

# **GALS in Sierra Leone**

an impact assessment



February 2017

# Introduction

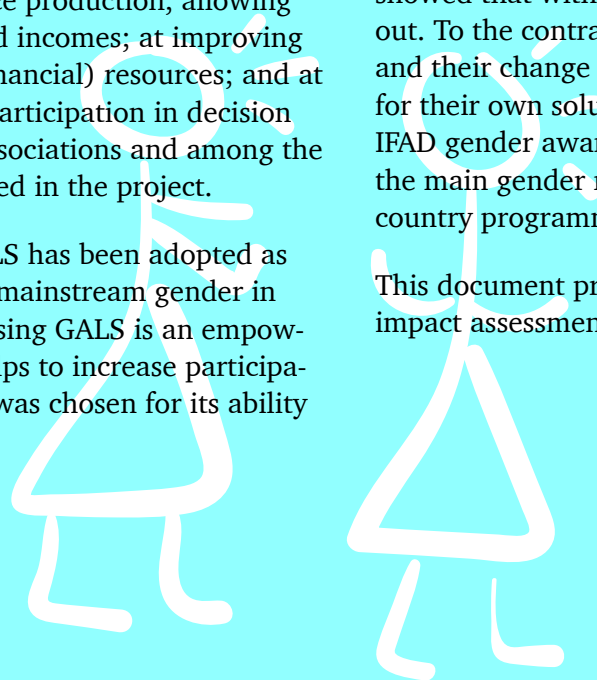
In 2011, Sierra Leone saw its first introduction to the Gender Action Learning System, or 'GALS'. The IFAD-funded Community based Poverty Reduction Project (RCPRP) in Sierra Leone decided to use the methodology as its main approach for social mobilisation. Initially, GALS was piloted among rural farmers' associations producing rice in the inland valley swamps, some of the groups that the project works with in promoting the rehabilitation of rice fields. The introduction of GALS aimed at increasing the number of women in rice production, allowing for additional household incomes; at improving the youth's access of (financial) resources; and at increasing the level of participation in decision making bodies in the associations and among the service providers involved in the project.

But more than this, GALS has been adopted as the primary strategy to mainstream gender in project interventions. Using GALS is an empowering process, which helps to increase participation at all levels. GALS was chosen for its ability

to bring together different stakeholders. It works with men, women and the poorest community members, addressing gender inequalities and imbalances within the household as a whole. GALS created an empowering platform for both women and men, increasing access and control over (financial) resources and decision making for women, female and male youth and other vulnerable groups.

An impact assessment report conducted in 2015 showed that with GALS, the poor were not left out. To the contrary: they became champions and their change helped others to join and look for their own solutions. Sierra Leone won the IFAD gender award of 2014, and GALS has been the main gender mainstreaming strategy in the country programme.

This document presents the outcomes of the impact assessment.



## About GALS

GALS is a systemic approach to peer learning. The system is comprised of a number of tools and processes that, when put together, promote transformational change at the individual level and within the household. It can also increase the ability of groups to work together and pursue common agendas.



The process starts with the training of a team of community facilitators in the use of the tools chosen, that champion the methodology in the desired project. This training is followed up with periodic support and check-ups to ensure that the principles of GALS are being taken into consideration by the facilitators when training other peers. Ideally a host organisation is involved that sets up a monitoring system, allowing all involved to learn and improve.

GALS is implemented under a set of principles that facilitate the empowerment of all involved: from beneficiaries to staff, but also the business community and civil society organisations involved. These GALS principles include:

- (i) ensuring that women, men and youth participate actively, regardless of their writing and reading skills;
- (ii) seeing women as intelligent actors of development, not as victims;
- (iii) power is shared among all, regardless of status, position, age, sex or religion;
- (iv) men are strategic allies for change;
- (v) change is a personal choice, which is why the methodology starts by raising the level of awareness of individuals and supports their actions for change;
- (vi) lobby and advocacy is the basis for collective actions to address issues of common interest.

## Some of the GALS tools used in Kenema



**Vision Journey**—The vision journey is a strategic planning tool that helps an individual (or individuals) to project their dream for a better life, looking at ways to escape poverty. It analyses the present situation and the past, and identifies opportunities and challenges. The vision journey helps to set periodical goals and identify concrete steps to achieve such goals, step-by-step moving towards the envisaged dream scenario.

It ranks the household's different sources and uses of income, and it identifies unnecessary expenditures. It also looks at property ownership and decision making at the household level. This tool helps to show unfair distributions of roles and responsibilities at the household level.

**Income Challenge Action Tree**—The Income Challenge Action Tree analyses the root causes behind the challenges restricting the main source of income. It helps identify challenges at production, market and household level, and understand the opportunities for both women and men.

**Empowerment Map**—The Empowerment Map is a tool that helps to analyse relationships with resource people, with key institutions and it also looks at the flow of power, money and love.

**Gender Balance Tree**—The Gender Balance Tree looks at productive and reproductive activities performed by household members, identifies and





## Morrison Amara Makaya

*For Morrison Amara Makaya from Talia Makaya village, it took time to understand the importance of GALS. At first he thought it would be another project that comes and goes, like so many that were introduced in his village. However, he saw his peers improving their lives so he too decided to take it seriously. In his late 20s, Morrison is a teacher in his community. His dream was to go to university, but he impregnated a school-going girl. He changed his plans to take his responsibility as a family man. Now the baby is born and he is teaching the girl, now his wife, to take her high school exams by the end of the year. “In the past I was not responsible in my relationships with women,” Morrison said. “Nevertheless, I learned in GALS that girls also have a right to be educated and to have a better life. That is why I decided to give priority to my wife’s education. I already have a teacher’s certificate but I have to make sure I help her finish high school. When she is studying I take care of the child and I am enjoying being a dad.”*

*With a family, Morrison needs a source of income. He started producing rice, has four plots of his own and is working in one collective plot as well. With the help of a local organisation, he created two saving and lending groups with 29 women in each group. They save weekly and the money is kept in a box in his house, as the secretary. Farming was not in Morrison’s original plans, but now he has a different perspective. “Most of the land in my community belongs to my family. We can live well with what people pay to use the land. But I have a family now and I want to contribute in a different way. I think working in the farm has made me grow up.”*



# Introducing GALS in Sierra Leone

The introduction of GALS in Sierra Leone started small, with the intention to then identify opportunities to scale up the approach. The activities started in August/September 2011, in two communities in Kenema district: Talia Makaya and Fulawahun. Kenema was where two dynamic Inland Valley Swamp Associations (IVSAs) related to the RCPRP were already doing rehabilitation work in their swamp. Eight female and male rice farmers from these organisations were the first to be trained and to become community facilitators. The GALS tools were introduced in stages, with a training every three to four months. The first community facilitators took part in a six-day introductory workshop.

Young women and men became champions in the use of the methodology in a very short time and with little follow up or outside resources. Six of the eight community facilitators shared the GALS tools with 30 neighbours, family members and other IVSA members. This second group joined the first 'generation' of facilitators in a second training session, where external facilitators introduced new tools and evaluated the progress made. The group of 38 were asked to share their knowledge with at least three others. This process was repeated twice more, resulting in the training of over 200 people in the introductory year. In March 2012 these 200 GALS facilitators were encouraged

to train as many peers as possible, in their own communities and in three new ones: Tissor, Kpandebu Dama and Loko communities.

The quality of the peer training was ensured by a certification system. To qualify for certification, a facilitator needed to build a network of a minimum of 50 peers in one year. Fifty of the 200 facilitators reached this target. In December 2014, the 50 GALS 'champions' were lauded at a graduation ceremony. According to RCPRP data, the certified facilitators alone reached 2500 people. An additional 1000 people were reached by those who did not certify.

GALS was introduced in three phases:

1

Phase I: training of community facilitators in basic GALS tools and piloting the use of tools by the facilitators.  
(August 2011–September 2012)

2

Phase II: Introduction of production and market analysis tool.  
(September 2012–September 2013)

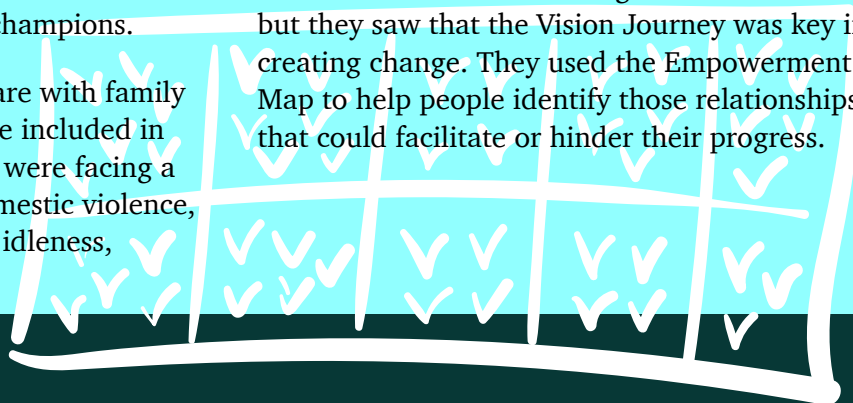
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Phase III: Scaling up of GALS through the certification process.  
(October 2013–October 2014)

The community facilitators, understanding that GALS is a process of change, committed themselves to develop the skills and abilities that changed their lives and become champions.

The participants chose first to share with family members or neighbours who were included in their own vision exercise, or that were facing a challenge of some sort—be it domestic violence, drinking, gambling, prostitution, idleness,

etcetera. Facilitators were free to choose which tools to use and in which order. Most of the facilitators used the Challenge Action Tree first, but they saw that the Vision Journey was key in creating change. They used the Empowerment Map to help people identify those relationships that could facilitate or hinder their progress.



## *Rice cultivation*

Since the initial participants came from the IVSA, it was expected that rice would be considered as the main source of income. However, the large majority identified palm oil, cassava, groundnuts, petty trade and mining as their main source of income. Through a market mapping exercise the participants came to understand the opportunities and challenges of engaging in rice production for more than only consumption. This exercise helped expose the Chinese Farm business centre and several other potential large buyers as an opportunity, as they lease land, provide seeds and buy rice for a fair price.

In their Vision exercises, the majority of the peers identified their swamp and the RCPRP as an opportunity. Unfortunately, their involvement with the project was ending. Still, the exercises allowed them to understand some of the reasons why their involvement in the IVS had not been optimised, better preparing them for future interventions. Although the peers no longer had a direct relationship with the IVSA, their interest in growing rice had increased, and they started looking for different strategies to continue to produce rice.

The discussions encouraged a significant group, even those who did not start in the IVSAs, to develop their swamps for rice and vegetable production. Most do not own land, but they can easily lease land from landowners. Many decided to expand from one plot (about one acre) of rice to having three or four, selling the surplus. Even those with occupations outside of farming relying mainly on their salary started producing rice.

## Achievements and impact

GALS has brought about powerful, positive changes in gender norms and relations for both men and women, including youth, proving to be very beneficial for meeting rural development project goals in the different countries that have adopted it.

One of the IVS service providers that attended the course stated that they now **hire more women** for paid work that was previously only reserved for men. They also encouraged female youth contractors to come forward.

A significant number of the champions had **increased and diversified their income**. The additional income was invested in buying lots to

build houses, helping young people to move out of the family compound and create their own living conditions. Others invested in new businesses like the commercialisation of agricultural inputs and other goods; in school fees and exam forms; and in buying motorbikes. Some of the facilitators got married along the way and used GALS to ensure that their spouses also developed vibrant income generating activities. Diversification of income by the GALS peers has helped them to reach their goals and to continue to expand.

About 70% of the people involved with GALS are young people aged 15–27. The additional income also allowed for a large majority of these young people to go **back to school**, including vocational





training and preparations for university entry exams. Many also use their additional to support their siblings' education. Some young people who could not write and read took literacy classes.

Sisters and brothers that had grown apart **used GALS to reconcile**. More than half of the certified facilitators had a story of reconciliation with a family member or had facilitated a reconciliation of someone. The majority of young people involved in the GALS network have family ties in this network. Most of them started using GALS in their lives because a family member shared the tools to help overcome a particular challenge. The changes observed in the lives of the first facilitators became an encouragement for people to join whenever there were approached.

When the certified facilitators revisited their Vision Journeys in 2015, most of them had achieved their dreams—and in some cases they updated their visions to include new desires. The visions they had for their lives were bright with ideas of change, both at the level of their household and in their livelihoods. The way the GALS peers expanded their resources shows that when people have a dream and a plan to reach it, money is not a problem. And when money appears, it is used wisely.

The encouraging results can be attributed to the peer learning approach. This by itself is an empowering process. Community champions use their own creativity to share their knowledge with

those who they believe influence their lives, or those who they believe need support in terms of gender inequality. The absence of project funds to support the peers' activities allowed people to first look at their own resources, before expecting any help from outside sources. This strengthened a mindset of self-reliance among the peers.

Defining, right from the beginning, the need to include both male and female youth, adult women and men, formal and informal leaders, has created a fully inclusive programme. Female participation was great during the process, partly because (breastfeeding) mothers were very welcome in the process. This not only enabled women and young mothers to participate without having to worry what to do with the children, but also helped to see the change of roles in the care for the babies. One facilitator explained that at the beginning he was ashamed of holding his baby in public, but since he has started with GALS, he has learned that holding the baby is showing love and sharing responsibilities with his wife. Because GALS tackles issues at the household level that drive people to poverty in a non-confrontational way, it also empowers the men. This opens avenues for more cooperation and sharing of power and resources among the household members.

GALS helped them to focus and change their own attitude. It helped them to be creative and to believe in their ability to make things happen. They become master of their own lives.

*The most significant changes ignited by the use of GALS as a life planning tool and empowering mechanism include:*

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Women and men share power in the household, leading to a fair distribution of workload both at the household and in productive activities.

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Women exercise more rights to take decisions over their lives, including decisions about their right for paid work, mobility and to access education.

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Young women and men give more value to agriculture and agribusiness opportunities.

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Increased diversification of income leads to greater access to finance and more investments in the household, particularly among women and young people.

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There is an increased solidarity among people, who have better negotiations skills.

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An increased organisational capacity can be seen, which led to the creation of an organisation consisting of GALS peers.

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During the piloting GALS was adopted by other RCPRP components, including the climate change adaptation, tree crop rehabilitation and decentralisation components, as a key training approach in their activities.



*Before she learned about GALS, Adama Bockarie from Fulahun was a heavy drinker. She quarreled a lot with her husband, a teacher. Sometimes when she needed money she would sell something in her house, but she really believed the husband should be a provider to the family, and felt neglected by him. When her sister-in-law shared her GALS Vision with her, her interest was peaked. She developed her own vision and decided that she could*



*become independent and be a more pro-active person. She joined other women in the market and soon used GALS to expand her business. She is now selling palm oil and charcoal, two products that are very valuable in the Kenema cuisine. She buys the palm oil in bulk and keeps it to sell later in the year when there is scarcity and high prices of oil. Very recently, her sister got married and she was proud to go to the wedding with two cans of palm oil for the festivities.*

*Her husband started to feel left out, so Adama shared her vision with him and they worked on a family vision. To live rent-free is one of their family dreams. Adama has also been to other districts as a facilitator, and has shared the tools with her adolescent daughter. She saved part of the stipend she was given and used it to buy a town lot. Adama and her husband are now building their own home in that lot of land and after living together for 23 years, they are planning their wedding for March next year.*

*Apart from her palm oil business, Adama also has four plots of rice. She expects to get over 500,000 Leones after paying for the seeds, when she sells her rice to the Chinese Farm business centre. With tears in her eyes, explained that it never crossed her mind that she could be a business woman.*

**Adama Bockarie**

## Challenges along the way

When GALS was first introduced, it was expected that it would continue to play a central role in the IVS activities of the project. After the initial training however, there was no concrete action plan for the district offices or the IVS officer to follow up on the implementation, and priority was given to the technical aspects of the IVS rehabilitation. The RCPRP was ending the relationship with the two initial IVSAs, and without the project land agreements did not allow for the groups to continue in its original form. As a result, the piloting of GALS in Kenema took its own course and focused on households, rather than the IVSA and improving relationships between producers, traders and the local government. Still, for the majority of the GALS peers rice has become an important source of income, without further support from the project.

Experiences from other countries where GALS has been introduced successfully show that the presence of a host organisation—be it a cooperative, a community based organisation or an NGO—is key for its sustainability. The changes reported could have had a greater impact if the peers were linked to an organisation that provided a support structure for their growth. The host becomes the support mechanism which the community facilitators can rely upon. Even though the IVS component of the project did not take over GALS as part of its gender mainstreaming strategy, the regular presence of an external GALS facilitator during a period of two years, the persistence of the

RCPRP's Gender Unit, and the commitment of the community facilitators, helped to sustain the activities. The community facilitators' engagement in sharing with their peers helped to strengthen the group and enabled the process to move forward.

There was a poor link between the GALS activities and the other activities of the project. Despite having participated in GALS trainings, the project staff was not sufficiently interested at the level of implementation. Project management also did not adopt the use of GALS for mainstreaming gender—it was left at the discretion of component heads. In addition, a weak connection with the gender unit in the Ministry of Agriculture or with other UN agencies in the country did not help to lobby and advocate at a higher level, nor inspire the adoption in other programmes.

### *The Ebola epidemic*

Ebola caused a social and economic crisis that paralysed the country, adding an additional constraint to those who have limited resources. For eight months, people needed to restrict their activities to the minimum since gathering of people was prohibited. Most of the GALS facilitators however, continued with their businesses and they did not mention Ebola as part of their challenges.





## Sustainability

The total cost for the introduction of GALS was USD 125,000, including all training activities, logistics and follow-up. This means that, per participant, the full cost was only USD 36 for the duration of the project. Peer learning does not require funding from an external source: a notebook and a pen are the only materials needed to start a transformation. Also, relying on their friends and family to spread the methodology may have contributed to the large outreach of the pilot. This confirms that in the use of GALS, once the first facilitators are established there is no need for much financial support for the group to continue their work.

The 50 certified facilitators understood that to continue to expand their network of GALS practitioners, they needed to organise themselves. After

conducting several trainings, they started working on the creation of their own community based organisation. They established Access Gender Action Learning System (AGALS) in early 2014, replacing the district level GALS coordinating committee established during the piloting. AGALS allows them to strengthen their own capacities, follow up on the individuals and households they worked with, and to provide services to other organisations and districts. Their experience in the coordinating committee, made up of representatives of all communities and project staff, showed the facilitators how to create routines including monthly meetings, producing minutes, and following up on decisions and the challenges. This informal structure aided in the establishment of a self-help system by which they supported one another, to ensure that everyone is in the move.



Hannah Tarawally from Fulawahun community is a young mother. She was 24 when she joined GALS in 2012. Her husband was at the time the only breadwinner, but when he lost his job Hannah had to start a small business to keep the family going. Hannah's neighbor, a young woman in the first generation of community facilitators, shared the tools with Hannah. The challenge action tree helped Hannah analyse how both her and her husband contributed to the arguments they were having. She realised she could not change her husband but she could change her own attitude.



## Hannah Tarawally

Hannah envisioned her future with a hair salon, a rice swamp and her own house. Without any initial funds, she joined a woman with an established hair salon. They now share the daily profits of the salon. She also started growing rice and sweet potatoes, which she sells to the Chinese Farm business centre nearby and to a small restaurant near the salon. Hannah also uses the sweet potato for the family.

“The night before the first GALS workshop I was lying awake, worrying about presenting in front of all these people. I did not go to school and this woman has given me this white paper to draw something on,” Hannah said. Hannah is now a respected member of the AGALS association. She became one of the GALS champions’ who shared her experience in other districts. “The GALS methodology is now so ingrained in my head that I can share at any given time without consulting a book.” Hannah used the stipend she received to buy a town lot, opened a savings account in a commercial bank and bought 50 shares in the Kpandebu Dama Financial Service Association. She also bought a motorbike that she leases out for 150,000 Leones per week. Hannah went from a small business earning her about 50,000 Leones a month to earning over 500,000 Leones a month within two years.

Hannah learned the importance of taking responsibility for her life, which helped her to develop a different relationship with her husband. While Hannah provides the family with an income, her husband is building their house and most of the household chores. They have found a perfect balance in which they both feel that they are contributing and the money is flowing.

## Expanding GALS

The results of the GALS pilot in Kenema district proved to be very encouraging, as the number of champions continued to grow with very little input from the project. From here, the project decided to use the methodology in other districts and project components. They were able to contract facilitators through AGALS.

When community facilitators go out of their district the NPCU provides them with a stipend of about 500,000 Leones per trip. When facilitators started earning money, a session on finance was introduced to help them organise the additional income.

The project staff in Kono and Kailahun districts decided to introduce the methodology in 2013, training 70 participants including smallholder rice producers, IVS service providers, rural finance staff, cooperatives and members of the district youth council. These two trainings were the first

opportunity for the Kenema community facilitators to share their experience outside their own district. The introduction of GALS in Kono and Kailahun confirmed the need for a host organisation to help the spread of GALS, to check on their people's plans and to develop facilitation skills. Unfortunately, in both Kono and Kailahun the GALS training was viewed by district staff as a one-time training event and as such did not create a team of community facilitators.

The RCPRP's Gender Unit saw an opportunity to use GALS in other programme components as an awareness-raising tool. In December 2013, 180 women from Kenema, Kono, Koinadugu and Kailahun were trained on climate change resilience and greenhouses using GALS. Climate change adaptation strategies were identified, and the women committed to teach their peers as well. Some of the strategies were the use of energy saving stoves to reduce the cutting of trees, the

A Learning Event, 'Gender justice for pro-poor wealth creation: catalysing and upscaling the Gender Action Learning (GALS) process', took place in 2013. The event brought together 66 participants from IFAD-funded projects in eleven countries across Africa. The existing GALS experiences in Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Ghana and Uganda were shared. It gave first-hand exposure to the effects of GALS in Sierra Leone, while strengthening the country's capacity to serve as a resource for learning in the region and elsewhere. In addition, it established a firm basis for a regional network for ongoing exchange of learning, challenges and innovations on mainstreaming gender justice and livelihoods interventions through GALS. The RCPRP's Gender Unit has become a resource to some of these countries as they started their own GALS processes.



planting of new trees to reduce erosion, and the cleaning of riverbanks to avoid floods. In addition, the champions trained female farmers within the project's tree crop activities. Here they focused on improving the quality of their produce, on how to use their profits, and how to expand their businesses.

Increasing the use of GALS was done most prominently within the IFAD-funded project on rural finance in Sierra Leone. The rural finance team was interested in finding ways to increase the number of women accessing their services, so they contracted AGALS, Cd Peace and CAPEN-SL. In July 2016, the community facilitators and the local organisations had trained active loan clients in four districts, analysing how best to use

and repay their loans. Not only did this support the women and men that use financial services such as Community Banks and Financial Service Associations, but the GALS trainings functioned as an outreach strategy for these services as well. This benefits everyone: as community members buy more shares, the services become more sustainable. With access to financial services, women and men can start or expand their businesses while keeping their money safe. The GALS tools also made it easier for community members to follow up on defaulters.

The RCPRP's Gender Unit also used the methodology to train female and male Ward District Councillors and Ward District Committee Members in Kenema, Kailahun, Kono, Koinadugu,



Two local NGOs organisations—Cd Peace and CARD-SL—were invited right at the beginning of the GALS process in Kenema. Both have continued to use GALS independently: Cd PEACE in Makeni in its work with young people and Ebola-awareness, and CARD-SL in Kono with women's saving groups. As a result of the training in Kailahun, the local community based organisation CAPEN-SL started training its own community facilitators to develop saving and lending groups, with the support of facilitators from Kenema.

Moyamba, Bonthe and Bo District on gender justice and the design of a two-year vision journey for their respective wards. Again, the trainings were facilitated by the Kenema certified facilitators.

AGALS has now moved even further into another IFAD-funded project in Sierra Leone. Within the Smallholder Commercialisation Programme

(SCP-GAFSP), GALS has been used in farmer field schools in eight districts. Facilitators say that the pictorial tools aid in extension activities. At the beginning of 2017 the tools are also starting to be used in the programme's Agricultural Business Centres and with tree crop youth contractors, as the Vision Journey helps people plan for entering various value chains.





*Donald Bockarie from Fulawahun was 24 when he was first introduced to GALS by his cousin Hannah in 2012. At the time he was no longer going to school, lived with his grandmother and was not very productive with his life. His grandmother's rice farm was of no interest to Donald. After Hannah helped him with his own vision journey, he started identifying the root causes of his challenges. "My life had to change," Donald said. "I could not talk to my friends without showing results." His attitude changed, and he started helping his grandmother with the house cores.*

*His dream was to have a music shop, so he started by selling used clothes in the street to accumulate the money he needed. "Partnering with my friend, we accumulated 500,000 Leones and started looking for a place to rent for the shop. We were fortunate to find someone who rented us a place by instalments," says Donald with passion, when asked about how he built his business. Today, his vibrant shop sells and rents CDs and videos, charges phones, and types and prints documents for clients. Donald's business has a turnover of about 10,000,000 Leones a month and the asset value of the business is very close to 5,000,000 Leones.*

*Donald went back to school, where first he learned computer skills that help him run the music shop, and then wrote his exams for the West Africa Senior Secondary School Certificate. He is now hoping to enter into university to study law. Donald lost his mother, a nurse and one of the first health staff to be affected by the Ebola epidemic. As a result, Donald now is responsible for four siblings, even though he gets some support from the church and people in the community. They all go to school, and he has helped his older siblings to start their own little business so that they do not depend entirely on him.*

## **Donald Bockarie**

## Conclusion

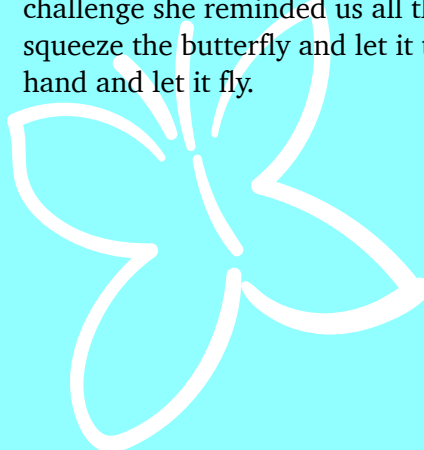
From what was observed it can be concluded that the sharing of GALS has raised the awareness of thousands of young people to further their education and at the same time create an income. It has empowered both female and male youth by giving focus to their lives. It has increased levels of self-esteem as women, men and young people have developed analytical, planning and presentation skills, enabling them to speak freely in meetings and other community gatherings. The peer learning has enabled the creation of a movement of people who believe that they have the power to change their lives with very little input from outside.

Self-reliance seems to be a key resource to GALS peers, and AGALS is a strong pillar to the sustainability of the programme. GALS can be seen as a key element in the exit strategy of the IFAD-funded programmes, because of the possibilities it offers to generate local capacity. Dedicating time to train the first group of community facilitators well enabled them to share the GALS tools confidently and develop an extensive network of peers.

Using the tools in their own lives enabled the community facilitators to walk the talk. And here, literacy and age is not a constraint—among the best community facilitators are people who had never been to a classroom.

But also, this experience shows that commitment of staff is very important—the GALS process was possible because the RCPRP's Gender Unit, with personal dedication, used any opportunity to go to the field to follow up on activities.

Mama Fatmata, one of the eldest GALS facilitators, often compared GALS to a butterfly that is at the mercy of who holds it. Any time there was a challenge she reminded us all that we could either squeeze the butterfly and let it die, or open our hand and let it fly.



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