



### **Acknowledgements**

**With grateful thanks to the staff of BBN, all of the SALT volunteers and the people of Sumaila Town, Dwarzak, Red Pump, Gray Bush, New England, Montomeh and Brookfields for the wonderful introduction to Sierra Leone, for the huge efforts made to organise our visit, for the wonderful welcome to Freetown and the openness with which all welcomed the opportunity to learn. It was a great blessing to be able to glimpse and share in the wonderful work that is ACV is doing in Freetown.**

**This report was commissioned by Feba who envisioned, initiated and have supported the ACV process since 2015**

## **Amplifying Community Voices: A Learning Review**

### **Executive Summary**

This report, commissioned by Feba UK, provides an analysis of data gathered for a learning review of the Amplifying Community Voices programme facilitated by the Believers Broadcasting Network (BBN) a Christian radio station in Sierra Leone. A participatory research process gathered qualitative data from a range of stakeholders through interviews, focus groups, community and household visits during a week-long field visit in March 2018. Interview data were supplemented by process documentation (including SALT visit debriefs, radio station documentation, counselling referral data, radio drama scripts, clinic data). Whilst evaluation questions guided data collection, data analysis was informed by a ‘grounded theory’ approach which entailed combing the data for themes (coding) and then reading through the data multiple times to ensure that the themes identified accurately represent/capture what was shared and that additional themes had not been missed. All quotations are verbatim, indicated by single quote marks. Wherever possible, direct quotes from the interviews and focus group conversations are used to describe the experiences and understandings of participants so as to more accurately reflect their perceptions.

The data indicate that ACV can be understood as benefitting the Radio station BBN, SALT volunteers and participants and on communities in a variety of different ways.

### **Radio Station Impacts**

- 1) Deepened relationship and trust with Communities: The SALT visits and the increased visibility (and vulnerability) of the radio station team to the community have enabled a more trusting dialogic space to be developed. In turn, this has allowed for some of the anxieties that community members had about sharing their stories to be assuaged. It is both the nature of the conversations and the frequency with which people meet in the SALT visits that has generated this improved relationship of trust between the radio station team and community audiences
- 2) Increasingly relevant programming: in which the issues broadcast in the Amplify radio dramas are directly drawn from the conversations that emerge in the SALT encounters. Listener groups reported that the Amplify programme is ‘very current and covers topical issues’ and that it ‘Emphasise[s] awareness of issues and the community’
- 3) Responsive program design: a more ‘bottom up’ community informed approach has changed program formats which has improved audience feedback and attracted increased interest in the Amplify program and dramas.

### **Impacts for Process Volunteers**

- 1) Learning: JFT data suggest that the process philosophy of listening to and appreciating each other has effectively flattened hierarchies of knowledge. The JFT do not perceive themselves as having answers or information to give to communities.

Rather all are learning together by listening to the wisdom and experiences of each other. When JFT members talked about the ways in which they felt they had learned from the process, they included 'looking forward', thinking about the future and being able to 'plan and see results'; 'prioritising' for oneself and one's community and 'knowing what is important'.

- 2) Psycho-social learning: The feeling of overall confidence and 'strong community role' that participation in the ACV process appears to give local volunteers is a critical benefit to their being involved in the process and is one of the many factors that helps them to maintain morale and energy over time. The fact that being involved enables such a range of opportunities for team and community members to learn about and from multiple communities and individuals whom they may not otherwise have come into contact with ensures that there are very real benefits to being involved.
- 3) Social skills, knowledge and networks: The ACV process is breaking down some of the traditional hierarchies in communities and fostering new social encounters across traditional differences of class, religion, geography. As a result, volunteers are:
  - I. learning skills of communication with new interlocutors
  - II. developing social confidence through new interactions
  - III. encountering stakeholders and patrons within the community with whom they would not ordinarily have contact
- 4) Most significantly, ACV is contributing to the development of the social and cultural capital of volunteers by: fostering relationships of mutual respect across differences (including religious, political, class, neighbourhood); creating 'reputable' citizens with enhanced cultural capital in communities; fostering new networks for social and material exchange and providing a critical sense of belonging. Enhanced social capital has critical impacts for an individual's wellbeing across all spheres of life – including emotional, physical and mental health. Its importance cannot be underestimated.

### **Community impacts**

- 1) Radio Broadcast enables the generation of social and cultural capital for community members whose voices are broadcast. Where SALT teams had recorded and broadcast individuals' stories to represent the feelings and experiences of communities, other local people in the community often got in touch with those individuals saying that they had heard them on the radio, and to thank them for representing the community. Radio broadcast is able to re-connect people in communities to each other and to generate new networks. Radio broadcast also generates an amount of cultural capital (non-economic resources that enable social mobility) and social status for those individuals who are broadcast as they become heard and recognised by the community as spokespeople and people with connections to radio.

- 2) The SALT visits have actively encouraged communities to meet together to discuss concerns. That a community is meeting regularly represents a shift from inactivity (in which concerns about the community are articulated at the household level and remain at the household level) to action and agency. It is clear that the SALT visits have served not only to listen to concerns at the household level and amplify them upwards through radio, but also to foster horizontal connections between households to generate momentum for a community wide conversation.
- 3) Out of the community-wide conversations, a number of tangible outcomes have emerged across different neighbourhoods including: generating money from community assets for water tanks; installing electric lights to improve security; encouraging household donations for community projects including water tanks and road repairs.

### **Process strengths**

The ACV process has a number of distinct strengths which, when taken together, imply a robust model for community engagement with considerable potential. These strengths include:

- 1) An ethos and philosophy which works against the short-termist and often extractive nature of traditional donor engagements. ACV is sustainable and immediately 'gives back' to communities through representation via radio broadcast.
- 2) ACV equips and facilitates volunteers to challenge entrenched 'dependency mentalities' – both in their individual lives and at community level, encouraging people to think of themselves as agents with potential, rather than passive recipients of aid/development.
- 3) That the process incorporates multiple sites of operation (household, counselling centre, radio broadcast, community conversations) implies that voices that might be marginalised in one space (due to gender, age or social status hierarchies) can be heard and elicited in another space. The combination of the intimacy of the household, the confidential one-to-one nature of the counselling centre and the multi-dimensional aspect of radio (public but potentially anonymous; containing a host of media and formats to protect confidentiality; allowing for 'impartial' and contested commentary and responses) means that certain power dynamics (of age, class, gender etc) can be offset within the process.
- 4) Faith and prayer offer spiritual resources/capital and are highly valued dimensions of the pastoral care that is offered through active and empathic listening in the SALT visits. Prayer is a way of deepening connections in communities where there is profound trauma. It enhances the engagement that happens within SALT visits and in many cases builds credibility by engaging people holistically, and recognizing spiritual as well as material needs. In a non-secular context, and one in which religious differences do not tend to create tension and anxiety, questions about

people's spiritual and religious lives can open up conversations, rather than close them down. It is often easier for people to talk about their faith than to talk about political or personal affairs and questions about faith can encourage open communication and the development of relationship.

### **Conclusions and Future Directions**

The ACV process could be developed in a number of ways including to impact a greater number of people by: a) expanding SALT visits into new communities (horizontal expansion) b) developing the commitment to ACV within BBN to resource and expand both radio and community based aspects by using radio to engage more deeply c) marshalling SALT gathered data to lobby at national levels (vertical expansion). Various recommendations have been made to facilitate thinking in relation to both of these axes.

For any of these possibilities to be realised, strengthening data gathering and analysis within the process is important. Whilst there is evidence of good and regular recording of SALT visits, improving data consolidation and triangulation between different sources of information (eg listener groups; radio phone ins; community conversations, counselling centre data, clinic data) would add considerable value to ACV and the communities in which it operates. Opportunities for development of data analysis include:

- 1) Improved tracking and triangulation of evidence from counselling centre/SALT visits/radio broadcasts/clinics to actively explore connections between what is expressed in these sites and what might be missing from agenda? which groups might not be heard in any of these spaces? How are the issues talked about differently in each space? What does this tell us about the different experiences of community life for different constituent groups?**
- 2) Better understanding, mapping and quantifying of the 'soft' skills learned through the process - active listening, communication, team working, community knowledge, community influencing etc. - including tracking whether volunteers move into positions of community responsibility/jobs that rely on skills developed through SALT participation.**
- 3) Gathering better information as to the how SALT visiting to households relates to and challenges 'dependency mindsets'. This could be sought by exploring with groups/households how the 'messaging' of the process relates to individual thought/action.**
- 4) Analysing changes to BBN's listenership in SALT and surrounding neighbourhoods. Intentionally exploring where there are ways of correlating listener data with the SALT process and its impact.**
- 5) Building evidence as to how the process includes/excludes/reaches/is experienced by non-Christian respondents.**

- 6) **Learning more about the specific issues affecting marginalised hillside communities, particularly those whose mobility is limited.**
- 7) **More clearly tracking the connections between SALT visits and eventual material 'successes' e.g. water tanks, electric lighting so the process and speed of involvement and investment of the community can be better understood. Whilst this might be too much to do across communities, a case study neighbourhood could be identified in which a deeper exploration of the process which maps material and social change is possible.**
- 8) **More rigorous information as to how much organic transfer is already happening would be very valuable and would further indicate the value of ACV.**

There are a number of **process recommendations** that would strengthen ACV. These include:

- 1) **Developing BBN's capacity in the process at different levels of scale. This work needs to be informed by strategic thinking about the role of ACV in BBN and BBN's institutional role/responsibility as process host and partner. BBN's role/capacity could be developed in the following ways:**
  - I. **As a platform for advocacy at national and local levels on the part of the many households that BBN represent/have consulted with through ACV and SALT visits. To say that BBN have heard from e.g. 150 households on the issue of teenage pregnancy can be a powerful voice at national level. More systematic data gathering and analysis from SALT visits can facilitate and support better lobbying work.**
  - II. **As a signposting and referral point to local service providers and NGOs that are working to support local communities. The community level data in relation to stakeholders and actors in the different neighbourhoods can be usefully consolidated to provide a 'directory' (whether online, through radio broadcasts etc.) of local support that can be shared.**
  - III. **To facilitate wider stakeholders and communities to engage in/raise the status of debates about community life and change in Sierra Leone, building on the testimonies of those households represented by ACV. This could be done by increasing the levels of programming that allow for live responses and debate. For example, more stories could be taken from marginalised groups as generated through SALT visits, turned into ten minute dramas and followed by phone-ins to allow a public debating space. Data around who is calling in and from where could be tracked to see how people from different backgrounds and more privileged groups respond to what they are hearing and to facilitate public debate, lobbying and response.**

- IV. Networking with other radio stations working around community development to expand reach, particularly to more marginalised and stigmatised groups or other faith communities that Christian radio may not be able to access.**
  - V. Ensuring that broadcasting scheduling is carefully done to reach target audiences (i.e. if programmes are oriented towards the youth, they should not be broadcast during school hours).**
- 2) A more critical engagement by the BBN/SALT team to consider the power dynamics of each space of engagement (home, radio, community, counselling centre). In each space, who is able to speak? Whose experiences are marginalised? How can these dynamics be navigated in the process? How can marginalised voices be included? Not only will this improve the representation of community voices in the process, but it will also encourage critical thinking on the part of individuals about a) the ways that social structures and spaces can silence particular experiences b) the ways that society recognises certain experiences, voices and bodies as more important than others and how to guard against colluding with those hierarchies in the SALT process.**
  - 3) Ensuring proper and active signposting to appropriate confidential/private/supporter spaces, such as the counselling centre or local community NGOs, to ensure that specific constituent groups who are negatively disadvantaged by power structures are fully recognised within the process.**
  - 4) Intentionally identifying other highly marginalised groups encountered through the SALT visits that need better representation/advocacy and focusing on them in broadcast/SALT visits.**
  - 5) Evaluating levels of resourcing for the ACV process and how to ensure that volunteers feel properly compensated in terms of transport and daily expenses. Questions around incentives need to be addressed. Further consideration needs to be given to how questions of money and microfinance should be dealt with. How will more formalised remuneration/microfinance/structures change the dynamic of the process? Is microfinance for broadcaster training something that could be usefully explored? How can process resources be generated?**
  - 6) Improving data management and recording to measure change; the development of better participatory research skills for SALT teams to assist with data gathering and the facilitation of local asset mapping (i.e. helping communities to recognise their tangible as well as intangible resources)**
  - 7) Recognizing, quantifying and promoting the learning experience that SALT volunteering offers to participants in terms of hard and soft skills and social networking. Given the high levels of unemployment in Freetown, such opportunities for skills development are incentives to participate in what is**



**materially a resource-light process. Encouraging volunteers to think about and share what they have learned through SALT participation could make for interesting and incentivising radio broadcast and would foster the focus on the intangible but real benefits of community participation.**

**Table of Contents**

Learning Review Introduction	10
Introduction to AVC	11
<b>AVC Impacts:</b>	
Radio Station	13
Volunteers	15
Community	21
<b>Process Strengths:</b>	
Challenging Traditional Donor Engagements	26
Challenging Dependency Mentalities	27
Multiple Spaces of Operation	
Household	28
Private Spaces	30
Radio	32
Faith and Prayer	32
The Future of AVC	35
<b>Conclusion</b>	36
<b>Information Gathering Recommendations</b>	37
<b>Process Recommendations</b>	38

## Amplifying Community Voices: A Learning Review March 2018, Freetown, Sierra Leone

### Introduction

In March 2018 we undertook a participatory, learning review of the Feba supported Amplifying Community Voices (ACV) programme in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Jo Sadgrove (Centre for Religion and Public Life, University of Leeds and USPG), author of this report and Stephanie Mooney (then of Feba now at Mothers' Union) worked alongside Believers Broadcasting Network (BBN), the Joint Facilitation Team (JFT), Local Facilitation Teams (LFT) and SALT volunteers across Freetown to understand and analyse the impact that ACV has had and is having amongst a range of stakeholders. These stakeholders include:

- Host Radio Station *Believers Broadcasting Network* (BBN) who institutionally host the ACV process
- Affiliated BBN Counselling Centre
- Joint Facilitation Team (JFT)
- Local Facilitation Teams (LFTs)
- SALT volunteers
- Community members who have encountered the SALT process
- Community NGOs and stakeholders (including clinics)
- Local churches

The data from the March 2018 Sierra Leone review visit draw from interviews, neighbourhood SALT visits and focus groups with a number of SALT process stakeholders, partners and volunteers. Over the course of a week, Jo and Stephanie worked daily with a core group of 9 JFT members (3 of whom work for BBN) to visit and hear from people in the neighbourhoods in which ACV has been operating. In each of the 7 Freetown communities visited, we were supported by and heard the perspectives of at least 3 local SALT volunteers and sometimes as many as 5 or 6. We also heard from listener groups and stakeholders in each context.

The team visited 7 communities which have experienced and participated in SALT visits and engaged in the ACV process. We visited Sumaila Town, Dwarzak, New England, Red Pump, Gray Bush, Montomeh and Brookfields to explore and understand the impact that the SALT process has had at individual and community level. As a team, we collectively sought to:

- Understand the impact that the SALT process has had on its key partners BBN and the affiliated counselling centre
- Understand the ways in which the primary partners have responded to the impact of the SALT process and how they perceive future development

- Understand the ways in which participation in the SALT process has impacted on the lives and learning of those who comprise the Joint Facilitation Team
- Understand the ways in which participation in the SALT process has impacted on the lives of volunteers
- Understand the ways in which communities perceive and respond to the SALT process
- Understand the ways in which communities perceive and value BBN – in particular the Amplify programme

During each neighbourhood visit, the research team divided into three groups to map the influence of the process for a) local stakeholder organisations b) radio listeners c) local SALT team members. The precise numbers of respondents in each neighbourhood varied with some LFTs having gathered significant numbers of participants representing the constituent groups and others having gathered only 4 or 5 people overall. We listened to the experiences of JFT members, LFTs in 7 communities, the staff of a number of local NGOs, community health workers, community counsellors, local religious leaders, community stakeholders, SALT volunteers, BBN radio listeners, and local community members. In total we heard from over 100 people through individual or group interview. We also undertook a number of debriefs and focus groups with members of the JFT and LFT and BBN radio/counselling staff to probe, clarify and expand our understanding as to what we were experiencing and hearing in the course of our community visits. Analysis of the available data indicate a number of clear domains of change. This report considers these domains of change in turn and seeks to identify areas where learning and information could be more robustly captured and communicated. It also poses a number of questions around future directions particularly for the BBN radio station and counselling centre.

Whilst evaluation questions guided data collection, data analysis was informed by a 'grounded theory' approach which entailed combing the data for themes (coding) and then reading through the data set multiple times to ensure that the themes identified accurately represent/capture what was shared and that additional themes had not been missed. All quotations are verbatim, indicated by single quote marks. Wherever possible, direct quotes from the interviews and focus group conversations are used to describe the experiences and understandings of participants so as to more accurately reflect their perceptions. Because of the method of analysis this report is organised thematically rather than by constituent group. Hopefully the executive summary will help readers to navigate the document. Thematic organisation does the best justice to the data and to authentically communicate the experience of the field visit and the SALT process. Thematic analysis also ensures that unexpected outcomes receive the same attention as expected outcomes.

### **Introduction to the ACV process**

Well, there are many gains that we have made since SALT came into our lives...as I was saying, if you are in your community and you don't have people to interact and discuss ideas I believe that the community would not be able to progress but when we have SALT everything we discuss issues very close to us...we discuss ideas. We

interact...these are the things that I have gain through SALT. It opens up ideas and makes me feel that I belong...SALT (Local Community Volunteer)

Amplifying Community Voices aligns radio broadcasting with community concerns. Radio station staff as key process participants join with other community volunteers to undertake fortnightly household 'SALT' visits within a number of communities in Freetown. These visits seek to engage with local people, to listen to their stories and experiences and to affirm and support them through listening. Within the context of ACV, the visits also seek to challenge local people to think about themselves as *agents*, rather than as dependent on governments and NGOs for change, and to focus on what *they* can do to mobilise their communities for collective action. The ideology of the SALT visits is captured in this description from a Joint Facilitation Team member:

We go out to preach this SALT to [...] different communities telling them the essence of SALT, reminding them of *their* ability which they think is not useful to them. But we remind them, this is *your* gift, this is *your* quality. Don't wait for the government. When we talk to them they say 'we started this [community initiative] but within a month, it just petered off'. We say have you been holding meetings? They say 'no'. we advise that they hold meetings. The [next] time we visit there they say, you reminded us to be holding meeting now we are seeing development.

As radio station staff attend the visits as SALT team members, they are able to record the perspectives of community members in their houses for broadcast. Through debriefs and documenting after the visits at the BBN offices, the LFTs are able to process what they have seen and heard in the visits (including any challenging things they may have witnessed) and the radio station staff team are able to identify stories and pressing community concerns that can be made into topical radio dramas to stimulate responses from wider audiences.

Structurally the process has what was referred to by one volunteer as an 'executive team' called the Joint Facilitation Team (JFT) which includes radio station staff and representatives of Local Facilitation Teams (LFT) in different communities. The LFTs are responsible for organising local SALT visits in their communities, managing debriefs and tracking community concerns. The JFT have a broader oversight. Members are drawn from LFTs across Freetown to represent the process and communities in different neighbourhoods. 3 radio station staff also sit on the JFT. The JFT works closely with the radio station and counselling centre staff to help with process development and planning, and supports LFTs in their work with communities. The JFT acts as a bridge between the community level SALT processes across Freetown and the radio/counselling centre responses.

It is clear that all involved in the SALT process have benefitted in a number of ways from their participation. Sometimes the changes that are evident are visible, measurable and material in nature. These include changes in the radio's broadcasting programming; addressing community concerns around eg income generation and water shortages; improved connections between community stakeholders and active dialogue between different community partners (eg the collaborative relationship with the Poor Man's Friend – see below). Other changes are less tangible, but strongly evident in the data and pertain to issues of improved social capital and networking, participation in a supportive peer

network, a sense of belonging through involvement in the process, a deepened spiritual and religious experience (spiritual capital).

Based on the evidence gathered during the field visit and supplemented by SALT debriefing notes, BBN radio documentation and data from other stakeholders, this document tracks the changes that appear to have happened and indicates areas that could be strengthened or developed. Whilst some of the impacts of the process are specific to particular constituent groups, there are a number of intersecting areas of change that operate across the different groups, suggesting particular process strengths. Wherever possible, the report uses the direct words of process volunteers and participants to communicate the experiences and changes that have been brought about by ACV.

### **ACV Impacts:**

#### **Radio Station Impacts**

##### **1) Deepened relationship and trust with Communities**

In interviews with radio station staff and having witnessed their engagement in the communities, it is very clear that the SALT process has had a major impact on the experiences, thinking and professional work of the radio staff team. The nature of the engagement with the community through the SALT visits was recognised as a major change in practice for the radio team who suggested that they were ‘going into the conversation [not] trying to get a news story but for a conversation’. In this space of engagement, the nature of the relationship between the radio station and the community has been transformed. As a result of a more relational approach, rather than one which is primarily about extracting stories, the radio station team feel that they now ‘understand the constituency [they] are serving’. There are a number of benefits to this deeper relational engagement with local communities on the part of the radio station and its staff. In terms of broadcasting, it was felt that the process had changed the ‘thinking and psychology of producers’ and that this had had a direct impact on programming in two ways.

First, the SALT visits and their ways of engaging revealed to producers that there were ‘Lots of stories within the community that [they] had been missing out on based on ways of working’. The SALT process helped the team to realise that where ‘the primary focus for engagement is on conversation...People open up and talk about sensitive issues and more people have a confidence to talk’. The SALT visits and the increased visibility (and vulnerability) of the radio station team to the community had enabled a more trusting dialogic space to be developed. In turn, this allowed for some of the anxieties that community members had about sharing their stories to be assuaged. As one producer suggested: ‘It is for us a totally different way of doing things. We meet the people. We interact...People have their guard up when you come as radio station. No one wants to go on record. We build their trust and they are more prepared to go on the radio. We get under the surface.’ The data suggest that it is both the nature of the conversation and the frequency with which people meet in the SALT visits that has generated this improved

relationship of trust between the radio station team and community audiences. As one team member described it: ‘the frequent visits mean we can take conversations deeper and get different shades and opinions which provide a broader perspective of what is going on....we are no longer a remote station...[but] know more what people want to talk about’.

## **2) Increasingly relevant programming**

The access to ‘deeper’ and more nuanced community issues and stories has also allowed for increasingly relevant programming in which the issues broadcast in the Amplify radio drama are directly drawn from the conversations that emerge in the SALT encounters. Listener groups reported that the Amplify programme is ‘very current and covers topical issues’ and that it ‘Emphasise[s] awareness of issues and the community’. Issues covered in Amplify programmes include unemployment, teenage pregnancy, rape, corruption, the complex relationships between money, the cost of school fees and ‘love’ or ‘sugar daddy’ type extractive relationships, lack of self-esteem, lack of education – pressing issues across much of Freetown and particularly relevant to the youth. It appears that the SALT process and the deepened relationship between broadcaster and audience that has emerged has improved the ‘fit’ between the issues that are being discussed on the radio and those with which the target audiences are dealing in everyday life.

## **3) Responsive programme design**

A second example of change appears to be informed by the ethos of the SALT process and concerns a more ‘bottom up’ approach to radio program design. An example was given of the changed format of the ‘Healthways’ programme. The format for this programme had initially been to invite a doctor into the studio to talk about specific medical conditions/concerns. The style had been of an ‘expert lecturing’. In light of the SALT visits which both generated feedback on programming and a more relational and dynamic way of conceiving of the relationship between broadcaster and audience, Healthways was ‘reversed’ and the programme is now driven primarily by the health concerns/needs of members of the public who call in with doctors available to respond to the needs of listeners. As one staff member described it: ‘Healthways’ format changed through interaction with SALT. We do a Q&A with a doctor. We now take real life situations, feeling real people’s needs’. This has generated improved audience feedback and more interest in the programme.

As with the example above, the radio station appears to have incorporated the philosophy of the SALT process into its methods in a number of subtle ways. The correlations between the issues generated in the visits and the issues raised in the programming are comparatively easy to map. What is less easy, because it is perhaps less conscious on the part of the radio station, is the incorporation of key ideological tenets of the process into the broadcasting. An example that emerged in a couple of the listener conversations included mention of ‘responsibility’ and challenging dependency mentalities. One listener suggested: I listen to BBN since the start of the SALT process. [Amplify] Makes people understand their responsibility. What people can do as a community without government. We are able to do things without government’. The discourse of responsibility came out strongly across all groups involved within the process. Evaluating how far this is a mirroring

of process language and how far this discourse of responsibility impacts *individual* behaviour (and significantly the role of radio in supporting these changes) is an important question that requires deeper, longitudinal research.

### **JFT and LFT Volunteer Impacts**

#### **Learning**

##### **1) Individual learning**

The JFT, a core group of (9) people, demonstrate a deep connection to each other and a strong, companionable and constructive group dynamic that has been forged through the SALT process. As a group, their experiences and interviews indicate many of the changes that participation in the SALT process has fostered for all participants in the process. The experiences of the JFT, who were repeatedly interviewed individually or as a group over the course of the week, demonstrate the ways in which their thinking is challenged by the communities they meet in the process of undertaking SALT visits. Specifically, participation has enabled individuals to challenge their assumptions, analyse their contexts and rethink their relationships with themselves, their families and their communities. As one member stated, 'I learn from the community to deal with my own problems'. 'Learning' emerges as a significant benefit for individual JFT members. That the group talked enthusiastically about learning from the communities suggests that the process philosophy of listening and appreciating each other has effectively flattened hierarchies of knowledge. The JFT do not perceive themselves as having answers or information to give to communities. Rather all (volunteers and community participants) are learning together by listening to the wisdom and experiences of each other. When JFT members talked about the ways in which they felt they had learned from the process, they included 'looking forward', thinking about the future and being able to 'plan and see results'; 'prioritising' for oneself and one's community and 'knowing what is important'. One JFT member talked about the impact that the process had had on his family life because the process methodology had taught him to 'appraise[...] myself and my experience. I check with my family. What is working well and not working well? It has helped me and my family. What do I do that is not fine? How can I do it better?'. This indicates the ways in which the value of the learning and process model of SALT are recognised by participants and taken back from the experiences in the community into other domains of life.

##### **2) Psycho-social learning**

These subtle shifts in internal orientation and the ways that they impact on thinking about the relationship between the individual and the group/family/community of which participants are a part are narrated through the experiences that JFT members have had in the SALT process. Many JFT members commented on the ways that their engagement with a range of communities in Freetown as a result of the process has shifted their perceptions of the relationships between themselves as individuals and the communities that they are listening to. One member talked about the discovery that by 'discuss[ing] with them, listen[ing] to their stories we are able to lift them'. Another suggested that 'the person is part of us', indicating the ways in which the relational exchange that happens in the process



generates a type of empathy and connection in which *all* are implicated in the emotional wellbeing of a community both as community member and as SALT facilitator. A number of JFT members tried to express this complex realignment of self/community:

When I see or hear of change in a community, I feel blessed I was part of the process. Somehow that I was an instrument. There is a child that is going to be born in that community that won't have [the same] challenges [as those before] because we are [now] geographically connected. A positive new for them and a blessing for me. When a life improves, It also has a positive impact on my wellbeing.

This idea that community and individual wellbeing are connected is a critical premise of the process, but not one which is always easy to articulate or measure on the part of participants or evaluators. Another member suggested that the connections forged by the process, both socially and geographically, affected his feeling of wellbeing. One JFT member who is also part of the radio staff team talked about the personal and human identification with the communities that now informed his work for the radio station, stating that the SALT process:

Changes the way I look at [the community] before getting their stories. It makes me understand their own stories, I identify with them. I feel more confident. I feel more confident to build up trust and confidence as I engage them in conversation.

This theme of identification with community members as human through deeper relationship was consistent throughout the interview and field data. In answer to a question about the most significant impact of the process on an individual's life and thinking, one JFT member spoke of the 'Relationship with the community – [it has] deepened it. You have the respect of the other person.' He went on to explain how the process helped to change the 'feeling' of those in the community with whom the SALT volunteers engage: 'We are not providing physical help, money. We helped them to believe "you are important to [your] situation". We kick away their own feeling'. The feelings that he is referring to as 'kicking away' are feelings of helplessness, dependency and despair. It would be helpful to independently and systematically gather the perspectives of those who have received SALT visits to explore whether and how the 'mindset shift' filters down beyond SALT process participants to individual recipients of SALT visits over time. Whilst the research team did hear from households, the primary benefit that household members reported from the SALT visits was a) being heard and listened to and b) having their perspectives represented on the radio with the attendant benefits to social status and capital documented in following sections. More to track the more in depth experiences of visited homes would help to get beyond what is reported by LFT and JFT members as to their understanding of the process message/language, to understand how that message is received and/or acted upon by those on the peripheries of the process.

The feeling of overall confidence and 'strong community role' that participation in the process appeared to give local volunteers is a critical benefit to their being involved in the process and is one of the many factors that helps them to maintain morale and energy over time. The fact that being involved enables such a range of opportunities for team and community members to learn about and from multiple communities and individuals whom

they may not otherwise have come into contact with ensures that there are very real benefits to being involved. This is particularly true in a context of high unemployment and limited formal life-long educative opportunities. Further, the time that is spent undertaking SALT visits provides genuine material for constant reflection, inspiration and re-evaluation in relation to a range of issues and contexts including spiritual, individual, family and community.

### **3) Social skills, knowledge and networks**

In a context of high unemployment, the value of a process in which people are able to participate, gain experience as volunteers, network and learn new skills cannot be underestimated. A few of the younger respondents talked about their experiences as volunteers for a range of different community based processes, including one who had volunteered for a development initiative run by Oxfam. This particular professional volunteer spoke highly of the SALT process, and valued what it had allowed him to experience. He and other younger respondents reported the ways in which participating in SALT visits and networks were training them in critical (soft) skills. One local volunteer who was in his early 20s said that he had ‘gained a lot of experience through SALT. I am proud to be in my community talking to my people and I am fortunate to speak with big people in the community. I didn’t use to talk to people but I now have the confidence to talk to people’. As a result of the ACV process this young man is:

- I. learning skills of communication with new interlocutors**
- II. developing social confidence through new interactions**
- III. encountering ‘big people’ whom he would not normally come into contact with**

This indicates the ways that the process is breaking down some of the traditional hierarchies in communities, and fostering social encounters across traditional differences of class, religion, geography as we see across the process.

The JFT in particular indicate a clear sense of ‘expansion of horizons’ socially, geographically and pastorally - and a deepened understanding of local communities and the city of Freetown as a result of participating in SALT visits. This sense of new connection and knowledge was experienced very positively by the group. One member suggested that the process ‘has helped me a lot. I never used to get down to those areas. I never crossed the bridge. [Now] I even went up the hill. I go beyond Gray Bush.’ Others talked about the new and ‘deeper’ understanding they had of neighbourhoods and communities that they had known before and all were very struck by the ways in which people in those communities managed the many challenges that they had to deal with. Often, this was articulated through a language of faith. One JFT member noted: ‘It is amazing. You have challenges you think are so enormous and you see that people are in greater need than you that are hopeful and faithful. God is stepping into help them. It encourages faith to grow and develop.’ (See also the section on faith below).

Mirroring some of the comments of JFT members noted above, other volunteers recognised the value of the deepening community knowledge that they have gathered as a result of

participating in SALT visits and recognised this knowledge as an end in itself. Other local volunteers talked about and recognised the value of the different example and mindset that SALT visits and ACV had modelled for them, particularly when contrasted with what all referred to as ‘dependency mentality’. One volunteer suggested: ‘Salt is teaching me how to change my life and following in the footsteps of SALT. When I become somebody, I will do what SALT is doing and support the life of the community. I have learned the constraints’ (SALT volunteer). Another LFT member encapsulated the benefits of participation (community knowledge, social networks and mindset change) when she stated: ‘I continue to like to this programme. I know more about the community. I have friends. I ask people what they will do and not what they want’.

The SALT visits enable the development of a considerable range of ‘soft skills’ which include: active listening, communication, empathy, pastoral care, team work and commitment, working with a range of different kinds of people in different communities, influencing and persuading people to challenge their behaviour and thinking, challenging their own thinking about community life and development (ie. critical thinking) and learning something about how radio journalism can and does work. Whilst these skills are not easily quantifiable or measurable, they are strongly communicated across the different voices in the data. A more focussed study/structured information gathering would enable these benefits to be better explored and quantified, should that be of interest to the partners and participants.

### **Social and Cultural Capital**

‘Social capital’ is a term that describes the intangible or ‘invisible’ assets that functioning communities have and rely on. These include networks and relationships, belonging, shared identity, shared values, trust and reciprocity. It is these things that enable societies to function effectively. Where there are high levels of relationship, trust and shared values, communities and individuals thrive. Where these aspects have been undermined by social crisis/stigma/war etc individuals and communities are likely to struggle. The benefits of these aspects of trust, relationship, reciprocity and belonging are as important to thriving and flourishing as adequate food, water and medical provision. The absence of social capital and social networks have been found to have as serious an impact on health and wellbeing as a daily smoking habit; loneliness is as harmful (if not more harmful) for physical health as smoking. Studies show that not only does loneliness (ie the absence of social capital) impact on mental health, but it has negative implications on susceptibility to and recovery from a host of diseases. As one scholar has suggested:

Relative to socially isolated individuals, socially integrated individuals (those with more social ties) live longer, have better mental health outcomes, and show increased resistance to a variety of somatic diseases including cardiovascular disease, cancer, and infectious diseases. In fact, some studies have shown that simply having at least one confidant...significantly reduces the likelihood of a negative mental health outcome after a major life stressor. On the basis of these

findings, it has been noted that a lack of social relationships constitutes a major risk factor for health. <sup>1</sup>

More and more attention is being paid globally to the significance of social relationships and social capital for individual health and wellbeing and increasingly there is interest in processes that facilitate the development of *relationships*.

Cultural capital relates to the assets that an individual possesses that enhance social mobility – i.e. the likelihood of being accepted in groups other than one’s own family/community. Cultural capital includes factors such as education, an individual’s ability to communicate, dress/style, intellect. We know that those who have had access to education are able to move in different social worlds from those whose access to education has been limited. Within the ACV process, there is evidence of the ways that individuals are developing skills and knowledge that would not otherwise be available to them, and that through this they are engaging with new networks and hierarchies. That the ACV process is contributing to such critical aspects of individual and collective capital is likely its most valuable contribution. The following section outlines some of the different ways in which the data indicate the generation of social and cultural capital through the ACV process.

### **1) Fostering Relationships of Mutual Respect across Differences**

One of the most significant impacts of the process for participants and volunteers that emerges from the data and is demonstrated in particular ways is the generation of relational and social capital. The JFT group offer a useful case study for understanding this process as a group of people whom by their own admission would not necessarily have come to know each other nor have had the opportunity to cross the various social boundaries to meet were it not for the SALT process. One group member suggested that prior to becoming involved in the process, ‘there [were] some people I thought I would not have a conversation with...SALT develops my love for people. I am now friends with more people’. Although the group is all male, it incorporates a range of ages, professions, education levels, income levels and political affiliations. The ways in which the group has bonded is striking and extends beyond the core group to neighbourhood LFTs and SALT volunteers. The volunteers have a WhatsApp group through which they ‘communicate together, they unify each other, they talk to each other about problems’ (JFT member). There appears to be a strong ethic of mutual support and encouragement between group members and a powerful social aspect. The volunteer network has become a ‘way to pass information – personal and social’ and all of those interviewed talked of the ways in which the process had enabled them to ‘meet new people, make new friends’. The social benefits of participation in the process, particularly by SALT team volunteers (JFTS and LFTS) are strongly articulated in the data.

Interestingly, the group have also put in place certain rules in relation to communication to ensure that divisive messaging does not undermine the group dynamic. At the time of the review visit, Sierra Leone were a week away from an election run off after an earlier round

---

<sup>1</sup> Eisenberger, Naomi I. , An Empirical Review of the Neural Underpinnings of Receiving and Giving Social Support: Implications for Health, *Psychosomatic Medicine* 75:545 - 556 (2013)

of voting did not yield the necessary 55% to elect a president. There was considerable anxiety amongst many people as to whether the election would result in violence, and many were wary of the divisive nature of the political landscape at the time. We ourselves encountered much election anxiety as we moved around communities in Freetown. To ensure that political divisions did not disrupt the work and solidarity built by the volunteer group, it was clearly articulated by JFT members that ‘the SALT teams are seen to be independent. The teams have different political views, but they are uniting on the development message’. Further, to protect the group from potential divisions, certain communication rules were put in place: – ‘In the ... WhatsApp group there are rules – no political messages can be shared’. This group management suggests a clear commitment on the part of the group a) to its own functioning and the integrity of group members and b) to the ethos of the process in which dynamics that could be divisive to the work and ability of the group to engage a wide range of community members are subordinated in favour of seeking out unifying common ground. The group’s self-management and modelling of integration rather than division was particularly interesting and indicates the high value of the collective over and against the individual interests of group members.

SALT has helped me to relate not only with my parish, but also with people of a different faith. To meet with people from different faiths adds value spiritually to my own life. Without SALT I wouldn’t have had that opportunity. [local religious leader]

It is clear from the articulations of the JFT, LFT and volunteers that the SALT process is bringing into deep encounter people from different social, religious and educational backgrounds and strong links have been forged across the various social differences represented in the JFT and LFTs. Given the context of Sierra Leone and the fact that it is a predominantly Muslim country, there is particular interest in how what is essentially a process being facilitated by a Christian radio station perceives and is able to work across faith boundaries. Facilitation team members suggest that the process ‘works across Christian/Muslim boundaries without too many difficulties’. One JFT radio station member stated that ‘given that Muslims are part of the SALT outreach teams, they have never complained that there is a Christian bias’. Rather, like the issues of political allegiance, issues of faith (and other differences) are subsumed under a recognition of the value of the process for local community development. Although we gathered limited data from Muslim participants, one Muslim respondent stated that ‘SALT has deepened my faith by giving me a cause that Allah can support’. The cause he refers to is that of his community’s wellbeing and wider social connections and integration which participation in the process has brought. Another Muslim respondent echoed the significance of the ‘community development’ message and linked it to his spirituality: ‘because of BBN my spirituality was enriched. I have been spreading information and news and bringing young people together to ground them’. There is some evidence that the common cause of community wellbeing renders individual religious adherence irrelevant to participation in the ACV process. These accounts indicate that the ‘spiritual’ motivation is extremely important in stimulating the response to community, but suggest that the process is flexible enough in its thinking about faith and spirituality to ensure that those who are not Christian do not feel excluded from sharing and speaking about these connections in their own lives.

## 2) Creating ‘reputable’ citizens

One SALT visit recipient indicated in an interview the important connections between community wellbeing, community development and social capital when he explained how contributing to the community would give him the ‘blessing’ of being better known in the community:

R: I want to try to do something...I believe that as part of the community, the little things you do here and there will give you a good name, reputation. I have now decided myself to try to connect a tap here, because I see people coming from the top end of the street to fetch water from here. I believe that if I succeed, my name will be spread widely and people will get to know me.

I: So these things have blessings

R: They have blessings.... To work for the community, not just to destroy... when you plant something God will add more and more to your life /multiply it in your life ...I have those plans for now.

This interviewee reveals the fascinating ways that giving to the community benefits one’s social capital, the importance of enhanced social reputation as a motivation (applicable also to SALT volunteers) and the intertwined nature of personal and social identities. In a context like Sierra Leone where much relies on personal reputation, being active within the community – whether within a process like SALT, or as a material donor – brings with it the ‘blessings’ of being known and having a ‘good name’. ‘Being known’ will in turn likely enable the development of wider networks which bring added layers of opportunity and security to individuals. SALT is one of the ways in which people become known to their communities and this in turn benefits and motivates individuals to engage in the process.

### **3) Fostering networks for material exchange**

There is evidence that the process generates networks of trust that allow for material as well as relational and social exchanges to occur. One JFT member talked about the relationship he had formed with a fellow member: ‘Whenever I hear this guy’s voice I will stay put attentively and tell the other listeners he is my friend from SALT. I feel proud. [Name] had a piece of land. He called me and said I will not sell it to anyone but you. Now because of SALT I am like a brother to him.’ If we consider the high status of land across Africa as the most valuable and critical commodity for many, the fact that the SALT process generates the kind of trust in which a transfer of land which would not have been possible is mooted indicates the significance of the relationships that have been forged and demonstrates the ways in which the newly formed networks of trust (which are implicitly competing with older more established patrimonial structures) offer new possibilities for exchanges of all kinds.

## **Community Impacts**

### **1) Radio and Social/Cultural Capital Generation**

Radio plays a critical role in generating new networks of trust. During our visits to local communities, we repeatedly heard stories as to the ways that new networks were developing as a result of stories being broadcast on the radio. Where SALT teams had recorded and broadcast individuals' stories to represent the feelings and experiences of communities, other local people in the community often got in touch with those individuals saying that they had heard them on the radio, and to thank them for representing the community. The radio broadcast appears able to re-connect people in communities to each other. Radio broadcast also generates an amount of cultural capital (non-economic resources that enable social mobility) and social status for those individuals who are broadcast as they become heard and recognised by the community as spokespeople/people with connections to radio etc. It was clear that the attention and communications that people received as a result of being heard on the radio delighted and excited those individuals, and being on the radio really did 'give something back' to *individuals* who received a certain status and delight. As a radio station JFT member said: 'When they hear their voices on the radio, it is an impressive thing for them. People are opening up when you tell them you would like their voice to be heard'. Radio broadcast ensures that voices are heard and that the community and household conversations are amplified up to reach other communities. Given the considerable local hostility towards short term donor development projects and suspicion over how communities really benefit, a process that gives an immediate and visible/audible outcome for local communities who are investing time and energies into SALT visiting is a critical strength of this process.

The publicity that radio broadcast generates for individual stories can also generate new networks for and interest in local projects/businesses. A stakeholder in Gray Bush told us about the ways in which radio broadcast had created employment/skills training networks by popularising his work and attracting others to join him:

In 2013 I started the organisation. I built a pushcart and started to [collect] door to door waste. I [saved] money and got a tricycle – more young people came onboard to help me. I help[ed] to get them employed. SALT amplified our voice – to help us to share what we are doing. People here go to the radio to see what is good. From this radio, people come to the organisation and volunteer themselves and we do more door to door collections. We have given more people a job.

We heard from another local collective who are trying to engage the unemployed in taking care of the local community. One of the members of the collective talked about the ways that being broadcast raised the visibility and status of the member concerned and impacted on the work of the organisation and generated renewed concern for the community:

After the radio interview, people really started to appreciate me, to talk about the community ... Since the interview more people are showing concern. More people are coming together to share the concerns of their community. We meet more. Now we are working together on garbage and cleanliness. There is no peace if we are not working together. We are do things together to move forward and have been meeting together for the past two months.

The radio provides an immediate ‘feedback loop’ for the community who are able to hear their own experiences and information being shared with a wider audience. Radio broadcast has the capacity to stimulate community interest in existing initiatives, expanding existing connections and networks. This appears to be true of the SALT process too. One LFT member in Dwarzak told me that a radio interview about the work of the SALT team ‘has created enthusiasm so other people are now putting zeal into SALT. Community members heard me on the radio and I am now seeing them become involved.’ This suggests that more could be reported on the work of the SALT teams to encourage awareness, interest and participation at community level. The ability of radio to deepen networks and connections appears critical to the potential of the SALT process. This extra dimension of communication that promotes the work of communities and the messages at a different level of scale and across a variety of different communities has huge potential. The power of radio to draw the everyday situations of local people to the attention of those in power by lobbying on behalf of communities is also evident in the Amplify process. One JFT member talked about SALT based radio reporting from the communities affected by the mudslide.

Mudslide survivors were taken out of the community through use of force. We reported on this and it ignited political attention. It is the most sensitive issue we reported on – it was traumatic – it highlighted that a woman had had a miscarriage as a result. The government [later] contacted them to give their side of their story. The audience was calling in. (JFT Member)

The intimacy of the SALT process had enabled the team to access and report the experience of mudslide survivors not out of a journalistic motivation or context, but out of a place of empathic, human encounter. This enabled the team to represent the feelings and the trauma of this community to a national audience and to generate pressure and networks of concern that drew the attention of the government. The scaling from household to public broadcast is a key strength of Amplify and one that could be more intentionally marshalled to lobby at higher (national) levels around a range of social issues on behalf of communities in Freetown, should that be something that the executive decides to pursue.

Radio plays a critical role in generating and enhancing different types of capital (social and cultural) at different levels of scale within this process. It is clear that radio:

- I. **Adds a prestige and excitement for individuals and communities who hear their perspectives directly represented (cultural capital)**
- II. **Creates new connections around individuals representing their communities in the public space of radio (social capital)**
- III. **Elevates the status/capital of individuals and communities whose stories are being broadcast**
- IV. **Raises the profile of issues within the community and at national level**

Within the process itself, we also witnessed the ways in which a relationship of trust has been built up between the radio station (through the SALT process) and local communities, and have heard reports that communities have begun to reach out to the radio to talk and



share experiences, now that relationships exist. Given the power of radio broadcast and the significance of BBN as a community ally, it will be interesting to observe how the relationships between the communities and the station develop and whether we see an increase in programming based around SALT stories in the schedule of BBN.

## **2) Creating a Common Voice**

Issues of collective cohesion are critical to the SALT process at all stages and feature as process aims, methodology, results and outcomes. When we asked a range of community respondents about the difference that the SALT process had made to their lives and the lives of their communities, the most common response in every community context was 'now we are meeting'. Whilst a proliferation of meetings might not sound like a particularly 'hard' outcome, its significance for mobilizing communities cannot be underestimated. As one JFT member noted, 'Solutions are found by meeting. Get a meeting. So many meetings – we are a witness to these meetings which give the strength to generate action'. There was a strong narrative in the data that 'People have been apart but now through regular visits they are changing the life of their communities again' (JFT member). The divisive recent histories of civil war and the Ebola epidemic have done much to undermine community functioning and generate distance, stigma and separation within and between communities. Imagining such a fragmented context is important for understanding the significance and value of the SALT process as 'giving space for people who are marginalised. People who have been waiting to be heard for too long. They want people to listen and as part of the community it is difficult' (SALT volunteer). Further, it was suggested by one community member that: 'people want people to listen to them, but they are not listening to each other. SALT is bringing people together for that'. Whilst it was recognised and emphasised that 'it takes time to go deep into the conversations', SALT appears to work by encouraging people to listen to each other which reminds fractured and untrusting communities to (re)connect and collectively mobilise.

The fact that communities were now meeting and that this was so widely supported across the data from each community indicates a number of important changes. A community meeting represents a shift from inactivity in which concerns about the community are articulated at the household level and remain at the household level to action and agency. It is clear that the SALT visits have served not only to listen to concerns at the household level and amplify them upwards through radio, but also to foster horizontal connections between households to generate momentum for a community wide conversation. As one community member suggested, the SALT process offered an 'opportunity to develop ourselves instead of waiting for the government to intervene'. The meetings that had emerged had led to a range of community activities.

## **3) From Voice to Collective Action**

In Sumaila Town, a group met to consider the problem of the availability of water. The difficulties in accessing water and the long distances that people had to walk to obtain it was linked by community accounts to a significant rise in rates of teenage pregnancy, as girls were raped or coerced into sex on their way to and from water sources. The SALT process not only made the connections between teenage pregnancy rates and the

connection with water shortages visible to the community, but it also raised awareness with a local NGO 'Poor Man's Friend' who offer legal aid for the local community. Whilst the NGO is well connected within the community, they themselves said that without the SALT process having reported this concern, they would not have been aware of it. Now that they were aware of it, they were seeking to engage more constructively with the issue, initially by trying to talk about it and signpost to relevant sources of support.

The Sumaila Town community held a series of meetings to discuss and mobilise around the issue of water. In the course of those meetings the group decided to start by asking each household for 50000 Leones to contribute to the development of the water [system]. Having been initially reluctant to donate money, a representative reported 'Once the community began to see the change. They were more willing to contribute. They are now increasing the money for cement'. Sumaila Town was clearly a neighbourhood in which the SALT process had managed to generate considerable energy and resources amongst the community. As well as water, the community had managed to repair a road that was in a very bad condition and, incentivised by the success they had had, were keen to continue the development of the neighbourhood under their own efforts indicating a gathering momentum and confidence in the community's agency.

In Dwarzak a community who were also struggling with the availability of water started to meet to discuss solutions. They identified a piece of community owned land and decided to fence it, tidy it up and turn it into a football pitch. Community groups including schools were able to use the pitch for sports activities, festivals and events at a small cost (2000pp). The proceeds were then used to build a wall to surround the field and for other projects including water towers. These are fairly simple and effective community actions, but arguably they would not have been possible without the work of the SALT teams in encouraging people in households to share their concerns, talk to their neighbours, think about what they could *do* to meet these challenges and call meetings to work collectively on the issues. The harder outcomes (including those of water tanks, road repairs, electric street lighting for security) emerge out of the initial incentive of the SALT process to listen and to encourage people to act. As one SALT volunteer in Dwarzak described it: 'Salt creates the voice and that gets the community able to connect with donors...And then you can show the other communities how to fence their field'. The recognition of community owned knowledge and the transfer of knowledge and models for community action across neighbourhoods indicates the potential of the methodology to organically move information around and between communities. As one LFT member stated: 'SALT shares ideas and thoughts in communities' making it a critical process for the transformation of knowledge in what are sometimes challenging geographic or social situations where community trust has turned to stigma - such as the Ebola pandemic.

A number of community members expressed how difficult it was to a) talk about issues – 'Sierra Leoneans have attitudes of "it's not my business" which is accepted in the community' and b) move from being a victim of one's problems to an active participant in seeking solutions: 'People are aware of their problems but find it hard to *act*. Communities need to be pushed to work together. It is something that they find hard'. Thus the SALT process works by mobilising and orienting energies at key points:

- I. **By encouraging people at household level to talk and, critically, endorsing the validity of people’s voices and experiences through active listening.**
- II. **By reflecting people’s concerns back to them and asking people what they can do to meet their own challenges (ie leaving no space for a ‘dependency mentality’ pattern of reaction).**
- III. **By making connections between households and giving confidence to a shared voice of concern.**

Those individuals facilitating the process are themselves inspired and nourished by the interactions between each other as team members and in the relationship building with local community members whom are frequently a source of inspiration, challenge and learning for the local and joint facilitation team members. That the team reported no attrition of volunteers over the 2.5 year period during which ACV has been running indicates the high value that the process holds for participants. This is despite a number of parallel complaints about the high demands that being a SALT volunteer makes on individual time and (financial) resources.

### **Process Strengths**

#### **1) Challenging Traditional Donor Engagements**

SALT has reached more families than Oxfam. It is constant. Oxfam is only here for 6 months. SALT is constant. (LFT member, former Oxfam volunteer).

Throughout the data, there was a distinct critique of short term community level development work. Much of the work that the ACV process is doing, particularly through the SALT visits is facilitating communities to recognise their assets and to act collectively for local change, rather than waiting for governments or NGOs to do the work for them. That communities can mobilise themselves to effect change is a core principal of SALT. A key articulation throughout the data was that the most challenging aspect of community engagement is communicating that SALT teams do not bring systematic material assistance to communities or households (although there is also evidence that small hand outs are sometimes offered as tokens in households which are struggling, as an empathic response by SALT team visitors). Not only is ACV working in a context where there are high levels of dependency, but the data suggest that Freetown is also a place where too many short term community development initiatives have incited huge anger and disappointment amongst the communities in which such initiatives were implemented. As the CEO of a local NGO in one community told us: ‘Temporary measures are not fair. Any impact [of SALT] does have to be sustainable. People are not forgiving of short term initiatives’. Another community group leader told one SALT team member when we visited that the group did not want to talk to us ‘because people are coming here, using them and then going off. They go home and people say who is the white person who came here? What did they do [for the community]?’. The group were angry that their stories were constantly sought (I imagine from researchers and academics) and yet nothing filtered back to the community in terms of change or resource. Again, the advantage of radio is that there is a direct link between hearing a person’s or community’s story and broadcasting that story back into the homes of

that community. In this sense, Radio takes information from the community but gives it back in a powerful form that enables a sense of recognition and can be experienced as a form of advocacy on behalf of the community. In terms of donor fatigue and anger, SALT volunteers have had to work extremely hard to lower (material) expectations and communicate the essence of their work and purpose. As one LFT member summarised 'Some organisations go [to communities] and they give them promised but don't return. When they see us, they think we come to give them sugar coated answers. But as SALT we will involve them. See that it is different'. There were numerous comments on the paralysis that a 'dependency mentality' had generated and how SALT sought to challenge this thinking: 'There is the perception that things can't improve without the government. [As a result of SALT] People are now coming together to act before the government steps in'. The change that SALT seeks to catalyse is one in which communities are aware of their strengths, recognise their own skills, knowledge and expertise and most importantly perhaps, recognise their own agency. For JFT and LFT volunteers, what distinguishes SALT from other community development processes is 'that in SALT the *people* are the experts, unlike in other development programmes where *they* tell *you*. But with SALT they themselves give the answers and take action'. Another volunteer told us that the ethos of the process 'is not about money, but about helping yourself. It is a community volunteer programme and you need to try for yourself'.

## 2) Challenging Dependency Mentalities

Just like I said SALT has played a very big role here. We called a meeting, called people, explained to them, that laziness... will not help you. Don't just sit there with your arms and legs folded ...go out there for yourself. You see most of the young guys now have something to do.....[LFT member]

The shift from dependency to action can take time and a number of SALT visits. As a number of JFT members noted, the communities that have had the most investment in terms of visits and who have been most exposed to the ethos of the process have done the most in terms of community mobilisation. Of the communities that we visited during the week, one had only received SALT visits on 3 occasions so it was no surprise that they received our delegation with the most scepticism and hostility. As one JFT member advised when we debriefed, it 'takes a while for people to understand the concept. Those communities and households who have had a number of visits, the expectations [of the ACV process] change'. As this report suggests, change comes in a variety of guises and domains that include the material, the social and relational and the spiritual. In relation to mindset change, we did hear a number of reports of less 'idleness' in communities in which SALT visits were regularly happening. One community member noted: 'One impact that SALT has made is that we are trying to tell our children that you can't just sit and wait for people to help you: you have to make some effort in your own life'. In another community we were told, in response to a question about impact, 'We are not seeing so many idling people. Youth are now being engaged in activities not idling'. An interview with a pastor in a third community revealed:

R: Well... (there was) plenty of lazing about... plenty of sitting about before, just folding your arms and legs ...waiting... doing nothing, has lessened a bit.

I: Idleness

R: Yes....idleness. So we are making a lot of effort to learn a trade now.

### **3) Multiple Spaces of Operation – Household, Counselling Centre, Radio Broadcast**

The great strength of the Amplify process is that it offers a number of different spaces for learning about the communities and constituencies which the process seeks to serve. Each of those spaces is distinct and has different advantages for the Amplify team in terms of what they might reveal/conceal about the lives and dynamics governing individual and community life. More could be done to look at the intersections across the different spaces of household, counselling room, radio broadcast to understand how each space might teach the team something slightly different about what is happening in communities for different constituent groups and where tensions and factors that can undermine community mobilisation might lie.

#### **Household Visits: Intimacy and Intergenerationality**

The great strength of the SALT process is that visits take place within the household. The site and space of the household is highly significant for a number of reasons and enables SALT to engage with communities in ways that few other processes can. First, household visits mean that the challenges of geography in hillside communities do not disadvantage individuals from participating in the process. As an employee of an NGO in Sumaila Town reflected: 'here we have the challenges of geography in hillside communities. People can't get to services so SALT helps with people with mobility issues to be visited and to share their thoughts'. This perspective was also shared by volunteers in Dwarzak who suggested that: 'People in houses on hills are stuck up there. They don't come down'. There is an obvious value in SALT's ability to represent the perspectives of those whom might otherwise be absent due to challenges of geography and mobility. Arguably, more could be done to intentionally record and represent the perspectives of those whom are specifically marginalised by geography and mobility thus deepening understanding as to the particular challenges of these underrepresented communities and groups.

As soon as we meet people in their house, all in the house setting become interested to know the motive and everyone becomes involved and chats. Some people are always withdrawn but then they see you they really want to listen. They feel more comfortable in the home. The visits trigger community feelings and wakes them. We give people in their homes the idea of togetherness. Then it is easier to find solutions. (LFT member)

The household is a site of intimacy which renders it a very interesting place in which to learn about the situation of families and communities. Much of what is shared in the SALT visits is unmediated by the demands of self-presentation that more formal institutional structures might evoke. An individual attending a clinic or a formal NGO setting is likely to experience the institution as holding a particular kind of power which can render an individual uncomfortable. People perform differently in formal settings than they do in their home environments. Meeting people in their own homes, an environment in which they feel

comfortable and in control, radically changes the dynamics of the interactions and generally allows for more open expressions, so much so that the openness of people in their own homes frequently elicited surprise from SALT facilitators.

Many of the SALT volunteers who have been participating in household visits expressed surprise at what families reveal about their lives during the SALT visits. This was felt to be particularly striking in the context of Sierra Leone which was described as being one in which people tend to protect their privacy (which speaks to the issues of stigma, mistrust and separation fostered by the civil war and more recently Ebola as noted above). One JFT member suggested that though surprising, the facilitators welcomed the opportunity to engage on a deep level with family challenges: 'We didn't expect people to tell us about their family life. We don't shy away. We go deep into family issues. We help them by conversation'. Another LFT member said: 'People can confide [in us and] tell stories about their own personal life. Initially, we as Sierra Leoneans are people who protect [our] personal life'. Issues that had been talked about included teenage pregnancy, struggles and rivalries with family members, financial and material challenges. It was felt by LFT and JFT members that it was the fact that the conversation happened within the home that enabled people to be open about their situations. One JFT member explained the significance of visiting somebody's home within the context of Sierra Leone: 'In Sierra Leone, when you go to somebody's place, they really appreciate it. They start crying their problems then you are the courage for them and you can refer them to BBN for counselling.' It was further felt by the JFT that, as in any context, a number of issues are so personal and private that they cannot be spoken about outside of the home, and here the 'private' nature of the setting allows an expression of 'private' family matters that could not be aired in a community or public setting. Although these issues were not directly named, it might be interesting to think more about the issues that can and cannot be spoken about within/outside of the home so that the team can begin to think more critically about whether there are certain spaces in the process in which particular issues should be targeted and raised and other issues avoided. Given there are three distinct spaces within this process through which to engage people, there is a possibility to develop more intentional targeting of particular issues/perspectives in each space and to avoid conversations that might be deemed inappropriate in any one space to maximise learning and trust building in the Amplify process.

It is clear that the household visits are a highly distinct and unusual strength of the SALT process, when compared to community mobilisation models that operate out of central structures and institutions (such as churches, clinics, community groups etc). That people are taking the time to visit individual families in their homes was highly valued by recipients of those visits, many of whom reported that they do not feel listened to or heard by structures of power. This was particularly the case where those visited would not otherwise be able to access support groups or services due to issues of mobility. In such cases, the household visits enable a different set of otherwise marginalised voices to be heard and amplified - either directly through radio interviews/broadcast or indirectly through the incorporation of themes into fictional radio dramas. It is also clear that the fact that the elicitation of concerns happens at household (rather than community) level enables an openness of response (in relation to certain issues – see also below) on the part of families visited and a surprising candour from some individuals. This openness generates a depth of

understanding of the issues and implications being discussed in the visits on the part of the SALT team.

As an example, we visited Montomeh a community which is struggling in the aftermath of the devastating mudslide of 2017 as a result of which over 1000 people were killed and thousands were made homeless. We visited a family home and heard that in the period since the mudslide, the community was struggling and not enough had been done to support victims. The family was struggling with school fees as well as dealing with the trauma of the impact of the mudslide and a shortage of basic services, food, aid and water. The family had been visited by the SALT team a number of times since the mudslide and it was clear from the interactions between SALT facilitators and the family that there was a degree of recognition and trust. This relationship had been built up over a period of visits. The first time that the SALT team had visited, the father of the family had been very angry. One radio station JFT member narrated the ways in which the SALT visits had generated relational trust both between the SALT facilitators and the family, and the family and the wider community through the combination of listening and radio broadcast:

Because of the way that the media works, the focus [in Montomeh] has been on big donations, relief and local personalities, rather than local feeling. We visited this man who was angry with the situation, the government, the relief acts and was in pain. They put the story of his anger on the radio. He is a Muslim. After a stay on the radio, he was getting contacted by people in the community. They were grateful to hear that they were being represented by him and that he was giving a different viewpoint. This affirmed him and generated a new network of solidarity as the people in his community contacted him.

This example illustrates a number of the strengths of this process. First is the power of radio content elicited through SALT to accurately represent community stories and experiences. Secondly this story illustrates the simple way in which radio broadcast serves to give back to/affirm individuals who share their feelings on air by raising their status as spokespeople of the community. We heard this a number of times during the week long field visits. Thirdly the act of broadcast connects and generates new solidarities in the community, as the community coalesces around the figure who has articulated the experiences of the group. Such networks foster new possibilities for collaboration and pastoral care. Perhaps what is most notable about this story, is the emphasis on 'feeling' and the SALT team's ability to recognise and help to process the emotional aspects of this complex encounter, rather than focussing on the more practical and material challenges as other processes might. As a JFT member suggested: 'In the aftermath of the mudslide and the trauma, that was a time for a deep personal conversations about people their emotions. It was not project orientated, but about deep emotional connection'. Such encounters have enabled the SALT team to develop an emotional literacy that is very striking, particularly when compared other kinds of community engagement.

### **Private Spaces: Counselling Provision**

'We were surprised that in families, there are secret things' (JFT member)

Whilst the household has many strengths as a site of elicitation and learning, it is also an intergenerational site which is complicated by various hierarchies including those of age and gender and these hierarchies serve to silence certain voices. Whilst there are certain issues that cannot be easily talked about *outside* of the home, there are also issues that cannot be easily expressed *within* the home, particularly where the power dynamics of age and gender are operating. For example, whilst it might be possible for a team of visitors to hear *parental* concerns about teenage pregnancy, it is unlikely that a conversation around teenage desire – whether sexual or material – from a *youth* perspective will be able to counter any parental narrative in front of parents and other elders. Where there are intergenerational/gendered differences in moral orientation, it is not easy to access in depth the experiences and narratives of those whose experiences do not align with those in the household who hold authority (generally older males).

Alternative private spaces need to be available to understand tensions and differences of opinion so that the voices that tend to be marginalised within the household are also heard and understood to more accurately reflect the contested challenges of community life across different cohorts. A great strength of the BBN partnership is that there exists a ‘private’ space for referral through the counselling centre. This generates a number of further questions to better understand the relationship between the Counselling Centre, SALT visits and Radio programmes such as *Hope Line* and *Someone Really Cares*. Unfortunately in the course of this piece of research, it was not possible to look at every aspect of the process in as much depth as would be ideal and a number of questions are outstanding.

The data on referrals and conversations with staff at the Counselling Centre indicate that a majority of referrals now come through radio programming/awareness raising (685 referrals between 2015 – 2017). Unfortunately comparative data showing a decline in walk-ins were not made available. It would be useful to also know from the Counselling Centre: 1) how many referrals come through other means for this period (2015 – 2017) to supplement these figures and show comparative percentages. These data were not made available for the purposes of this report; 2) If we examine the two years *before* the Amplify process was implemented, how do referral patterns change over a 5 year period? This would provide a better picture as to how Amplify and radio referrals through *Hope Line* and *Someone Really Cares* is affecting the use of the Counselling Centre. Finally It would be interesting to know whether the discussion of particular issues on the radio programmes generate referrals from clients dealing with those *specific issues* as discussed in the programmes, or whether radio serves a more general promotion of the centre.

It would be helpful to examine in more depth the connections between SALT visits, radio program content, counselling self-referral data. Questions that remain include whether the counselling centre is promoted within SALT visits? Whether there is any signposting within SALT visits for those (eg younger/female) family members who might benefit from a private space to talk and process? How might those vulnerable to power dynamics within a household visits be recognised by the SALT team and subtly informed as to the availability of the counselling centre? How are the experiences/situations that are expressed in the counselling space fed back into ACV to aid overall understanding of the community as a whole with all of its dynamics and tensions within and between different groups? This might



be an interesting question for the team to consider in relation to the development of the process and a more intentional use of the different 'spaces' of the household, radio and the counselling centre to engage different constituencies.

### **The Space of Radio**

Within the discussion about process spaces, the radio occupies something of a critical 'third' space to the process. Broadcast is by nature public but, BBN is also capable of offering space for more anonymous expressions through phone-ins, text and social media services. It can therefore stimulate community conversations in different ways. Radio is distinct from the household and the counselling space in that it is not directly a face-to-face medium, (although as the process shows, it can facilitate face-to-face communication within communities). The kind of anonymity that this affords makes it ideal for the discussion of issues that might prove inflammatory or may undermine personal reputation, which, as we have seen, is so important in community life. Further, that many of the SALT conversations generate radio *dramas* rather than direct engagement means that rather than taking a moralising tone - 'telling people what to do and what not to do' – issues can be explored in unthreatening, depersonalised ways. Radio can also name issues that are too difficult to talk about in face-to-face ways in communities, but that are widely recognised as existing and exerting power. The combination of the different natures of these process spaces with their distinct but comparative strengths offers real potential for thinking strategically about the kinds of issues/ that can be explored in each space on behalf of different constituent groups.

### **Possible Community Spaces?**

The fact that SALT visits happen in the household raised questions about the visibility of the process. In some neighbourhoods, from both team members and local partner organisations alike. There were suggestions that SALT needed an 'office' type space, to improve visibility within the community and to provide a space that people could come to. The desire that SALT start to take on the more traditional characteristics of an NGO were heard not only from local community members and partner organisations, but also from the JFT itself. In a final session on envisioning the future of the process, a strongly felt desire was to see SALT with its own space and infrastructure, to 'become an NGO with an office'. However, given that there is already an institutional structure, it would seem logical for BBN to develop its own thinking around this.

#### **4) Faith and Prayer**

Faith and prayer offer additional dimensions to the Amplify process that serve to strengthen relations with communities in different ways. There have been understandable questions as to whether and how a Christian radio station can expand their audience in what is a Muslim majority country, and whether a process facilitated by a Christian radio station can reach diverse communities and avoid the challenges of religious division? However the evidence to date suggests that the religious aspect of the process offers a number of perhaps unexpected advantages. More time needs to be spent interrogating and investigating how a broader section of non-Christian process participants, volunteers and households perceive the process to try to garner a more nuanced understanding as to the ways that non-

Christians might feel the process is of limited relevance to them. However, the limited data gathered suggest that faith and spiritual aspects both play an important role in the process and are themselves enhanced by participation in the process. Very limited data suggest that this is true for some Muslim participants as well as Christian, but this needs to be more fully investigated.

‘God is working through us to touch peoples lives’ (LFT member)

Faith and particularly prayer plays an important role in the JFT and LFT group life. The groups pray together as they meet to go out on SALT visits and prayer is part of the fabric of group life. There is on the part of JFT members a sense that SALT visiting enables the group to see and experience ‘God in another dimension – operating through me, providing service to people when they tell you their own stories of their hearts. God is caring for people through me’. Participating in SALT visits enables a new experience of the divine and a new way of acting out discipleship. Another JFT member talked about ‘changes in my spiritual being – I look to see God in every person and every situation. I look out for that moment. I am more conscious I can see God. Any moment can be a God moment and I appreciate that’. Amongst local pastors who have experienced the process as LFT members in different communities, there was a sense that the work they had undertaken through SALT visiting had transformed their thinking about ministry by bringing them closer to the needs of people. One suggested that the experience of SALT visiting connected him to his community in ways that his ministry as a pastor had not: ‘the difference of SALT visiting is it connects me to people I have never met and to hear the views of people in terms of development. It has connected me to many other communities. I visited those communities in the city for the first time through SALT and it allowed me to see the reality of people’s lives’ (LFT member). Another pastor from a different community reflected on the ways that his understanding of ministry had changed as a result of SALT: ‘The SALT idea can help in my ministry so much. My ministry can not only be looked at spiritually, but also physically. The church can be so spiritual. People wait for God, but God also asks you to take responsibility – I am trying to get people to be less spiritual and more practical’ (LFT member). This spiritual and missional reflection is not limited to LFT and JFT members. One community member who had received a SALT visit reflected on the ways that the process had impacted him by humanizing his experience of the divine. He stated: ‘SALT has taught me that God uses human beings to help human beings. This has affected my belief; that God can use people to help other people’. Another LFT member talked about how his primary concern had been ‘only spiritual’ but now he recognised the importance of the physical. He said: ‘given that Christ was preaching, he was also feeding. I am now more concerned with the physical [work] of Christ’. The process appears to break down the barriers between spiritual/material and divine/human by drawing the focus down to everyday embodied, community existence. The divine is experienced in the ordinary person; the spiritual can be found in the collaboration of people; material and spiritual needs are perceived within the same frame and tended to holistically through empathic human encounter. It is clear from the data that participation in the SALT process as a prayerful community of care is informing participants’ personal spirituality and sense of their own missional role as ‘God’s hands on earth’(LFT member). The SALT team’s growing empathy and responsiveness to the communities to whom they are responding are deepening their thinking and understanding about what it means to be a person of faith and what it means to serve local communities

both for those who are faith leaders and for those who are not.

### **Prayer as Care**

Faith and prayer are also critical aspects of the care that is offered by the process to people in communities. Prayer represents an additional and highly valued dimension of the pastoral care that is offered through active and empathic listening in the SALT visits. Many JFT and LFT members talked about prayer being a part of SALT visits, even where there are differences of faith. Prayers are often asked for as a part of the conversation, once it is known that people are visiting on behalf of a Christian radio station. One JFT member said: 'we pray together and [people] come closer as they are God fearing. They give us more time and attention'. Prayer is also a way of deepening connection in communities where there is profound trauma. In Montomeh, recognizing the depth of people's needs in the aftermath of the mudslide, prayer has acted as a bridge, a multi-dimensional way of communicating across the differences between the visiting SALT team and a community in a state of trauma. It can and has acted as profound way of 'holding' individuals and communities, recognizing and mirroring back their needs, advocating on their behalf to the divine and neutralizing some of the distinctions between 'us'/visiting SALT team and 'them'/local community as all become equal under God. Although it does not happen in every visit, prayer deepens the engagement that happens within SALT visits and in some cases builds credibility by engaging people holistically, and recognizing spiritual as well as material needs (whilst not over privileging the spiritual).

Interestingly, prayer also served to neutralise anxieties that were heightened as a result of the presidential elections. On a visit to a group in New England, we met with a group of 14 women who were farming a community garden generating crops to sell. As we approached the group who were expecting us, there was a certain amount of anxiety from the group. As was explained after our visit, in the context of election tensions, the women felt that they were being watched by the landowner, and were highly anxious that the land that they were renting for crop cultivation would be taken away from them. In particular, the fact that the SALT delegation contained white people made the group highly visible to local scrutiny. The women were afraid that we would be perceived to be there for political reasons. The welcome was very restrained and the atmosphere uncomfortable for all. This changed entirely when the Pastor on the JFT was asked to pray. We sang a song of prayer and those gathered were visibly relieved. The visibility/audibility of the prayer served to communicate the purpose of the SALT visit in a tangible way, allaying anxieties about political allegiances and reassuring all as to our neutrality in terms of party politics.

In a non-secular context, and one in which religious differences do not tend to create tension and anxiety, questions about people's spiritual and religious lives can open up conversations, rather than close them down. It is often easier for people to talk about their faith than to talk about political or personal affairs and questions about faith can encourage open communication and the development of relationship. In an interview with a local NGO, the CEO who was a Pentecostal was visibly excited when we asked whether the SALT process had had any impact on her faith. We asked the woman for her testimony, and she was excited by the question saying that in a professional conversation: 'No one has ever

asked the question about my testimony!'. The SALT process has, for some, opened up a new space for talking and thinking about faith. Whilst there are still questions as to whether Muslim and other faith participants feel as comfortable with the Christian aspect of the SALT process (more data need to be gathered in relation to these questions), faith can be a 'safe' way into more difficult conversations about private/traumatic issues. Prayer can generate an amount of trust in and across groups which contain other differences (such as political/social/cultural) and it is a way of levelling hierarchies and expressing care. Finally, ongoing prayer for the communities visited was reported by JFT members. It would be interesting to explore the ways in which praying for communities encountered in SALT visits not only sustains the relationship of care between JFT/LFT and communities, but also acts as a space/method for ongoing reflection and processing of what they have experienced in the SALT visits, particularly given that SALT teams are often dealing with/holding the very challenging burdens of the communities that they visit.

### **Thinking about the Future of ACV**

With regards to future planning, it is clear that there is enthusiasm for the process at community level and that of the JFT and LFTS. There is a desire from the volunteers to see the process grow and expand into new neighbourhoods. With a vehicle like radio to promote the work of the SALT process in a range of different ways and to a range of new audiences, there is a lot of potential for transfer. However, there are important questions as to how to align new interest in the process through radio with actual SALT work on the ground in new communities. Ideally there needs to be coordination/dialogue between what is happening on the airwaves and what is happening on the ground. As the institutional home of the process, and with the communication resources of radio, helplines and social media capacity, BBN could take on this responsibility for mapping and coordinating: where transfer is happening organically; where radio has generated interest but 'on the ground' accompaniment is required to socialise communities into the ethos and practice of SALT visiting; where SALT visiting has moved ahead organically but could be better supported by accompaniment from the JFT or nearby LFTs.

Depending on the thinking of BBN, radio could be used more intentionally to facilitate SALT transfer in a number of ways. Given that broadcasting about SALT brought new people to the local SALT process, increased coverage of the stories of the ways that SALT visiting has brought benefit and renewed communication to communities could stimulate interest in new sites. Interest could be tracked through radio phone ins/online chat rooms, questions asked and answered and interested communities identified for accompaniment visits by JFT and LFT representatives. Radio dramas or community based programmes could be used intentionally to facilitate community meetings by advising that communities meet in groups to listen to a broadcast and then discuss the relevance of the programme to their own communities. This would directly stimulate community meeting and discussions and could be another way of bringing the SALT ethos to new groups. Communities could be encouraged to think about whether there is anything that can be done in their local context. Meeting in this way would likely enable communities to identify what is already going on in relation to community mobilisation? Who is already working on what issue? Whom is connected with whom? Thus generating social interactions that might yield benefit. In evaluating possible priorities for the future development of ACV, BBN and the JFT will need

to think about how much they can support, which neighbourhoods might take priority and how much accompaniment can actually be resourced.

The question about capacity and resourcing is absolutely critical and was raised persistently throughout our week together. In particular, a number of concerns were raised about material resources. The process itself is very 'resource light' and provides limited material benefit (T shirts, transport money, food etc) for SALT teams. The JFT, whilst passionate about the work that they are doing as a SALT team, felt that they were struggling to support the process on very limited personal resources. They were keen to have an office space, more recorders for interviews, more t shirts and to have their expenses of food and travel more adequately recognised. They also raised questions around microfinance and whether microfinance could be developed to support radio broadcaster training within the process? The work that the JFT and LFTS are doing out of commitment is so critical to sustaining the process that it is worth ensuring that it costs as little as possible to be a part of the process by ensuring that all expenses are generously covered and all materials provided. Given that small donations were given to households on a few occasions, there is a question about whether this money is a personal or process donation and whether it should be reimbursed. However, this need for financial security within the process also needs to be held in tension with strong team desires to see SALT 'as an NGO', with an office space in communities which was something that was articulated by the JFT and LFTs in relation to questions about the future development of ACV. Moving to an NGO model would fundamentally change the nature of the SALT process and its engagements at community level. These considerations need to be carefully thought through by the JFT and LFTs.

### **Conclusion**

ACV has affected change in multiple ways, many of which are absolutely critical to and reflective of the SALT process principles of community flourishing, social justice and drawing the marginalised into networks of care and representation. Those who have positively benefitted include process volunteers, BBN Radio and Counselling Centre and local communities. Due to the nature of the data, it was not always possible to be clear or definitive about process impacts (for example in relation to Counselling Centre and local clinic use. One clinic showed us data which implied changing patterns of use over a time period which correlated with SALT visits in surrounding communities but robust evidence as to *causal* links still needs to be gathered). Only those changes which are clearly indicated throughout the data are evidenced in this report. This does not mean that other changes are not taking place, only that we do not yet have the evidence to speak with confidence about what is happening and how it is happening.

Specific process recommendations are detailed below. More generally, better reporting and triangulation of data generated at different points and in different spaces across the process (household, radio and counselling centre) would allow for detailed and robust cases to be made in relation to a number of areas. A deeper engagement with the data that has already been generated would enable ACV to speak more powerfully into national debates in Sierra Leone about e.g. community challenges, issues of gender, issues affecting young people and representing marginalised local voices to structures of power. The data generated through SALT visits could be ordered and used to lobby government and other institutions. Its power

as a data set comes from the fact that it represents hundreds of households/community members across 7 neighbourhoods in Freetown. With good documentation and careful marshalling of the evidence that is already being gathered in the SALT team debriefs, more pressure can be applied and the voices of local people more effectively amplified. Further the data that ACV implicitly holds about the communities in which it is operating has considerable value in the context of Sierra Leone where data on community level concerns, assets, activities and networks are likely to be patchy. Careful data storage and analysis could be a considerable resource (with financial value) for local councils/neighbourhood action planning/governments wanting to understand better the situation of communities and neighbourhoods.

I have tried to indicate areas where better information gathering would support improved understanding and/or community engagement throughout the document. To summarise, they include:

- 1) Improved tracking and triangulation of evidence from Counselling Centre/SALT visits/radio broadcasts/clinics to actively explore connections between what is expressed in these sites and what might be missing from agenda? which groups might not be heard in any of these spaces? How are the issues talked about differently in each space? What does this tell us about the different experiences of community life for different constituent groups?**
- 2) Gathering better information as to the how SALT visiting to households relates to and challenges 'dependency mindsets'. This could be sought by exploring with groups/households how the 'messaging' of the process relates to individual thought/action.**
- 3) Better understanding, mapping and quantifying the 'soft' skills learned through the process including tracking whether volunteers move into positions of community responsibility/jobs that rely on skills developed through SALT participation.**
- 4) Whether there are changes BBN's listenership that are trackable in SALT and surrounding neighbourhoods specifically? Whether there are ways of correlating listener data with the SALT process and its impact?**
- 5) Building evidence as to how the process includes/excludes/reaches/is experienced by non-Christian respondents?**
- 6) Learning more about the specific issues affecting marginalised hillside communities, particularly those whose mobility is limited?**
- 7) How can the connections between SALT visits and eventual material 'successes' eg water tanks, electric lighting be better tracked so we can clearly narrate the process of influence through e.g. community meeting minutes? Whilst this might be too much to do across communities, a case study neighbourhood could be identified in which a deeper exploration of the process which maps**

**material and social change is possible.**

- 8) More rigorous information as to how much organic transfer is already happening would be very valuable and would further indicate the value of ACV.**

**Process Recommendations:**

There are a number of process recommendations that would strengthen ACV. These include:

- 1) Developing BBN's capacity in the process at different levels of scale. This work needs to be informed by strategic thinking about the role of ACV in BBN and BBN's institutional role/responsibility as process host and partner. BBN's role/capacity could be developed in the following ways:**
  - I. As a platform for advocacy at national and local levels on the part of the many households that they represent/have consulted with through ACV and SALT visits. To say that BBN have heard from eg 150 households on the issue of eg teenage pregnancy can be a powerful voice at national level. More systematic data gathering and analysis from SALT visits can facilitate and support better lobbying work.**
  - II. As a signposting and referral point to local service providers and NGOs that are working to support local communities generally or in relation to specific issues that have come up in the SALT visits. The community level data in relation to stakeholders and actors in the different neighbourhoods can be usefully consolidated to provide a 'directory' (whether online, through radio broadcasts etc) of local support that can be shared.**
  - III. Facilitating wider stakeholders and communities to engage in/raise the status of debates about community life and change in Sierra Leone, building on the testimonies of those households represented by the SALT process. This could be done through increasing the levels of programming that allow for live responses and debate. For example, more stories could be taken from marginalised groups as generated through SALT visits, turned into a ten minute dramas and followed by phone-ins to allow a public debating space. Data around who is calling in and from where could be tracked to see how people from different backgrounds and more privileged groups respond to what they are hearing and to facilitate public debate, lobbying and response.**
  - IV. Networking with other radio stations working around community development to expand reach, particularly to more**

**marginalised and stigmatised groups or other faith communities that Christian radio may not be able to access.**

- V. Ensuring that broadcasting scheduling is carefully done to reach target audiences (i.e. if programmes are oriented towards the youth, they should not be broadcast during school hours).**
- 2) A more critical engagement by the BBN/SALT team to consider the power dynamics of each space of engagement (home, radio, community, counselling centre). In each space, who is able to speak? Whose experiences are marginalised? How can these dynamics be navigated in the process? How can marginalised voices be included? Not only will this improve the representation of community voices in the process, but it will also encourage critical thinking on the part of individuals about a) the ways that social structures and spaces can silence particular experiences b) the ways that society recognises certain experiences, voices and bodies as more important than others and how to guard against colluding with those hierarchies in the SALT process.**
- 3) Ensuring proper and active signposting to appropriate confidential/private/supporter spaces, such as the counselling centre or local community NGOs, to ensure that specific constituent groups who are negatively disadvantaged by power structures are fully recognised within the process**
- 4) Intentionally Identifying other highly marginalised groups encountered through the SALT visits that need better representation/advocacy and focusing on them in broadcast/SALT visits.**
- 5) Evaluating levels of resourcing for the ACV process and how to ensure that volunteers are properly resourced in terms of transport and daily expenses. Questions around incentives need to be addressed. Further consideration needs to be given to how questions of money and microfinance should be dealt with. How will more formalised remuneration/microfinance/structures change the dynamic of the process? Is microfinance for broadcaster training something that could be usefully explored? How can process resources be generated?**
- 6) Improving data management and recording to measure change from the beginning and the development of better participatory research skills for SALT teams to assist with data gathering and the facilitation of local asset mapping (i.e. helping communities to recognise their tangible as well as intangible resources)**
- 7) Recognising, quantifying and promoting the learning experience that SALT volunteering offers to participants in terms of hard and soft skills and social networking. Given the high levels of unemployment, this could act as an incentive to participate in what is materially a resource light process. Encouraging volunteers to think about and share what they have learned**



**through SALT participation could make for interesting and incentivising radio broadcast and would foster the focus on the intangible benefits of community participation.**