There is a high level of religious and ethnic tolerance in the country, but it is also the case that ethno-regional divisions related to politics are deep and growing. In pursuit of electoral gains, parties and their supporters have escalated rhetoric that has resulted in an elevated level of tension that spiked around the 2018 election and has persisted since, erupting in frequent incidents of violence around party processes and by-elections.

In terms of government responsiveness and effectiveness, while there have been improvements over the last twenty years, public service delivery does not meet the basic needs of Sierra

Leone's people. This is reflected in the country's low Human Development Index ranking - 182 out of 189 countries in 2019, the latest year for which a report was issued. A 2021 study conducted by Oxfam Sierra Leone and the Institute for Governance Reform noted improvements in education and health delivery as a whole since the last study on the issue was conducted in 2015, but deep disparities persist among localities.¹

In 2002, the post-war government committed itself to decentralization reforms, an acknowledgement that poor governance and exclusion of certain groups contributed to the conflict. However, progress in implementing decentralization has been slow, with long periods of inaction. A 2019 report noted that 80 functions were mandated for devolution to local councils from central government under the 2004 Local Government Act, but that only 56 had been devolved fifteen years later.² Local councils regularly experience problems with limited and delayed funding. Additionally, there are unclear roles and responsibilities between the local councils and chieftaincies, traditional authorities also protected by law.

A recent article credited civil society with "...providing the glue that held Sierra Leone's post-war society together."³ The 2019 Civil Society Sustainability Index (CSOSI) report on Sierra Leone⁴ found that CSOs are strong advocates and cites their ability to build constituencies and networks as their biggest strength. Civil society also faces many challenges, including inconsistent funding and a difficult legal environment. In 2019 new regulations were introduced, although they still have not been fully implemented. The Development Cooperation Framework (DCF) requires CSO work to align with government priorities and includes restrictions that have been called violations of key human rights standards by two United Nations Special Rapporteurs.

The legal environment is more mixed for media organizations. The Public Order Act of 1965, which criminalized defamation and seditious libel, was repealed in 2020. A Right to Access Information law was instituted in 2013, but understanding, utilization, and compliance with the law remain uneven. A cybersecurity bill currently in Parliament has been of some concern to media and the public in terms of privacy and freedom of speech. Media organizations and journalists encounter other challenges, like low pay and a lack of training, which in turn make Sierra Leone vulnerable to the spread of disinformation and misinformation. While social media use is limited, disinformation and misinformation online often are picked up by traditional media and quickly spread via radio, television, and in community circles. In recent years there has been concern about the risk of politically-oriented hate speech spreading on social media channels, and more broadly in communities.

The period covered by this activity includes national elections, currently anticipated in June 2023. Many political observers believe that local council elections, originally scheduled for 2022, will be folded into the national or general election cycle scheduled for 2023. Elections are

¹ Broadening Access and Quality: Citizens' Feedback on the State of Health and Education Services in Sierra Leone, March 2021. Available at: <http://igrsl.org/broadening-access-and-quality-citizens-feedback-on-the-state-of-health-and-education-services-in-sierra-leone/>

² The Local Government System in Sierra Leone: Country Profile 2019. Commonwealth Local Government Forum, page 1. Accessed at: https://www.clgf.org.uk/default/assets/File/Country_profiles/Sierra_Leone.pdf

³ Adebajo, Adekeye, "The Dog that Did Not Bark: Why Has Sierra Leone Not Returned to War After Peacekeepers Left?" *The State of Peacebuilding in Africa*, T. McNamee and M. Muyangwa (eds.), 2021, p. 349.

⁴ Available at: <https://csosi.org/>

a powerful mechanism supporting accountability of elected officials to citizens. USAID therefore sees electoral-support activities, particularly at the local level, as a critical piece of this activity.

In recent years, development practitioners have evolved their thinking on accountability. The idea of “accountability ecosystems” has grown out of an understanding that supporting government transparency alone (the “supply side”), or citizen engagement alone (the “demand side”), will not affect sustainable change in terms of building a social contract between citizens and government institutions. The concept of accountability ecosystems, as described by Brendan Halloran in the 2015 discussion paper, “Strengthening Accountability Ecosystems,” recognizes “the need for more holistic and systematic approaches that take power relations as the central focus of their strategy.”⁵ Halloran presents the evidence base that shows the importance of ongoing analysis of power relationships, building coalitions, working with varied stakeholders and at multiple levels of governance, and working with informal and formal institutions and groups. This analysis is in line with USAID’s Local Systems Framework,⁶ which encourages building a holistic understanding of the institutions and individuals that make up a local system, their roles and relationships, and the institutional rules that govern them as part of the design and implementation of any development intervention.

USAID plans to support a holistic, sustainable approach to strengthening the social contract between citizens and local governance institutions in Sierra Leone by facilitating the work of accountability champions across various institutions and groups in a politically-informed, adaptive approach.

USAID Programmatic Background

CELGA is expected to build on two previous or ongoing USAID activities in Sierra Leone, Women Empowered for Leadership and Development (WELD) and the Sierra Leone Election Dialogue Series (SLEDs). Both addressed gaps in Sierra Leone governance, with different emphases.

The Women Empowered for Leadership and Development activity was implemented in seven districts in Sierra Leone from 2014 through 2018. It sought to increase women's participation in the economy and political life. The activity contributed to the increased participation and representation of women in decision making processes, particularly in supporting women to be elected to local councils. It also worked to economically empower women, supporting formation, training and ongoing mentoring of women’s savings groups. An evaluation of the WELD project, publicly available on USAID’s Development Experience Clearinghouse, noted challenges in increasing women’s representation presented by the country’s single member district system and male-dominated party leadership that is often not supportive of women aspirants. It also indicated a need for training women who are newly elected to government office.

The SLEDs activity, which is scheduled to end in 2021, began shortly before Sierra Leone’s March 2018 national elections and conducted a number of activities to support Sierra Leone’s

⁵ Accessed at: <https://www.transparency-initiative.org/blog/862/strengthening-accountability-ecosystems/>

⁶ The Local Systems Framework can be found at: <https://www.usaid.gov/policy/local-systems-framework>

capacities to conduct peaceful, free and fair elections. In particular, SLEDS supported a popular series of issue-oriented national debates that encouraged politicians and citizens alike to focus on issues of development, rather than polarized politics, during campaign periods. Also with SLEDS support, election authorities and media conducted a campaign of peace-messaging, voter education and informative press conferences to provide citizens with accurate and verified information about election processes and results.

In the post-election period, SLEDS has worked in all districts to support efforts to hold elected officials accountable to their campaign promises, strengthen local governance and oversight of local governance processes, and promote peace and consensus-building in communities. SLEDS conducted a series of randomly sampled national public opinion surveys to track and publicize citizen priorities vis-à-vis development issues and citizen needs as well as their assessments of governance performance by public authorities and institutions. SLEDS has also raised the professional capacities of journalists and media to verify facts, promptly correct false rumors, and provide in-depth reporting and discussion forums about issues of concern to citizens. At the local level, SLEDS has supported issue-oriented townhall meetings throughout the country, enabling citizens at the grassroots levels to discuss their needs and to hold local officials accountable.

USAID seeks to facilitate the sustainability of programmatic results by ensuring that activities are well-coordinated and that newer activities draw on the strengths, and learn from the challenges, of previous work. The CELGA activity will work in districts and wards where SLEDS has worked. CELGA should therefore build on this previous work and the relationships that were built. Similarly, CELGA is likely to work in one or more districts where WELD was active. Where this occurs, CELGA may be able to work with women's savings groups that WELD supported, and may support women in local councils that received training and other support from WELD when they ran for office.

III. ACTIVITY OBJECTIVES, ANTICIPATED RESULTS

Purpose

The purpose of this activity is to strengthen the social contract between citizens and their local governments by fostering increased accountability of local-level decision-makers to citizens on issues of importance to the community, and particularly service delivery. In the communities where it is implemented, CELGA will take a holistic approach, engaging with citizens, local officials and traditional leaders, civil society actors and journalists. The sectoral areas that the activity will work on should be informed by analysis led by or with the active participation of local groups. Sectoral areas of service delivery may be different in different localities, depending on the priorities, strengths, and analysis of local actors.

USAID invites the Interested Parties to propose a theory of change that reflects the approach and methodology they will pursue if they are selected to implement the activity. USAID and the implementer will review the proposed theory of change throughout the life of the activity, and, as appropriate, revise it to reflect emerging learning and changing realities. Interested Parties must present a holistic activity that addresses all objectives and sub-objectives.

USAID intentionally presents the programmatic objectives and anticipated results below in a broad framework in order to leave room for the Interested Parties to present their own understanding of the problem. USAID encourages Interested Parties to submit innovative and creative ideas for how to advance the activity's purpose and measure their outcomes. Interested Parties should include a description of how they will monitor the technical approach proposed and provide a list of notional indicators for each objective and sub-objective.

Period and Place of Performance

The period of performance will be five (5) years. The place of performance will be targeted districts in Sierra Leone. USAID anticipates a relatively low number of target districts for this activity, as the aim is to support holistic programming across a higher number of partners and stakeholders in each district. Interested Parties are invited to propose criteria for selection of districts, as well as proposed target districts. Final selection will be made together with USAID during the inception period of the resulted award. USAID notes that selected districts should represent a diversity in terms of majority ethnic group population and political party leadership, and that the selection of districts should take into consideration planned or current programming by USAID and by other donors. Please see Section IV for more on these activities.

Objectives and Anticipated Results

Interested Parties will achieve the following objectives and sub-objectives. NB: The organization of these objectives, in which only Objective One includes sub-objectives, is not intended to indicate that Interested Parties should place more emphasis on achieving Objective One results.

Objective 1: Increase effective and informed citizen and civil society participation in local government and political processes

Through this objective, USAID seeks to support work that will inform residents on their rights and responsibilities as citizens, and that will increase their capacity to effectively engage local governance bodies and participate in political processes. Interested Parties should propose strategies for increasing civic participation in governance and political processes. Interventions should engage a range of stakeholders, including civil society and community-based organizations, broadly defined, and journalists and media organizations.

Proposed interventions for civic engagement should incorporate an understanding of how inequities in communities, such as uneven access to services by different socio-economic groups, will be assessed and addressed. Interested Parties should consider how analysis can help local communities and implementers to understand such gaps; Interested Parties should also explain how disparities will be addressed in programming. Interventions under this objective should actively work to increase participation among those groups who have long been marginalized from governance and political processes, including women and youth.

Sub-objective 1.1: Increase capacity of civil society

Through this objective, USAID seeks to build on previous work supporting civil society groups, both formally and informally organized, by focusing on bolstering CSOs in their efforts to perform the tasks essential to a healthy democracy: civic education, advocacy, and oversight. As discussed in section II above, civil society actors, including women's groups, youth organizations and student groups, environmental groups, religious organizations, labor unions, savings groups, artists and artisan groups, and power societies have been critical to maintaining social cohesion and demanding government accountability in Sierra Leone for decades. Interested Parties are invited to propose robust strategies for supporting civil society, defined broadly, in their work to increase civic engagement and encourage local government transparency and accountability.

Civil society groups are key connectors. This activity should support varied non-governmental actors to build pro-accountability coalitions, including within and across local communities. Building coalitions can mean working with other civil society groups, formal or informal; media; private sector actors; or with champions of accountability within government. Civil society should also be supported to bring citizens together with decision-makers, to perform their watchdog function, and to actively participate in local decision-making processes. This objective is not focused on enhancing the service delivery capacity of CSOs; rather, it is targeted toward strengthening their oversight, advocacy, and civic engagement functions.

This objective can support the work of existing citizen oversight bodies, such as School Management Committees and Health Facility Management Committees. These bodies are important facilitators of collaboration between government bodies and communities on service delivery.

Interested Parties should propose approaches that build the capacity and sustainability of civil society groups across technical, administrative, and management functions. As noted by the 2019 CSOSI report, civil society organizations rarely receive support for enhancing their capacity in terms of administrative and financial management. USAID encourages approaches to civil society partnership which will support increased sustainability long-term, and which encourage CSOs to operate democratically and transparently. Additionally, in order to be effective, civil society groups may need training or mentoring on specific technical issues. Interested Parties may consider approaches that build or strengthen networks or otherwise facilitate peer learning, as well as external technical assistance.

Sub-objective 1.2: Support local media to inform citizens

This objective should further local media capacity to produce issue-based reporting. It should also support the ability of local radio stations to provide a platform for discussions on issues of concern to citizens, and to amplify citizen voices. As discussed in the background section above, media organizations experience a variety of capacity challenges. Local radio stations may not have extensive experience reporting on governance issues, and may require technical assistance or mentoring to understand government processes and sectoral issues in order to be able to produce accurate, issue-based reporting that will inform citizens.

This objective should also address the issue of misinformation. Work in this area could include strengthening the capacity of media organizations and journalists to recognize dis- and misinformation, including hate speech, in order to stop its spread or actively counter it. Additionally, the activity should include interventions aimed at strengthening citizens' media literacy and ability to stop the circulation of disinformation and hate speech.

Sub-objective 1.3: Support citizen engagement in elections and political processes

Interested Parties are invited to propose relevant programming to support civic engagement in the electoral process, including voter education, media literacy, and monitoring of candidate platforms post-election. Civic and voter education interventions should be thoughtful about reaching groups that have traditionally been marginalized politically, such as women and youth, or that receive information in different ways, including some persons with disabilities. USAID also seeks to build on its past support through the SLEDS activity for candidate debates, an important tool for fostering issue-based discussion and setting targets for accountability. This should include debates at the district level and at the national level.

Relatedly, Interested Parties should propose strategies to increase women's participation as candidates for office at the local level. A study of women's political participation in Sierra Leone that drew on the experiences of women who participated in USAID's WELD activity found that women are more likely to become candidates if they receive support from community-based civil society organizations. It also noted that women who had heard messaging about women's empowerment were more likely to self-report voting for a female candidate. Other potential interventions could include fostering mentor relationships between aspirants and experienced female politicians, and skills- and confidence-building workshops.

Given the rise of political tension and violence around political processes, including by-elections and party primaries, USAID anticipates a need for violence prevention work in the period leading up to the 2023 election, particularly in communities that are "swing districts." This could be coordinated with long-term conflict mitigation and peacebuilding work being conducted by a separate anticipated USAID activity.

Illustrative results:

- Citizens are better informed about citizen rights and responsibilities, local government structure and processes, and political processes, including women's right to participate in political processes and political platforms
- Citizens are more likely to participate in local government processes
- In-depth media reporting on governance and service delivery issues in target communities
- More effective civil society oversight of local government bodies and processes
- CSO partners have enhanced administrative and financial management skills
- Women aspirants to local office increase necessary skills

Objective 2: Bolster the capacity of local governance institutions to provide critical services and be more transparent in their processes

In the selected locations, the activity will likewise work with local councils, Village and Ward Development Committees, and other relevant groups to increase their effectiveness and support transparency and accountability to their local communities. Interventions will vary by community depending on the needs raised by citizens and civil society. Support could be provided to traditional leaders under this objective as part of working with governance bodies in a community.

This objective should incorporate strategies to improve the functioning of local councils and committees, depending on the needs of specific bodies. These could include support to regularizing rules and procedures, strengthening administrative performance, coordinating with chiefdom councils and with local representatives of ministries, and technical assistance on policy issues. Additionally, Interested Parties should propose a variety of strategies for increasing the capacity of decision-makers to communicate proactively with citizens and civil society, gather inputs from them, and encourage their participation in governance processes.

Interested Parties should think holistically. Potential strategies could include identifying and bolstering accountability champions within decision-making bodies, building pro-accountability coalitions across civil society and government bodies, strengthening information-sharing and joint action between traditional leaders and local government officials, and mentoring and networking across local government bodies in different districts.

Interested Parties should propose strategies for building the capacity of newly-elected women in leadership in particular. Women elected to office for the first time often do not have the networks that their male counterparts do; this often means they lack mentors and allies. This activity will help women elected to local positions to build their skills and networks, including with civil society and media.

Although the focus of this activity is at the district and community level, the linkages between the central government and local councils impact on the ability of local councils to operate effectively. With this in mind, this activity may include support to strengthening these linkages, and/or advocacy to central government bodies to empower local councils in terms of financing or regulation. USAID anticipates that the activity will require coordination with the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development at a minimum. CELGA may also benefit from coordination with other activities, supported by USAID or other donors, that already engage with the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, or the central ministries that support specific areas of service delivery, such as health or education.

Illustrative results:

- Local government bodies gather citizen and civil society input on community concerns
- Local government bodies are more transparent to citizens
- Local government bodies provide services in line with citizen priorities and input

- Women leaders in government bodies and traditional leadership structures have enhanced leadership skills and networking opportunities

Alternative Approaches

The interventions illustrated above are not exhaustive. Interested Parties may propose alternative combinations of interventions. A combination of need, realism, and innovation while proposing interventions is desired. USAID emphasizes that the priority is to facilitate the development of locally-led solutions responding to local priorities, and innovative ideas are encouraged.

IV. COORDINATION WITH OTHER IMPLEMENTERS AND DONORS

USAID Implementing Partners: USAID expects the implementing partner to coordinate closely with other USAID-supported activities in Sierra Leone. Implementing partners will be expected to work together to identify and capitalize on synergies and coordinate to avoid potential redundancies. There are a number of programming areas where USAID sees the potential for coordination:

- The OSLC will also be supporting a people-to-people conflict and violence prevention activity that will focus on prevention and mitigation of political violence. The aims of the CELGA activity and this new violence-prevention activity are closely aligned, and co-locating could create valuable synergies. Where the two activities are co-located, USAID expects the two implementers to coordinate closely, particularly in the pre- and post-electoral periods when the risk of electoral violence will be elevated.
- The OSLC has a significant amount of programming supporting Global Health initiatives. If the CELGA activity is working with a community that chooses to focus on improving health outcomes, USAID expects strong communication and coordination between CELGA implementers and any health activity implementers active in that district.
- USAID is likely to have some interventions supporting biodiversity in Sierra Leone during the period of performance, and may support activities in the sectors of agriculture, aquaculture, and other areas related to economic growth and the environment. As local economic development and conservation planning fall under local councils' areas of responsibility, coordination with other USAID activities working on these issues would facilitate more sustainable results in terms of both improved governance processes and better community outcomes.

Donors: USAID's Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance (DRG) activities in Sierra Leone are complemented by funding and programming from other donors engaging in the DRG space. These include the European Union, Germany, Ireland, the Open Society Initiative for West Africa, the United Kingdom, the United Nations, the World Bank, and the US National Endowment for Democracy, many of whom are active in supporting programming related to local governance, decentralization, accountability, and media and civil society strengthening. The proposed approach should demonstrate awareness of and potential linkages to any ongoing donor initiatives. Several pertinent activities are listed below:

- The National Endowment for Democracy is supporting political parties to enhance the meaningful participation of women in political life.
- The UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office is supporting Protecting Independent Media for Effective Development, a three-year program to support the provision of public interest media in Sierra Leone, along with two other countries.
- The European Union is funding a three-year project supporting six local councils and eight civil society organizations working in those districts to conduct development activities in response to local needs, as well as limited programming addressing decentralization reform at the national level.
- The World Bank is developing a new activity that will support institution-strengthening at the local council level, with a strong focus on capacity-building of government bodies on financial management and data transparency. This activity is expected to work closely with all 22 district councils on public financial management, including grants to fund development projects, and data monitoring and tracking systems. Given this, USAID expects that the CELGA activity will not engage extensively with district councils on PFM, but that CELGA can do complementary work, such as supporting civil society and other stakeholders to engage on PFM and how they may be able to use new data portals to track development inputs or outcomes.

V. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Local systems approach: USAID’s focus on local systems is rooted in the reality that achieving and sustaining any development outcome depends on the contributions of multiple and interconnected actors. Building the capacity of a single actor or strengthening a single relationship is insufficient. Rather, the focus must be on the system as a whole: the actors, their relationships and the incentives that guide them. The activity should be designed to align with the priorities of local actors to secure long-term, sustainable impact on the effectiveness of local governance systems and relationships.

A key aspect of the local systems framework is *facilitation*, an approach which aims to stimulate systemic change without taking a direct role in the system. It involves working through sets of local actors and participants and ensuring that they are drivers of the change process, and fostering joint leadership in how activities are planned, conducted, and adapted.

The Interested Parties will describe how the activity will engage with, leverage, and strengthen local systems. Further information on the local systems approach can be found in the Local Systems Framework: <https://www.usaid.gov/policy/local-systems-framework>

Adaptive Management: The Local Systems Framework recognizes a need for flexible and adaptive management. The accountability ecosystems approach discussed in the Background section encourages iterative programming drawing from ongoing analysis of the actors, the power relationships, and political context. The Interested Parties will present a vision and strategy for management that intentionally plans for consideration and adaptation of approaches based on program analysis, learning and experience.

The CELGA activity will incorporate an inception period of three months that will allow for setting the activity locations and an initial mapping and analysis of local governance and accountability systems in key districts of Sierra Leone. This will provide a starting point for identifying key actors, their roles and relationships, and potential change agents and windows of opportunity. Ensuring the participation of a local partner or partners in this work will enhance the results and the ability of this initial analysis to inform local actors going forward.

For more information on adaptive management as a part of USAID's Collaborating, Learning and Adapting Framework, please see: <https://usaidlearninglab.org/cla-toolkit>

Participation and Inclusion: USAID's Strategy on Democracy, Human Rights and Governance (2013) states that the Agency's overarching goal in the DRG space is *to support the establishment and consolidation of inclusive and accountable democracies to advance freedom, dignity and development*. Fundamental to USAID's vision of democratic and accountable governance is the prioritization of inclusion and public participation. Yet in every society historically marginalized and excluded groups face particular barriers to participation in governance and political processes. USAID expects the CELGA activity to place an emphasis on addressing barriers to participation for marginalized groups across all objectives. Exclusion and marginalization may look different in different communities where CELGA works, and therefore should be fully integrated into the mapping of power relations that should underlie initial planning and regular vetting of the programmatic theory of change.

Sierra Leone has a long history of neglect and marginalization of women and youth, a fact cited by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as a key contributing factor to both the eruption and protracted nature of the civil war. A USAID-supported assessment of democracy, human rights and governance issues in Sierra Leone noted a lack of evidence that post-conflict reforms have addressed these issues. Thus, this activity should incorporate strong targets for inclusion of women and youth across its objectives.

Women are heavily under-represented in formal government positions, holding only 12% of seats in Parliament. This reflects significant structural challenges, including a first-past-the-post electoral system and a lack of gender quotas either in government institutions or within parties. There are also social norms at play, and women often face significant pushback to running for office. In a USAID-supported public opinion poll from December 2018, female respondents cited fear of violence as the lead reason they believe women choose not to run.

Women do play a strong role in public life in other ways. Sierra Leone has a number of influential women's groups, both nationally and at the community level, and during the civil war and after, women have been crucial to peacebuilding, reconciliation, human rights, and other areas of work critical to the country's stability. Over the years, women have also competed for traditional leadership roles, becoming chiefs and paramount chiefs, although they make up a small minority of these positions.

However, it is clear that women do not participate in governance and political processes at the same rate as men do. This is the case even at the most basic level. In the most recent Afrobarometer study (2020), 37.7 percent of female respondents said they had never attended a

community meeting, with the vast majority of those indicating that they would do so if they had the opportunity. These numbers are significantly different for men: 20.6% said they had never attended such a meeting. The disparity may reflect a number of challenges, including time constraints related to gender roles and responsibilities, inequitable access to resources, and gender norms. These constraints are likely to differ for women of different backgrounds, including age, socio-economic status, education level, disability status, or ethnicity.

The CELGA activity should be informed by, and build on, USAID's previous work to increase women's opportunities to meaningfully participate in politics and governance. CELGA interventions in support of women's political participation could include supporting training and mentoring for women aspirants and candidates, coalition-building between women politicians and civil society, public messaging about women's right and abilities to run for office, and skills-building for newly-elected women local officials, among others.

Youth are also underrepresented in political office, and face their own challenges to participation. Young people contend with high levels of unemployment and poverty; it is estimated that 60 to 70 percent of young people are unemployed. Some young men, in particular, have joined "Ataya bases," or local tea groups, to socialize and network. But a number have turned to "cliques" and gangs; these cliques have increasingly been recruited by political parties to incite violence. A Risk and Vulnerability Assessment conducted by ECOWAS in 2017 notes "concerns that youth are vulnerable to manipulation by politicians, which could lead to violence in the lead-up to elections."⁷ Understanding that youth represent the majority of the population and the future of Sierra Leone, CELGA should proactively incorporate efforts to promote the inclusion of youth in local governance and political processes. Interested Parties are invited to propose innovative ways to increase the inclusion of young people across the objectives of this activity.⁸

Conflict sensitivity and Do No Harm: The Do No Harm (DNH) principle dictates that development interventions should not exacerbate conflict or put beneficiaries at greater risk than they would otherwise face without the intervention. Instead, they should ideally contribute to peace. Whenever development actors bring resources, ideas or staff into a situation, they become part of that environment. A Do No Harm approach recognizes this and takes action to mitigate the negative and optimize the positive impacts. DNH is part of a conflict sensitive approach to programming.

It is critical to strictly adhere to this principle throughout an activity's lifecycle. The programming described above is designed to impact the relationships, dynamics, and power structures within and between community actors. Yet it can be difficult at the beginning of an intervention to predict exactly how relationships, roles, and power dynamics within a community will change. This is one reason why ongoing analysis of the accountability ecosystems the activity is working within is essential. This analysis should incorporate a conflict lens, and should provide the basis for ongoing risk analysis to identify and mitigate the potential unintended impacts of the activity. In addition, the activity should reassess the programmatic

⁷ Country Risk and Vulnerability Assessment: Sierra Leone. ECOWAS Commission, December 2017. Page 33.

⁸ A resource that may be helpful is the Positive Youth Development Framework, which can be found at: <https://www.youthpower.org/positive-youth-development>

Theory of Change regularly, and employ collaboration, learning and adaptation approaches to adjust and refocus accordingly. USAID also welcomes other ideas from Interested Parties for integrating conflict sensitive approaches in the activity, with attention paid to understanding how conflict could affect the intervention and how the intervention could affect conflict dynamics both positively and negatively.