

## **Initiative for Peacebuilding Workshops in Sierra Leone**

Gender cluster

### **Local Civil Society Workshops**

(10 March 2009, Bo and 11 March 2009, Makeni)

On 10 and 11 March 2009, International Alert hosted two local workshops in Bo and Makeni, Sierra Leone, in partnership with Women's Partnership for Justice and Peace (WPJP) and Grassroots Empowerment for Self-Reliance (GEMS). The workshops combined sensitisation on UNSCR 1325 and discussion of public perceptions of security. Each workshop began with presentations on UNSCR 1325 and the Justice and Security Sector Reform (JSSR) process in Sierra Leone. Workshops then moved into group discussions to identify perceptions of security and the efficacy of the JSSR process.

#### Bo Workshop

The Bo workshop brought together more than 40 male and female participants from three districts, Bo, Moyamba, and Pujehun. Participants reported a feeling of "extreme insecurity." Some stated that an increased awareness of instruments like UNSCR 1325 and other measures to promote women's rights have led to an increase in violence as a form of retaliation, and to the deliberate marginalisation of women. In spite of the shared sense of insecurity, overall, participants reported an increase in security in recent years. They pointed to improved structures to look into abuses and violations of laws, improved laws and policies, and the existence of women's advocacy groups. Nevertheless, there are problems of implementation. According to participants, there are delays in the provision of justice and bottlenecks in the system. Additionally, participants mentioned cases that were resolved by compromise between perpetrators and the family of the victims.

#### Makeni Workshop

Participants in Makeni expressed a "fair" sense of security overall, but said that women are less secure than men. Most traditional laws and practices favour men, and participants connected the feeling of insecurity with lack of education and economic, social, and political empowerment. Although participants identify police, army, and the justice sector as key providers of security, they said that they would feel more secure with improved efficacy in policing. Other factors identified offering improvements in security were an increase in the participation of women in law enforcement and policy-making, equitable resource distribution, and economic empowerment.

Overall, workshop participants agreed that security has improved in their communities over the last five years. They enjoy relative peace in their communities, are aware of efforts to reform the security apparatus and justice sector, appreciate new laws to protect women and children, and believe there has been an increase in women's participation in decision-making. However, participants were not satisfied with the justice system. They

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report that while in some cases, victims of crime are able to access justice, but there are also often delays, high costs, and (as in Bo) situations where cases are compromised by corruption.