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Disability Mainstreaming or Away-streaming?

The Case of *One Family People* and the *Girl Power* Programme in Sierra Leone

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Who is Disabled?

If u no si de poson pas d crippul, den udat blind?

If u no yeri u broda de cry fo justice, udat deaf?

If u nor tok to u sista but push am from u, udat disable?

If u art en u mind no rich out to u neba, udat na de madman?

If u nor tinap fo de ryt of evribodi, udat crippul?

U abit to cripul dem e go bi wi biggest problm, en u tu.

Poem by Tony Wong

Krio Translation by Foday Kamara

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List of Acronyms

CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DAAG	Disability Action Awareness Group
DCI	Defence for Children International
DPO	Disabled People's Organisations
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
FSU	Family Support Unit
GPP	*Girl Power* Programme
ICDI	International Child Development Initiatives
ISS	Institute of Social Studies
MOFA	Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MLPU	Mothers-Led Protection Unit
MSG	Men's Support Group
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OFP	*One Family People*
SLAB	Sierra Leone Association of the Blind
SLUDI	Sierra Leone Union on Disability Issues
SLUPP	Sierra Leone Union of Polio Persons
SPN	Service Providers' Network
UN	United Nations
UNCRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WHO	World Health Organisation

Abstract

Despite a strong global and national legal framework to protect their rights on paper, girls with disabilities in Sierra Leone face social exclusion, limited educational and economic opportunities and extreme levels of discrimination in all realms of public life, including within their own families and communities. This study analyses a case study of disability mainstreaming in the advocacy activities of a grassroots NGO, *One Family People*, as part of the international *Girl Power* Programme, paying particular attention to the role of framing and the voice of girls with disabilities on the project's outcomes in relation to disability. Despite the obstacles, this organisation included girls with disabilities throughout the programme, bringing many tangible intended and unintended improvements to the lives of these girls, including reduced risk of sexual violence, improved social relationships, heightened self-esteem and better educational opportunities. As a strategy to advance disability rights in Sierra Leone, however, the project was less successful, as it did not explicitly challenge the cultural beliefs or address the systemic structures that sustain the marginalisation of girls with disabilities in society. The paper calls for a continuation of disability mainstreaming in ways that celebrate the diversity of those taking part and foregrounds their voices with the intention to achieve more transformative outcomes for the rights and wellbeing of girls with disabilities in the future.

Relevance to Development Studies

People with disabilities are the world's largest minority, accounting for approximately one billion people, or 15 per cent of the global population (WHO and World Bank 2011). After decades of ostracism from the mainstream development process, people with disabilities have gradually come to be recognised by multilateral donor agencies as an important heterogeneous social group whose rights and interests can no longer be overlooked. Yet there is still a long way to go before commitments are translated into action and disability rights are realised in practice. Development organisations are devoting more time and resources to social justice advocacy as a way of holding states accountable for rights violations. However, little knowledge currently exists on the conditions for successful advocacy in developing countries. This paper aims to contribute to that gap.

Keywords

Advocacy, children, disability, frame resonance, framing, gender, girls, mainstreaming, sensitisation, Sierra Leone, voice, youth, young people

ONE

Setting the Scene

Photograph 1

"This is where I live."

"The society makes you feel like you are a disabled. There is something like this barrier between us and them. They don't recognise us, they think we are useless. We are not treated as humans!"

This sense of frustration and despondency, as expressed by a nineteen year-old girl with a physical disability she had acquired from polio in childhood, is very common among the girls with disabilities I came to know during my two-month stay in Sierra Leone. Though I was aware of the existence of considerable social stigma surrounding disability before I arrived, I was unprepared for the emotional challenges I would experience as I grew to understand the level and extent of hardships confronting these girls.

Girls with disabilities are "the world's most disadvantaged group" (Boylan 1991: 1). They face a triple discrimination on the basis of their age, gender and impairment, placing them at an intersection of exclusion and marginalisation (Callus and Farrugia 2016, Morris 1992, Ngo et al. 2013). The stigma surrounding disability is deeply entrenched in Sierra Leone, with a widely held belief that it is caused by a parent's sin or the work of the devil (Powell 2010). When a baby is born with disability, families sometimes leave their babies in the forests, believing that the child must be returned to the demon spirits from where they came. Others abandon them altogether. Many of these girls end up living on the streets having to engage in activities to satisfy the basic needs for their short-term survival, including begging and sex work. This causes a common perception that people with disabilities are trouble-makers, and that their behaviour is the cause of their disability: "*Na dat mehk God mehk u so*" [This is why God made you that way], is a charge frequently levelled towards them in instances of dispute. They are a figure for mockery, often subjected to deliberate provocation and denied service by shopkeepers who believe they are there to beg or that serving them will bring bad luck.

As I was preparing for this research project, I found that, while the literature on disability in Africa is plentiful, it was difficult to find sources simultaneously looking at girl children, disability and Africa. This reflects what Okwany claims is an "invisibility or muting of female youth in policy, in discourse, in social movements and in research" (Forthcoming 2016: 1). This dearth of literature on girls with disabilities in Sierra Leone was reflected in what I found in the field. Families of girls with disabilities tend to hide "the source of their shame" (Muigai 2011: 199), resulting in an invisibility of girls with disabilities in the communities and in society in general. These girls are left voiceless, side-lined and de-valued by the majority, and are routinely considered to be "not there" (Children in Crisis et al. 2012: 1). Multiple barriers prevent them from participating in everyday childhood activities and they are frequently considered not fit for education. According to one report, 76 per cent of children with disabilities in Sierra Leone are not attending school, with girls less likely to be in school than boys (Tesemma 2011). These girls are obstructed by an entrenched sense of social exclusion, defined as "the dynamic processes of being shut out, partially or fully, from any or all of several systems which influence the economic and social integration of people into their society" (Commins 2004: 68). Frequently, the challenges these girls are required to overcome are less connected to their physical impairment than to their social

exclusion. As Boylan states, "her inferior status in society is often more debilitating…than the disability itself" (1991: 1).

Definitions of disability vary widely depending on the context. In some countries, only individuals with severe physical impairments are identified as having a disability, whereas others apply a much broader definition to include less inhibiting impairments as well as intellectual disabilities (Groce 2004). For the purposes of this paper, I will follow the World Health Organisation and the World Bank's definition of disability as "the umbrella term for impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions" (2011: 4), because this broad definition accepts the biological, physical, mental, intellectual and sensory bodily factors as well as the social, cultural, political and environmental factors that comprise the disability experience.

This study takes place in the context of Sierra Leone in West Africa. According to one source, the number of people living with disabilities in Sierra Leone is 490,000 (Restless Development 2012). However, there is a dearth of verifiable nationwide statistics available on the prevalence of disability in the country, since there has never been any form of extensive or verifiable data collection survey, creating a major obstacle for disability advocacy efforts. The aforementioned number represents approximately 8 per cent of the country's 6.5 million population, however a more likely figure, based on the prevalence of disability worldwide, is nearly double at approximately 15 per cent, or 975,000 people (WHO and World Bank 2011, World Bank 2015). Incidences of disability are exacerbated in Sierra Leone as a result of the civil war that raged from 1991 until 2002. Thousands were wounded, around 27,000 people had at least one of their limbs amputated and basic healthcare provision including childhood immunisations effectively ceased during the eleven-year wartime period leading to a sharp increase in debilitating diseases including polio (*IRIN News* 2011, Powell 2010).

In terms of policies and legislation, Sierra Leone has a strong framework to protect the rights of people with disabilities. As one CSO member told me, "Our country is very good on paper". The government was one of the first global signatories to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2007), and this treaty was subsequently domesticated into national law in the Persons with Disability Act (2011). Disability activists and civil society organisations welcomed these moves as landmark achievements, because the new law contained wide ranging provisions, including the establishment of the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities, as a way to give a voice to people with disabilities, and the entitlement of every person with a disability to free medical services in public health institutions.

However, the elation surrounding these new laws has gradually turned to cynicism, because of the state's inadequate implementation, monitoring and enforcement of these policies. The Commission rarely receives the government funding it was assured, and the promise of free healthcare is never adhered to in practice. People with disabilities are required to pay for their hospital visits like other citizens, which is a source of great concern, because they are more prone to needing medical attention, but less likely to have the means to afford

it. "We lost one" was a statement I frequently heard about members of the disability community, signalling yet another loss of life.

One of the major reasons for the lack of progress on this issue is cultural beliefs around disability and negative attitudes towards people with disabilities in general. Policy and legislative change alone is insufficient to "address values and behaviour that do not change simply because law changes" (VeneKlasen and Miller 2002: 13). One disability rights activist decried that "the government seems to think that now we have these things, we have got what we wanted and they can forget about us [people with disabilities] again". Consequently, the reality for people with disabilities is far removed from their formal rights outlined in the national and global legal framework; disability rights "remain rights only on paper" (De Gaay Fortman 2011: 3).

Another key factor hindering the progress of disability rights is money. In a resource-poor economy, disability is not prioritised. Despite a huge amount of aid and foreign investment over the past decade, Sierra Leone consistently ranks at the bottom of the Human Development Index (UNDP 2015). Life expectancy is the lowest in the world at 50 years, and over 70 per cent of the population live beneath the poverty line (CIA 2014, WHO, n.d.) Life for the majority of Sierra Leoneans is about survival. One taxi driver summed up the daily experience of many, telling me, "When I work, I eat. When I no work, I no eat". In this context, it is difficult to make progress on disability advocacy, because the nature of the condition requires resources for technical and medical support at the individual level, and housing and welfare at the community level (McClain-Nhlapo 2010). When non-state actors refer to policy frameworks to support disability rights-claiming efforts, the justification for stalled progress is normally attributed to resources. One half of Sierra Leone's national budget is comprised of development aid, so the government is heavily dependent on international donors, as is the non-governmental sector, where organisations tend to follow the trends in advocacy set by overseas funding agencies (Berghs 2012). Since the end of the civil war in 2002, foreign funding for advocacy has tended to prioritise gender and children's rights.

There is no universally-agreed definition of advocacy, nor one that can give a full account of the many kinds of activities it includes (Reid 2000). In its most direct sense, advocacy is the process of influencing policy-making towards the overall aim of combating the structural causes of rights violations (MOFA 2015b). However, this definition has "serious limitations", because it fails to take into consideration that, in matters of human rights, anyone can in theory take part in advocacy (Cohen 2001: 7). This paper, therefore, employs a more holistic working definition of social justice advocacy, as organised efforts which

> seek to highlight critical issues that have been ignored and submerged, to influence public attitudes, and to enact and implement laws and public policies so that visions of "what should be" in a just, decent society become a reality.

> (Cohen 2001: 8)

There are many disabled people's organisations and non-governmental organisations working on social justice advocacy for disability issues in Sierra Leone, including the Sierra Leone Association of the Blind (SLAB), the Sierra Leone Union of Polio Persons (SLUPP) and the Disability Awareness Action Group (DAAG). The majority of these groups operate under the umbrella organisation, The Sierra Leone Union of Disability Issues (SLUDI). However, the relationship between these various groups is sometimes characterised by disunity, quarrelling, political partisanship and a general lack of co-ordination towards a national strategy for advocacy. Outside of these advocacy groups are international charitable organisations including Handicap International, Helen Keller International, Leonard Cheshire Disability and Sightsavers International, which concentrate more on medical, technical and rehabilitative support at the individual level.

Somewhere between these advocacy groups and charitable groups, and yet also quite distinct from them, exists *One Family People* (OFP), a grassroots NGO based in the capital city of Freetown. From 2011 to 2015, OFP took part in the *Girl Power* Programme (GPP), a five-year international advocacy project intended to increase the protection and empowerment of girls. OFP adopted a mainstreaming approach for the inclusion of girls with disabilities throughout the GPP.

My research focuses on this case study of disability mainstreaming in advocacy. The GPP is an interesting case in light of the debates on disability mainstreaming, a policy which has been identified by many global development organisations as the appropriate route for furthering the cause of people with disabilities in the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda (Tardi and Njelesani 2015). More concretely, the case of the GPP can shed light on the possibilities and limitations of following a disability mainstreaming approach in advocacy, the lessons from which are particularly relevant because OFP have recently embarked upon a new advocacy project, *Her Choice*, which involves similar objectives to empower girls and to mainstream girls with disabilities in its activities.

Furthermore, the findings from this case are useful because this study is part of a co-operative project of the African Studies Centre Leiden and Liliane Foundation, *Breaking down Barriers to Inclusion – Building Capacity for Lobby and Advocacy for Children With Disabilities*. The project aims to build upon the knowledge and capacity of Liliane Foundation[1] and its global partners in the field of advocacy for children with disabilities in two countries: Cameroon and Sierra Leone[2]. Over a four-year period, several Masters' students will conduct research to help foster a greater understanding of the various factors that determine the success of grassroots advocacy work for children and young people with disabilities. OFP is a strategic partner organisation of Liliane Foundation in Sierra Leone.

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[1] Liliane Foundation is a Dutch NGO founded in 1980 to support children and young people with disabilities in developing countries.
[2] Two Masters students have already completed their fieldwork in Cameroon.

Civil society organisations are becoming increasingly concerned with advocacy activities to address the injustices of social exclusion by targeting power-holders to enact or enforce policies relating to disability issues. However, the conditions under which advocacy is most effective in developing contexts remain poorly understood. It remains unclear why some advocacy efforts are highly successful in achieving their aims whereas others are not, and why some grassroots advocacy efforts have managed to achieve considerable change with very few resources, whilst well-funded groups have not had the same levels of achievements.

There is broad consensus among scholars working in the disciplines of social movements and children and youth studies, that a number of factors contribute to achieving effective outcomes from advocacy by civil society actors. Two of these factors are framing and centralising the voices of those most affected by rights violations. It is these two factors that are the main focus of my research. Although many different factors have been identified as causal factors for the outcomes of advocacy, including strategy, power-holders, organisational capacity and the political setting, an investigation into framing is particularly relevant in the context of Sierra Leone where prevailing societal beliefs around disability are partly the reason for the lack of public support and political will to enforce disability laws and policies. This is strongly related to the emphasis on social construction and cultural resonance in framing theory. I intend to analyse the framing of girls with disabilities within the GPP, and to locate their voices in the advocacy activities. Hence, the central research question is:

How have the advocacy strategies and outcomes of the *Girl Power* Programme for girls with disabilities been shaped by the framing of these girls and the foregrounding of their voices?

The sub-research questions are broken down as follows:

1. What activities did OFP undertake in their implementation of the GPP?

2. How were girls with disabilities and their rights framed in the activities of the GPP?

3. How and to what extent were the voices of girls with disabilities foregrounded in the GPP?

4. What outcomes did the GPP achieve for girls with disabilities?

5. How did the framing of girls with disabilities enable and/or constrain the outcomes the GPP achieved for those girls?

6. How did the placement of the voices of girls with disabilities enable and/or constrain the outcomes the GPP achieved for those girls?

To answer the above questions, I ground this multidisciplinary inquiry across three fields of academia: Social movement theory, Children and Youth studies and development practice evaluation. To study OFP's framing processes, I turn to the work of Snow and Benford (1988), Gamson (2007) and Benford

and Snow (2000). To help establish a causal relation between this framing and the outcomes, I refer to a model of frame resonance designed by Noakes and Johnston (2005). Fletcher (2016)'s Rubric of Youth Voice, adapted from Hart's (1992) Ladder of Participation, allows me to measure the extent to which the voices of girls with disabilities were foregrounded in the GPP and to what effect. Finally, to assess the outcomes of the GPP for girls with disabilities, I used a guide developed by Reisman et al. (2007). These frameworks will be discussed in Chapter Two and Chapter Three.

In this paper, I have a dual focus. Firstly, I intend to examine whether the GPP achieved outcomes that benefitted the girls with disabilities who took part. Secondly, I will move to the larger inquiry of whether the GPP has contributed to the advancement of disability rights, and to what extent the mainstreaming approach has potential for disability advocacy more broadly. At both levels, the analysis will pay particular attention to the role of framing and foregrounding voices, and how these factors affect the outcomes of the GPP.

This paper is organised thematically, into five parts. Chapter Two sets the scene for this case study, introducing *One Family People*, the *Girl Power* Programme, and the strategies they implemented to mainstream girls with disabilities in the project's activities. This chapter also examines the way these girls and their rights were framed and how their voices were presented. Chapter Three assesses the multiple outcomes of the GPP for girls with disabilities, both intended and unintended, and analyses how the framing of disability issues and the location of the girls' voices influenced the advocacy outcomes. Chapter Four looks at the viability of the mainstreaming approach in relation to the wider goal of advancing the rights of girls with disabilities. This chapter highlights the long-term limitations to mainstreaming in this way, and suggests how more can be done or what might be done differently in mainstreaming. Chapter Five concludes on the successes and constraints of mainstreaming girls with disabilities in the GPP and reflects upon the lessons from this experience, advocating for more transformative and diverse forms of disability mainstreaming in future.

This data was collected over a fieldwork period of nine weeks in Sierra Leone from June to August 2016, using a multi-modal approach of three main qualitative methods: semi-structured interviews and focus groups, participatory photo-voice research and ethnographic observations. In total, I conducted 28 in-depth interviews and 11 focus group discussions, in Freetown, the surrounding Western Area communities and Moyamba, with members of OFP staff, government personnel, civil society organisations and participants of the GPP in the communities: V-Girls, V-Boys, MLPUs, MSGs and Paramount Chiefs. Of the 113 research participants, 21 were girls with disabilities that took part in the GPP as members of the V-Girls. Of these, 16 have physical disabilities and 5 have speech and hearing impairments. Some of the girls were included in focus group discussions with other girls in their community, and other times I engaged them in a one-on-one interview. Girls with visual impairments also participated in the GPP, but heavy rains prevented me from travelling to the blind school, so I did not meet any girls with visual impairments, and as such, my sample of girls with disabilities was skewed.

At the initial stage of the process, I discussed my intentions with OFP who provided a list of potential interviewees. This gave me access to research participants at the highest levels and in the most remote areas whom I would not otherwise have had the ability to contact. Yet, participant selection by the NGO whose activities I was there to evaluate carried a risk of biased or purposive sampling. Nonetheless, each interview produced more threads and more contacts, so ultimately, the names given to me by OFP were merely a starting point from which to launch my inquiry.

The GPP was launched in January 2011 and reached its conclusion in December 2015, but was significantly disrupted by the Ebola outbreak in mid-2014. At this time, the government declared a state of emergency and imposed heavy restrictions on travelling and public gatherings that lasted for one year. All GPP funding was channelled to Ebola emergency relief and OFP turned their focus to the distribution of supplies to isolated communities around the country. At the time of my fieldwork in mid-2016, the project had been officially dormant for six months but virtually dormant for much longer. While this offered the opportunity to reflect upon the whole programme from its inception to termination, and to examine its sustainability since ending, there were significant methodological implications researching a programme that was last in full operation two years prior to my arrival. Many participating girls with disabilities had lost contact with OFP, so I was unable to reach them.

Sierra Leone is a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual state. While Krio is the most widely spoken language, English is the official language and is spoken by over 80 per cent of the population, including all of my participants, allowing me to forgo the assistance of a translator (Crystal 2003), except during my focus group discussions with the V-Girls and V-Boys with speech and hearing impairments, when I hired a sign language interpreter. However, I found it problematic to facilitate an open dialogue, because every comment needed to be filtered through the translator. Not only did this cause a significant delay in the conversation, it also risked an alteration in meaning which is ultimately the basis of qualitative research (Temple and Young 2004, Van Nes et al. 2010). Yet despite the challenges during our discussion, it was clear these young people have many important things to say, but are rarely listened to.

Academics in the field of children and youth studies emphasise the importance of giving children and young people a voice in the research process (James 2007, Roberts 2000). Yet these young people are literally voiceless because they do not use speech as their primary mode of communication. Ashby (2011) discusses the methodological meanings of giving research participants a "voice", and suggests that the definition of voice is not limited to that which is articulated, but can also be observed and experienced. I decided to loan a digital camera to five of them so as to use photography as a way to answer the questions: "What is it like to be a young person in Sierra Leone? What do you enjoy? What are the challenges?". I hoped that the camera would provide a more direct way of communication in a medium other than language. Academics such as Kong et al. (2015) point to photography as a way of generating knowledge, and this participatory photo-voice project gave me, a foreigner without a disability, a greater comprehension of their local realities and helped inform my understanding about the issues disability advocacy efforts need to

address. Through the photo-voice project, I hoped to treat the young people with disabilities less as subjects of research and more as social actors in a participatory process that explores their lives (Wickenden and Kembhavi-Tam 2014, Woodhead and Faulkner 2000). Since I wish also to bring the voices of girls with speech and hearing impairments into this paper, the three girls chose some of their favourite photographs they took, which are reproduced at the beginning of each chapter, with their consent. Participatory research techniques are "contingent on authentic participation" with a full discussion of one's intentions and explanations behind that which they have produced (McTaggart 1989). To prevent possible loss in their intended meaning that may occur with the intervention of an interpreter, the girls sent descriptions of their photographs via social media instant messaging, and these quotes are underneath each photograph.

Coming to terms with my positionality is something I have had to actively negotiate throughout this research process, particularly given the multiple interests with a stake in this project. Like many social science researchers conducting fieldwork research, I face a "dual imperative" in that my research should be both policy relevant and constructive for the NGO, as well as objective and academically sound (Jacobsen and Landau 2003). During the fieldwork, I tried to operate as independently as possible, which sometimes caused discomfort with the NGO, whose endless generosity meant they had a tendency to look after me as if I were a guest. This behaviour is typical of the culture of Sierra Leone, a country known for its friendly people and warm hospitality, but I also suspected it was related to the fact I was the first researcher sent on behalf of their major donor, and that my findings would feed back to that donor.

Those who call into question my neutrality, given that I was provided with accommodation and office space from OFP, raise a legitimate concern. However, I felt that such intimacy was a trade-off, as it allowed me to develop deeper layers of understanding and build relationships of trust with the staff and the girls. As a white, British, middle-class female in my late-twenties living in the centre of Freetown, it was initially difficult to integrate in a way that was necessary for learning and adapting to the beliefs and behaviours of Sierra Leone. Living, eating and socialising with the girls significantly reduced my sense of outsider status and helped facilitate access to first-hand knowledge of the culture, hopefully lending greater authority to my research (Reed-Danahay 1997).

Before I arrived, I intended to restrict my role to one of a detached observant, but I realised from the outset that this was effectively impossible and the more I built friendships, the more emotionally implicated I became in the real-world "messiness" of my research. My presence alone had many ethical implications that I needed to navigate in my desire to "do no harm". Stacey (1988) discusses the irony that, while ethnographic methods allow for more reciprocal, empathetic and egalitarian relationships with participants than positivist methods, participants are also subjected to a greater risk of betrayal, exploitation and abandonment. Because of the limited actions of the state, and the charitable interventions of OFP and other NGOs, some people with disabilities have tendencies to seek financial assistance, hence I was occasionally

perceived as a source of money, and was asked to buy medicines, school-books, and other items from time to time. This perception of me was also evident in some of the interviews, where there was sometimes a belief that I was working with OFP to examine into which areas they needed to invest their resources, or that I was working with Liliane Fonds to evaluate OFP's eligibility for continued funding. This might have influenced some participants to over-emphasise the problems they face or over-emphasise OFP's achievements. I tried my best to manage people's expectations, clarify the objective of my research and explain the benefits of the study (Wessells 2009). At the end of this research process, this paper will be sent to the organisation and the donor as part of the learning trajectory.

TWO

Introducing *One Family People* and the *Girl Power* Programme

Photograph 2

"I took this photo at the *One Family* office. We do dance practice on Mondays."

One Family People was established in 2008. The idea was born from a collaboration between Edward "Eddy" Emmanuel and Hadiatou "Hady" Diallo, who had both recently moved to Freetown and were appalled to see the devastating conditions experienced by people with disabilities. In Sierra Leone, large numbers of these people live together in self-styled cooperatives in abandoned or derelict dilapidated ramshackle buildings, where the living and sleeping arrangements are so meagre that before visiting one of the locations, I was warned by one of the OFP staff, "Hold your tears, Emma". It was in one such disability commune on Walpole Street in central Freetown that Eddy and Hady lived for a year during their early days. In addition to buying food for everyone, they also brought their shared love of music and dancing, creating a musical group of people with disabilities, 'The Walpoleans'. "It was the best year of my life", says Hady, and it was also the start of a long-lasting relationship of love and trust from the disability community. Eddy and Hady later moved to an office and launched themselves as a grassroots organisation with the mission statement, "Breaking Barriers for Disability", with Eddy as the director and Hady as the Senior Programme Manager. In mid-2016, OFP employed eight additional members of staff, two of whom have physical disabilities: "We try to recruit people with disabilities among the staff in the organisation, we like to lead by example". In addition to full-time paid employees, OFP recruited two part-time staff to help implement the GPP in the district of Moyamba, and they can also rely on support from volunteers in the communities whenever they need assistance.

The work of OFP can broadly be divided into two categories: in depth day-to-day social work for people with disabilities at the grassroots level, and wider-reaching long-term advocacy outreach projects at the district level. Their social work mainly involves responding to needs and emergencies as they arise and can be anything from taking an individual to hospital for a healthcare emergency, providing money for food, rent and school fees and referring individuals to wheelchair suppliers, to singing and dance training for The Walpoleans', advising civil society groups on courses of action and lobbying the government for specific issues on behalf of their target group: "*One Family People* talk for we", said a man with a disability at a housing commune. At the same time, OFP are involved in the planning and implementation of several large-scale advocacy projects across the country, including the GPP, and this is where the majority of the organisation's funding comes from.

As this paper focuses exclusively on the GPP, an exploration of OFP's numerous disability advocacy activities not related to the GPP lies outside its scope. However, these activities could be the subject of a future study for worthwhile investigation.

The number and extent of activities OFP engage in on an ongoing basis often strains the capacity of their limited manpower. Like many grassroots organisations in the global South, OFP suffer from resource constraints, because all their money goes down to the ground. As one member of staff said, "You don't work with OFP for the money, you do it for the passion". Hady and Eddy work long hours into the evenings and weekends, and are frequently required to respond to phonecalls in the middle of the night. Partnerships with donors have brought new opportunities, specialised training and increased

overseas networks, but these donors also require submission of written evaluation reports according to deadlines, and such administrative tasks can be challenging. Their busy schedules and lack of available time mean that events are often planned at the last minute, and the resulting confusion and disorganisation took some time for me to adjust to.

The more I came to know *One Family People*, the more I realised how appropriate their name is: the organisation is like one big family. Their modestly sized office on Main Motor Road is always full of people and the sounds of singing, music and dancing. The staff have close personal contact at the grassroots level and a vast amount of local knowledge, and I was impressed to see they knew all the names of the thousands of young people they worked with in the communities. The affection towards them came across very strongly during the research process. One government minister told me that OFP "are very close to my heart", and a mother in Calaba Town shared similar sentiments:

> Some NGOs are coming, they talk talk talk, but they cannot do anything. But *One Family People*, when they come here, they speak to us, they encourage us, and whatever they say, they do it.

Their target constituency, people with disabilities, are arguably the most vulnerable demographic in the country and are frequently dismissed by figures in authority, and for this reason the gratitude and appreciation felt for OFP is all the more strong, because for many people, they were the first organisation to show them care and respect. Having spent their lives being pushed to the margins, the disability community in Freetown sporadically engage in outbursts of aggression, rioting and arson. One particular incident became so violent that even the President was called to intervene, but the only person able to calm the situation was Eddy, whose arrival was greeted by the group exclaiming, "*we boss don come*" [our boss is here]. Eddy, a former rap star, is a minor celebrity in Freetown, known by many for his energy, warmth and motivational spirit encouraging people with disabilities that they can achieve their dreams. Both he and Hady learned sign language to communicate with people with speech and hearing impairments.

In 2011, OFP initiated the *Girl Power* Programme, a five-year advocacy project designed to increase the protection of girls against sexual violence, early marriage and teenage pregnancy, and to improve their economic and educational opportunities. Table 1 presents an overview of the GPP, and OFP's target audiences, project locations and activities on the programme. Like most West African countries, Sierra Leone has patriarchal cultural roots that dominate both the private and public sphere. Significant gender inequalities exist in society due to entrenched discriminatory socio-cultural norms and values. Girls and young women have higher rates of illiteracy and fewer economic opportunities. In remote areas, women marry at an average age of 15.5 years, having been initiated into the *Bundu* secret society (Schroven 2006). Sexual violence was widely used as a weapon during the civil war, and this practice continued into the fragile post-conflict climate, because the lack of legislative and regulatory structures fostered a culture of impunity (ibid.). The residents of Dwazark, a community on the outskirts of Freetown with a population of approximately 5,000 inhabitants, recalled that there were two or three cases of rape per day

Table 1
Overview of the *Girl Power* Programme
Source: Child Rights Alliance (2013)

Overview
- Wide-reaching advocacy programme intending to reach large numbers of girls
- Project developed by The Child Rights Alliance, a coalition of 7 Dutch organisations including Plan Netherlands and Defence for Children International (DCI)
- Total budget of €52 million from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Operated from January 2011 until December 2015
- Active in 10 countries across Africa, Asia and Latin America

Levels
- ○ Individual Level
- ○ Socio-Cultural Level
- ○ Institutional Level
- ○ Civil Society Level

Four Thematic Areas
- Protection Against Violence
- Socio-political Participation
- Economic Participation
- Post-Primary Education

Goals
- ❖ Reduction of violence and increased protection for girls and young women
- ❖ Increased skills and awareness of rights for girls and young women
- ❖ Strengthened community-based protection mechanisms
- ❖ Increased awareness of communities & CSOs on the rights of girls & young women
- ❖ Increased access to post primary education for girls and young women

One Family People focused on 2 areas: Protection against violence and Post-Primary Education

Sierra Leone
➢ GPP implemented by a coalition of 9 local NGOs led by Plan Sierra Leone
➢ Each organisation partnered with a Dutch organisation in the Child Rights Alliance
➢ Active in 2 Districts: Western Area and Moyamba District (highlighted in adjacent map)
➢ Implemented in 51 communities, with different NGOs responsible for different communities

OFP
➢ Worked in partnership with International Child Development Initiatives (ICDI)
➢ Implemented the project in 13 communities in the Western Area and Moyamba Districts
➢ Received approximately €60,000-70,000 per year over the five-year span

OFP's Target Locations on the GPP
Source: Google Maps (2016)

Western Area
A - Congo Cross
B - Ecowas Street
C - Dwarzark
D - Kissy Shell
E - House of Jesus
F - Grafton
G - Calaba Town
H - Hastings

Moyamba
I - Sembehun
J - Moyamba Town
K - Moyamba Junction
L - Bailargo
M - Taiama

Targets
- 2,704 Girls and Young women aged 10-25 years directly targeted
- 1,000 parents and community leaders
- Approximately 100,000 Girls and Young indirectly targeted through media messages
- 8 government institutions including the Judiciary, Family Support Unit (FSU) and Human Rights Commission
- 8 CSOs in Western Area and Moyamba District including the Child Welfare committee

Community Initiatives
V-Girls ('Victory' Girls) – Extra-curricular life-skills training groups for girls and young women, providing an experience-sharing self-help platform and a forum to discuss the laws and rights of girls to protection
Football, Music, Dance & Drama Clubs for Girls
V-Boys ('Victory' Boys) – Groups for boys to learn about the laws around gender-based violence
MLPUs (Mothers-Led Protection Units) – Community-based structure of mothers and women to provide 24 hourly support for girls at risk of abuse
MSGs (Men's Support Group) – Discussion group for men in the community to support girls' rights
Gold Champions Programme – Intensive 10-month after-school training programme for girls to build their leadership skills and train them to teach other V-Girls
U and the Police – Community meetings with police representatives to learn about sexual violence laws
SPN (Service Providers' Network) – Civil society organisation created to support the protection of girls
Vocational Skills Training – Teaching girls skills such as hairdressing and clothes-making
Dignity Market – Micro-finance services for girls to earn money selling in their communities

Activities (including, but not limited to)
Forum Theatre – Dramatic performances in the communities to raise awareness of issues around sexual violence and early marriage
One Billion Rising for Justice Campaign – Annual march to protest violence against women
Men Caring Campaign – Men's campaign to support the idea of the economic and educational empowerment of girls and women

Lobbying and Advocacy
Dialogue meetings between civil society and government stakeholders
Engaging policy-makers and inviting them to events, to call for better implementation of policies and laws for the protection of girls
Training and support for CSOs to work more effectively to promote girls' rights
Bridge-building initiatives between communities and the FSU (Family Support Unit) division of the police
Capacity-building of government professionals about the laws against sexual violence

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before the implementation of the GPP. Perpetrators are often family members or neighbours, and in such cases, families may respond by giving their daughter to the abuser: "*You don virginate mi pickin, you don tek im*" [you have taken my child's virginity, so now she belongs to you]. A strong stigma exists around incidences of abuse, meaning that victims are often shamed into silence. According to an employee at one of the co-implementing partner organisations, the GPP was the "right intervention at the right time".

It might not be immediately obvious why an organisation whose focus is disability became involved in a project on gender. One of OFP's justifications for taking on the GPP is that girls with disabilities are at higher risk from sexual violence and tend to have higher rates of teenage pregnancy and lower levels of education and economic opportunities compared to their peers without disabilities. Many feminists have conceptualised how women experience disability in different ways on the grounds of their gender (Abu-Habib 1997, Boylan 1991, Wendell 1996). A number of studies have identified a connection between disability and sexual and physical abuse (Alriksson-Schmidt et al. 2010, Mays 2006, Waxman 1991). A V-Girl with a disability in her early twenties explained, "Some men think, since this person is a disabled, she will not be able to fight me. So they just come in and go away". Another girl lamented that her disability is a deterrent for emotional closeness, but not for physical closeness: "They don't want to marry us, but they want to lie down with us". By joining the GPP, OFP acknowledged the gendered nature of disability, and aim to address these issues that disproportionately affect girls with disabilities.

However, there was another, more practical justification for their involvement on the GPP. In OFP's early years, they were suffering from a lack of sustainable funding, so Hady contacted numerous European organisations for support. A Dutch child-rights NGO, ICDI, responded, offering to partner with OFP to implement the GPP:

> In 2009, we were driven by funding, not our focus…So if they [foreign donors] say, "There's a call for proposals on agriculture", we would apply, whether it's in line with our target group or not! [*Laughs*] When they say "education", we would go! When they say "women's programmes", or a call for a proposal on women, that has nothing to do with disability, we still go and find a way to link it to disability so that we can have the funding and support our group!

The application of social movement theory on the advocacy activities of NGOs in developing countries, has been critiqued by some authors, who claim that levels of strategic sophistication found in the West are often absent among organisations

> existing on the margins of survival…it is often merely a question of political opportunity, driven by desperation that leads to collective action rather than a conscious framing of options.
>
> (Thompson and Tapscott 2010: 14)

While certain elements of this statement reflect the situation for OFP, I also find it to be somewhat condescending, as it appears to overlook the agency of such NGOs. I am more inclined to agree with Ellis and van Kessel, who argue:

> Although donor dependency obviously has an effect on the form assumed by social movements in Africa, it would be a fundamental mistake to see these movements as no more than an extension of Western NGOs. Even when Africans are in receipt of funds, they are not passive...[they have] learned how to play the system to their own advantage.
>
> (Ellis and van Kessel 2009: 5)

Beneath their disorganisation and struggles to submit reports to deadlines stands a well-established and well-versed organisation whose achievements over its eight-year existence exceed the work of some larger and better-resourced counterparts. Much of this credit goes to Hady, a highly astute individual, whose shrewd ability to spot opportunities has helped drive OFP to where they are today. Gender empowerment projects are currently a popular choice for development investment in Sierra Leone, and in the absence of available funding for disability advocacy projects, OFP identified an opportunity to bring disability inclusion and awareness aboard the gender movement. In addition to the project's primary objective to increase girls' protection and empowerment, OFP had their own intention: "Our goal on *Girl Power* was to make sure that girls with disabilities are not left behind".

OFP decided to "mainstream" disability in the GPP. There are many different interpretations of disability mainstreaming and considerable variations in how it looks in practice (Smyth 1999). The formal definition of disability mainstreaming, adapted from the ECOSOC definition of gender mainstreaming, is:

> the process of assessing the implications for disabled people of any planned action, including legislation, policies and programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making disabled people's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that disabled people benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve disability equality.
>
> (Albert et al. 2005: 6)

The past two decades have seen increasing calls for disability mainstreaming to feature in all development aid, policy and programming and in the global sustainable development goals, and this approach was reiterated with the introduction of the UNCRPD (Chataika et al. 2015). The idea behind mainstreaming is to avoid channelling aid to specialised disability programmes left to peripheral backwaters of development programming, which can "ghettoise people with disabilities", and instead pay serious attention to disability concerns in centralised institutions (McClain-Nhlapo 2010: 123).

When I started investigating OFP's work on the GPP, I was fairly underwhelmed to hear that their goal for girls with disabilities was simply their inclu-

sion. Why wouldn't these girls be included? Where I come from, exclusion can result in prosecution for discrimination. However, as I struggled to remove my Western lens and learned more about the context, I came to see that this seemingly modest goal of disability inclusion was actually the opposite: it was extremely ambitious. As Chabal and Daloz suggest in their seminal text, *Africa Works*, the institutionalised separation of traditional religious beliefs and temporal practices which characterises the Western political order to which I am accustomed, is absent in Africa, where "political behaviour is affected by religious beliefs which have overwhelming cultural weight" (1999: 65). These beliefs have resulted in a very deliberate and systematic exclusion of people with disabilities in all arenas of public and private life. Global development institutions frequently attach specific provisions for people with disabilities when channelling aid into the country, but this aid is regularly diverted away from this group upon receipt. People with disabilities are actively ostracised and discouraged from taking part in forums that are open to others, as described by a man with a disability in Kissy Shell:

> We are never invited to meetings. Even if you force your way into community meetings, people shout at us and tell us to go away! They say we were not invited!

One member of a DPO claimed that many of the most prominent and prestigious advocacy groups in Sierra Leone have a frequent tendency to overlook people with disabilities in their activities:

> Those women's groups that talk about gender issues, they discriminate against women with disabilities. Same with children; there are a lot of organisations who work on children's issues, but when it comes to children with disabilities, it's a different story altogether!

The discrimination is so strong that it even extends into institutions that exist for the specific purposes of disability care. A representative from a well-known international charity that runs schools for children with disabilities told me that they recently decided to bring children without disabilities into their schools to facilitate an inclusive learning environment, but some teachers started to ignore and mistreat the children with disabilities to concentrate only on the other children.

This illustrates an atmosphere in which disability inclusion is persistently and intentionally avoided. Indeed, OFP initially faced resistance from the co-implementing partners on the GPP to include disability in the programme, and they needed to continuously push against the objections that "it's too much to include disability". Despite these obstacles, OFP embarked on a pro-active form of mainstreaming and explicitly targeted girls with disabilities to take part in the programme. Out of the 2,704 girls taking part over the project's five-year timespan, 475 were girls with disabilities, or 17 per cent of the total number of participants, approximately in line with the more accurate estimation of the proportion of people with disabilities in the country (WHO and World Bank 2011). As explained by one staff member of OFP, "We make sure we implement the *Girl Power* but we put more weight on disability because that's our core!". OFP included girls and people with disabilities at the design, implementation and evaluation stages of this project. They discussed disability at every

meeting with the GPP partner organisations. When choosing communities in which to implement the project, OFP deliberately chose communities with high rates of people with disabilities or ones that have associations with disability groups. When they entered the communities, they located girls with disabilities and actively encouraged them to take part in the GPP by becoming V-Girls, effectively extracting them from their metaphorical hiding places. They spoke with the families of girls with disabilities to emphasise the importance of education for their daughters. In addition, they invited boys with disabilities to join the V-Boys, women with disabilities to join the MLPUs and men with disabilities to join the MSGs. They ensured that participants with disabilities were involved at every event, demonstration and performance, and they always consider practical issues like building accessibility and the need for a sign language interpreter every time they host a function. At every opportunity, girls with disabilities were given the floor to speak out in support of the need for girls' protection and empowerment, acting as project ambassadors for the GPP. Disability advocacy in Sierra Leone tends to foreground the voices of "professionals and educated disabled men with particular types of physical impairments" (Chataika et al. 2015: 193), however on the GPP, the focus was on the most excluded category of people with disabilities: girls and young women.

Throughout the GPP, all girls, including the girls with disabilities, have been framed by OFP as vocal and active rights-holders. Framing is essentially a strategy of communication, a way of presenting a problem or a cause in order to raise or change awareness of an issue. The process of framing has been identified by many academics in the field of social movements as one way of increasing the effectiveness of advocacy efforts (Goffman 1974, Snow 2007, Zald 1996). Frames are "embedded within social constructionist processes that involve thinking and reasoning by the parties involved" (Snow and Benford 2000: 57). Consequently, activism has the greatest chance of success when its messages are framed in alignment with core social values, goals and cultural beliefs in order to gain maximum possible support from allies and bystanders, and to demobilise adversaries (Snow et al. 1986). The procedures involved in framing have been conceptualised by a number of academics including Benford and Snow (2000), Gamson (2007) and Snow and Benford (1988), as shown in Table 2. This table formed the basis of my examination into OFP's framing of girls with disabilities in the GPP.

Analyses of framing in advocacy may take place at both ends, at the input stage and at the output stage. In order to establish a linkage between the processes of framing and the outcomes of the GPP, I need to look how this framing was received by audiences, and for this I refer to the concept of frame resonance. The greater the projected frames synchronise or "resonate" with social norms, the greater the potential for effective advocacy outcomes. Noakes and Johnston (2005) formulate a concrete interpretation of the preconditions for a frame's resonance, illustrated in Table 3, which is suitable for determining how the portrayal of girls with disabilities in the GPP impacted the outcomes.

Scholars of Children and Youth studies assert that childhood and youth are social constructions located in a particular time and place, and this strongly influences how children and young people are framed (Ansell 2005, Montgomery 2003). Young people in Africa have mostly been framed either as violent,

Table 2

Operational Processes of Framing

Sources: Snow and Benford 1988, Gamson 2007,

Benford and Snow 2000

Frame Construction
1. *Diagnostic Framing*: Involves identification of a problem and the attribution of blame or causality, like a medical diagnosis
2. *Prognostic Framing*: Suggests particular strategies and tactics as solutions to the problem
3. *Motivational Framing*: Attempts to provide constituents with a reason to join collective action
Frame Content
1. *Identity Component*: Identifies an aggrieved group with shared interests and values; the "we" and "them"
2. *Agency Component*: Recognises that the grievous conditions defining the "we" and the "them" can be changed, encouraging the "we" to change their own destiny
3. *Injustice Component*: Places the blame for grievances on the individuals or institutions – the "them" – and encourages members of the "we" to respond
Frame Communication
1. *Articulation*: Effectively connecting and aligning events so they hang together in a relatively unified and compelling fashion
2. *Amplification*: Highlighting or accenting various issues, events or beliefs from the broader interpretive sweep on the movement

Table 3

Variables Affecting a Frame's Resonance

Source: Noakes and Johnston (2005)

Adapted from Snow and Benford (1992), Snow et al. (1986) and

Noakes and Johnston (2005)

Makers of a frame—movement entrepreneurs	Receivers of a frame—the target audience	Frame qualities—a frame schema's contents[a]
• **Credibility of the promoters**—their organizational and professional credentials and expertise • **Charismatic authority**—rare and unique personal qualities of a movement leader • Stategic/marketing orientation (or cynicism)[b]	• Ideological orientations (the target of **frame bridging**) • Demographic, attitudinal, moral orientations (the intent of **frame extension** and **frame transformation**)	• Cultural compatibility—the frame's valuational **centrality**, its **narrative fidelity**, and slogans (**amplification**) • **Frame consistency**, do its components synchronize? • Relevance—including **empirical credibility** and **experiential commensurability**

troubled, militarised youth or as vulnerable, apolitical, dependent victims (Cheney 2010, Comaroff and Comaroff 2005, Ensor 2012). The GPP was a determined shift away from this. Girls were presented not as silent "human becomings" but as vocal rights-holders and active "human beings" (Qvortrup 1994). This framing was clearly articulated and communicated throughout the GPP, at the workshops, in the life-skills groups and at the many events and campaigns facilitated by OFP. Girls with disabilities were placed centre-stage and shown in a new light towards their peers and to a variety of different power-holders, stakeholders and audiences, who may never have seen girls with disabilities in this way before. For the first time, they were framed not as incompetent objects of pity, but as subjects in their own right.

Within all the activities of the GPP, OFP deliberately framed girls with disabilities as "the same as" girls without disabilities, as reasoned by one staff member of OFP:

> We try not to separate them. We don't like to label them in that way. If we attach the word 'disability' in their minds, it can also affect people in their minds [*Facial expression turns negative*]. So we try to ignore these things. Because people are just people. But when they hear "disability", it brings laziness, it makes them hopeless and they can give up quickly.

OFP made consistent efforts to integrate girls with disabilities in such a way that they engage in discussions and performances on issues of female empowerment in the same way as the other girls.

The rights of girls with disabilities have been framed as women's rights and sexual and reproductive health rights. Framing disability rights this way has provided the chance to create leverage for the disability cause within the trend of gender advocacy, exemplifying what Noakes and Johnston (2005) claim is strategic marketing orientation, one of the key signs of frame resonance.

Throughout the programme, OFP deliberately encouraged the input of girls with disabilities in the GPP. Development interventions have a long history of presuming the needs and "ventriloquising" the voices of marginalised groups whose lives they are intended to benefit, with little or no consultation (Cornwall 2012, Escobar 2012). Many scholars have empirically assessed the factors for effective social justice advocacy, maintaining the more these voices are foregrounded in an ethical, authentic and undirected manner, the more successful and legitimate the advocacy efforts (Klugman 2011, Rand and Watson 2007). An employee at OFP agreed with this view:

> The big difference between us and the other organisations are that we are really connected with the people in the communities. Advocacy can only work if you have the kind of close relationship like we have and you work in partnership with them. Otherwise you cannot do it, the communities will not accept you. And I don't think the government will take you seriously.

In order to measure the extent to which the voices of girls with disabilities have been foregrounded in the GPP, I applied Fletcher's (2016) Rubric of

Youth Voice (Table 4), based on Hart's (1992) 'Ladder of Participation'. I examined how the voices of girls with disabilities are located within the GPP activities in relation to the Rubric. Once their voices were located, I was able to establish a causal relationship between the place of their voices and the outcomes, on the assumption that the greater the foregrounding of their voices, the more effective the outcomes of the GPP for girls with disabilities.

Of all the organisations I encountered in Sierra Leone, OFP were the most child-friendly. Every day the office was filled with children and young people. I found it difficult finding time to talk with senior members of staff because they were frequently in meetings with the child representatives of the Kids Advocacy Network and Children's Forum Network discussing collaborative projects working as equal partners. These girls and boys have close relationships with "Aunty Hady":

> We discuss so many things, she plays with us, she jokes with us. She has an open-door policy. If we want to talk with UNICEF or Save the Children, we need to make an appointment and it can take two, three weeks for them to contact us. But she is always there to listen, even if we call at night.

Their close and informal manner of interaction with young people was especially impressive given the socio-cultural context in which children tend to be "silenced and rendered invisible by the attitudes and practices of adult society" (Ansell 2005: 225). Despite the fact that children and young people under the age of 24 account for over 60 per cent of the country's population (CIA 2014), there is a pervasive perception in Sierra Leone that they have no place in the decision-making process, as suggested in this adage: "*Pickin ge rights fo tok, but wetin I tok no means say ni in fo be*" [Children can speak, but it does not mean what they say is right]. Many young people I met expressed frustration at being excluded from different realms of public life and policy-making, and their powerlessness to make their voices heard, given cultural norms that discourage young people from talking openly to their elders. This sense of marginalisation is intensified among girls with disabilities because of their gender and their disability. Callus and Farrugia (2016) note that the disability movement has privileged adults' voices while side-lining the voices of children with disabilities, on the presumption that all people with disabilities want the same things, regardless of age.

OFP actively invited girls to speak out to advocate for the protection of girls against sexual violence, teenage pregnancy and early marriage. They shone a spotlight on these girls, encouraging them to talk in front of large audiences, and by doing this, they aimed to empower girls with disabilities to stand up for their rights and reject their conceptualisation as passive and voiceless victims.

It was impressive to see the girls themselves play such a strong leading role in the project in line with the top levels of Fletcher's (2016) Rubric of Youth Voice. However, the space that has been created to accommodate the voices of girls with disabilities is for gender issues, not disability, because the GPP is a gender project. Many girls with disabilities claimed that, while sexual health and reproductive rights are certainly important topics for awareness-raising, they feel there are more pressing matters related to their disability, in-

Table 4
Rubric of Youth Voice
Source: Fletcher (2016)
Adapted from Roger Hart's (1992) Ladder of Participation

	THE WAYS YOUNG PEOPLE ARE ENGAGED	CHALLENGE	REWARD
ENGAGEMENT	8. Youth/Adult Equity. All youth, young adults and older adults are recognized for their impact and ownership of the outcomes.	This is an exceptional relationship in communities that requires conscious commitment by all participants. Deliberately addresses barriers and constantly ensures shared outcomes.	Creates structures that establish and support safe, supportive, effective and sustainable environments for engagement, and ultimately recreates the climate and culture of organizations and communities.
ENGAGEMENT	7. Completely Youth-Driven Action. These activities do not include adults in positions of authority; rather, adults are there in secondary roles to support young people.	Young people may operate in a vacuum, often without the recognition of their impact on the larger community. Activities driven by youth and young adults may not be seen by older adults with deserved validity.	Developing complete ownership in communities allows young people to effectively drive community engagement. Young people experience the outcomes of their direct actions on themselves, their peers and the larger community.
ENGAGEMENT	6. Youth/Adult Equality. This is a 50/50 split of responsibilities, authority, obligation and commitment.	There isn't recognition for the specific developmental needs or representation opportunities for young people. Without receiving that recognition, young people may lose interest and become disengaged.	Young people can substantially transform adults' opinions, ideas and actions.
PARTIAL ENGAGEMENT	5. Youth-Consulted. Adults actively consult young people while they're involved.	Young people have only the authority that older adults grant them, and their engagement is subject to external approval.	Young people can substantially transform adults' opinions, ideas and actions.
PARTIAL ENGAGEMENT	4. Youth-Informed. Young people inform adults.	Adults do not have to let young people impact their decisions.	Young people *may* influence adult-driven decisions or activities.
NON-ENGAGEMENT	3. Tokenism. Adults assign young people only token roles.	Youth and young adults are used inconsequentially by adults to reinforce the perception that young people are engaged.	Validates youth and young adults attending events without requiring effort beyond that.
NON-ENGAGEMENT	2. Decoration. Adults use young people to decorate their activities.	The presence of young people is treated as all that is necessary without reinforcing active engagement.	Attendance by youth and young adults is a tangible outcome that may demonstrate consideration for engaging young people.
NON-ENGAGEMENT	1. Manipulation. Adults manipulate young people.	Young people are forced to attend without regard to their interest.	Adults experience involving young people and gain rationale for continuing activities.

cluding housing, healthcare and transportation, that they have not necessarily been able to voice in the GPP, because the objectives of the project are directed to girls' rights. In this sense, it could be said that the girls exercise a form of constrained agency to articulate their voices in the GPP (Okwany 2008). A more critical look at the girls' role in the programme in relation to the Rubric suggests a degree of tokenism, defined by Hart as:

> instances in which children are apparently given a voice, but in fact have little or no choice about the subject or the style of communicating it.
>
> (Hart 1992: 9)

Debates in Children and Youth Studies over the past half century have moved from calls to allow children and young people to take part, towards pleas for the opening of new conceptual spaces where young people can actively voice to policy-makers their genuine needs and concerns (Lansdown 2005, Martin et al. 2015, Qvortrup 1997). While the GPP represents a significant milestone by welcoming girls with disabilities to participate, there is potential to go even further by allowing the girls to voice issues of their choosing and opening up more rounded discussions on disability issues within the programme.

This chapter has attempted to provide an overview of OFP and their work on the *Girl Power* Programme, both in general and in relation to girls with disabilities. I have also tried to illustrate how they framed the girls and presented their voices throughout the programme, the effects of which will be discussed in the following two chapters.

THREE

Exploring the Outcomes of the *Girl Power* Programme for Girls with Disabilities

Photograph 3

"I want to bring this girl to *One Family People*, and they can help her like they help me. But she does not want to come, so it is difficult. She cannot talk or write or sign. She finds her own way."

Meaningful evaluations of advocacy require a double focus on both processes and outcomes. While it is relatively straightforward to investigate the processes, it is more difficult to measure the outcomes (Tarrow 1999).

I found this to be the case when researching the *Girl Power* Programme. There are few certifiable statistics on school attendance, and records on the prevalence of sexual violence cannot be easily validated. Historically, reporting rates tend to be low because of the shame around speaking out. Baseline surveys were carried out in Sierra Leone before the GPP, however an end-of-programme evaluation was never conducted due to the Ebola outbreak. Given this lack of data, I relied on empirical observations of the GPP participants and partner organisations to inform my understandings of what the GPP has achieved for girls with disabilities. Designed by Reisman et al. (2007), Table 5 provides a benchmark of advocacy outcomes against which to judge the results of mainstreaming girls with disabilities in the programme. The purpose of this paper is not to evaluate the outcomes of the GPP for girls in general. There is potential for future research to be done here[3]. Instead, the concentration of this paper is on the disability component of the project and its impact on the girls with disabilities who participated.

Girls with disabilities have benefited from the main areas the GPP intended to address for all girls. Every stakeholder I talked to, from the participants themselves, members of their communities, the government, media and civil society, spoke at length about the extent of change brought by the GPP in reducing levels of sexual violence in communities. The GPP has brought increased awareness, knowledge and skills on gender equality and the girls are now better equipped to protect themselves against abuse. One thirteen year-old girl in Dwazark exclaimed, "Now when a boy touches my behind I turn around and say, 'Eh! Don't you grab me! I know my rights!'". Many of the problems before the GPP were related to ignorance, but OFP taught communities the law and made a guideline of rules about harassment. In my focus groups with the V-Boys, there was a general consensus that they had not known their previous behaviour was wrong. However, since the programme they have repositioned themselves as "our sisters' keepers", understanding the importance of respecting girls and refraining from sex at a young age. The GPP encouraged girls to share their experiences, and this broke the culture of silence and shame around speaking out. According to an OFP employee, the MLPUs "became mothers for the whole community! They would not compromise. When something is wrong, they say, 'Even though this is not my biological daughter, I will fight for her and protect her!'". In cases when a girl has been abused, they will accompany her to the FSU, the division of the police that deals with child protection services. Since the civil war, there was a breakdown of public trust in the police and fears that cases of abuse would not be taken seriously. However, the 'U and the Police' workshops in the GPP have fostered better relationships between the communities and the police. Reporting is now being followed up, and members of the SPN accompany girls to

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[3] For more information on the *Girl Power* Programme and its outcomes in Sierra Leone, refer to the mid-term evaluation report:
https://issuu.com/strategicpartnerships/docs/mtr_gpp_sierra_leone_country_report

Table 5
Outcomes of Advocacy
Source: Reisman et al. (2007)

1. SHIFT IN SOCIAL NORMS

Examples of outcomes
- Changes in awareness
- Increased agreement about the definition of a problem (e.g., common language)
- Changes in beliefs
- Changes in attitudes
- Changes in values
- Changes in the salience of an issue
- Increased alignment of campaign goal with core societal values
- Changes in public behavior

Examples of strategies
- Framing issues
- Media campaign
- Message development (e.g., defining the problem, framing, naming)
- Development of trusted messengers and champions

2. STRENGTHENED ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

Examples of outcomes
- Improved management of organizational capacity of organizations involved with advocacy and policy work
- Improved strategic abilities of organizations involved with advocacy and policy work
- Improved capacity to communicate and promote advocacy messages of organizations involved with advocacy and policy work
- Improved stability of organizations involved with advocacy and policy work

Examples of strategies
- Leadership development
- Organizational capacity building
- Communication skill building
- Strategic planning

3. STRENGTHENED ALLIANCES

Examples of outcomes
- Increased number of partners supporting an issue
- Increased level of collaboration (e.g., coordination)
- Improved alignment of partnership efforts (e.g., shared priorities, shared goals, common accountability system)
- Strategic alliances with important partners (e.g., stronger or more powerful relationships and alliances)
- Increased ability of coalitions working toward policy change to identify policy change process (e.g., venue of policy change, steps of policy change based on strong understanding of the issue and barriers, jurisdiction of policy change)

Examples of strategies
- Partnership development
- Coalition development
- Cross-sector campaigns
- Joint campaigns
- Building alliances among unlikely allies

4. STRENGTHENED BASE OF SUPPORT

Examples of outcomes
- Increased public involvement in an issue
- Increased level of actions taken by champions of an issue
- Increased voter registration
- Changes in voting behavior
- Increased breadth of partners supporting an issue (e.g., number of "unlikely allies" supporting an issue)
- Increased media coverage (e.g., quantity, prioritization, extent of coverage, variety of media "beats," message echoing)
- Increased awareness of campaign principles and messages among selected groups (e.g., policymakers, general public, opinion leaders)
- Increased visibility of the campaign message (e.g., engagement in debate, presence of campaign message in the media)
- Changes in public will

Examples of strategies
- Community organizing
- Media campaigns
- Outreach
- Public/grassroots engagement campaign
- Voter registration campaign
- Coalition development
- Development of trusted messengers and champions
- Policy analysis and debate
- Policy impact statements

5. IMPROVED POLICIES

Examples of outcomes
- Policy development
- Policy adoption (e.g., ordinance, ballot measure, legislation, legally binding agreements)
- Policy implementation (e.g., equity, adequate funding, other resources for implementing policy)
- Policy enforcement (e.g., holding the line on bedrock legislation)

Examples of strategies
- Scientific research
- Development of "white papers"
- Development of policy proposals
- Pilots/demonstration programs
- Educational briefings of legislators
- Watchdog function

6. CHANGES IN IMPACT

Examples of outcomes
- Improved social and physical conditions (e.g., poverty, habitat diversity, health, equality, democracy)

Examples of strategies
- Combination of direct service and systems-changing strategies

court to monitor cases and ensure that prosecution is not prematurely terminated by threats, extortion or bribery. I heard many individual stories about the intervention of community structures that had been created by the GPP to support the rights of girls. One such story involves an eleven year-old girl in Calaba Town who was about to be given away for marriage, but due to outreach and advocacy from the SPN, she was taken into care and is now attending school. "Now communities are concerned, they are rejecting abuse, ignorance, those harmful practices against girls", said a Paramount Chief in Moyamba. Real changes in awareness and behaviour are some of the indications of successful advocacy outcomes identified by Reisman et al. (2007). Improved policies and legislation have also occurred, partly as a result of the GPP, which, together with numerous other gender and child rights lobbying efforts has helped increase the political will of the government to address these issues. Magistrates are now installed in all 14 districts in Moyamba and the government passed The Sexual Offences Act in 2012 to close the gaps in the law around gender-based violence. Because the GPP was strongly community-driven, its outcomes are sustaining after the programme has finished. V-Girls and V-Boys meetings continue, and both the SPN and MLPUs have registered to become NGOs in their own right, so they are now recognised by the government as having the legal authority to protect the rights of girls in their communities. These outcomes have benefited all girls, including girls with disabilities.

OFP framed girls with disabilities by centralising the gendered aspect of their identity and downgrading their disability identity, which is so often made to be their defining characteristic. In so doing, they have acknowledged the intersectional nature of disability (Dhamoon 2011). Bringing girls with disabilities aboard a sexual rights project alongside other girls challenges the widely-held assumption that people with disabilities are asexual and accepts the reality that these girls experience natural sexual development like other young women (Murphy and Young 2005, Nam 2012, Shakespeare 2000). One of the girls I came to know expressed a desire for a relationship but lamented that her disability prevents boys from paying her any attention. A V-Girl with a speech and hearing impairment stayed in an abusive relationship for many years as a teenager, because she was abandoned by her family and believed that her boyfriend was her only option of finding love. This is often reported to be the case among women with disabilities (Amalo 2013). This girl has since left her boyfriend. Framing girls with disabilities as capable rights-holders and not as passive victims has empowered them to stand up for their rights against sexual abuse and they are now at a lower risk of sexual violence.

The GPP has also led to a decreased likelihood of girls falling pregnant at a young age. During the Ebola crisis, there was a spike in teenage pregnancies by an estimated 47%, partially due to the closure of all schools for a year leading to boredom, and also due to desperate food shortages that brought an in increase in the sexual exploitation of girls needing money (Whyte 2016). Of the 14,000 girls of school-attending age who became pregnant during Ebola, only 2 were V-Girls, implying that the GPP's empowering effects resulted in fewer teen births, including for girls with disabilities. In Sierra Leone, women with disabilities often have multiple children at a young age, believing their offspring will care for them in later life (Majiet 1996, Tepper 2000). High rates of teenage

pregnancy are also connected to their increased marginalisation from the economic and educational sectors. Although the statistics were not available, it was widely reported that the GPP had led to a significant increase in school attendance among girls with disabilities; nearly all the 475 V-Girls girls with disabilities had continued their education and the girls I met shared a keen interest in their school work and have aspirations for their future careers. Three girls with disabilities in the GPP have gone on to study at university, taking advantage of the government's free education policy for people with disabilities at tertiary level, an entitlement from which fewer than twenty individuals across the country are currently benefiting. So the GPP has increased their economic opportunities as well.

In the Gold Champions 10-month intensive after-school training course in which all V-Girls were invited to take part, 44 of the 69 girls who were awarded this honour were girls with disabilities. Why, when girls with disabilities account for fewer than twenty per cent of the total number of girls in the programme, do they make up nearly two-thirds of the Gold Champions? In order to pass the programme, girls needed to show a strong commitment and attend the workshops every day after school. Since the GPP was the first initiative the girls with disabilities were invited to join, they tended to take their participation more seriously and attend every meeting whereas most other girls stopped attending after a few months. This finding supports arguments of other academics that, far from being passive recipients of framing and socialisation, young people play an active role in their conceptualisation (Cheney 2007, Christiansen et al. 2006, De Boeck and Honwana 2005). This is demonstrated in the way that girls with disabilities dynamically re-positioned themselves in the GPP, rejecting their construction as useless and voiceless members of the community and contributing energetically to the project's goals.

Advocacy efforts often have unintended outcomes and these are sometimes more interesting than the outcomes that were intentional (Kolb 2007). Although unintended consequences of activism have not been the subject of systematic research (Kolb 2007), I found that the girls with disabilities were actually more enthusiastic about the changes from the GPP that were not related to the programme's primary gender equality objectives. Mainstreaming girls with disabilities into the GPP alongside other girls has alleviated their sense of social exclusion and segregation from other young people, and social relationships have been formed where previously they would not have existed, as described by one seventeen year-old V-Girl with a physical disability in Freetown:

> *Girl Power* created friendships for us. We are now walking hand in hand with the other girls. Before they would never be my friend, but now when they see me at school, they greet me! And when people are making trouble with me, they say, "Eh! Do not disturb her, she is our sister!" Even now when the programme is not running they still call me their sister! And I hope these friendships will continue.

To set this in context, one schoolboy said that when he first visited OFP and saw children with disabilities in the office, "I wanted to run! I became shocked

because I never knew this organisation was working for disableds. I made up my mind never to go again". This reaction typifies the extent to which social norms discourage friendships between people with and without disabilities, and also shows the change that has occurred since the GPP, because this same boy is now on friendly terms with the children he initially wanted to escape from.

My enquiries into what the girls find most challenging about living with a disability invariably produced the response that it is other people's attitudes. As with most people, these girls value social interaction, acceptance and "a psychological sense of connection to others" (Schur et al. 2013: 118). Having been deprived of these things for so long, the GPP was an opportunity for greater social inclusion bringing an improvement to their emotional wellbeing. Much of the discrimination that surrounds people with disabilities is borne out of fear and ignorance because they have been kept at a distance for so long (O'Sullivan and MacLachlan 2009). One seventeen year-old V-Girl in Dwazark, who does not have a disability said, "We think about those children different. Like, I've never had a friend who's a disabled. But I don't know why". Critical disability studies involves much theorising around the physically impaired body and its psychological impacts:

> The disabled person's "strangeness" can manifest and symbolize all differences between human beings…for the able-bodied, normal world we are representatives of many of the things they most fear – tragedy, loss, dark and the unknown.

> (Hunt cited in Goodley 2011: 720)

Because of the social norms that hold "strangeness" to be a barrier to social interaction, assimilating girls with disabilities with the other girls has helped to detract attention away from their disability and reduce their categorisation as "the Other" to show that they are not so "strange" or different to the other girls after all (Wendell 1996). Cultures and ideologies have an inextricable influence on how frames are received by target audiences, and frames that align or "resonate" with contextual values are more likely to have success than those that do not (Snow and Benford 1988). Referring to Noakes and Johnston's (2005) model for frame resonance in Table 3, it is evident that masking the girls' disability identity in the GPP has strong cultural compatibility and this has enabled the possibility for the girls' acceptance in the programme by the other participants.

Framing girls with disabilities as responsible and capable of standing up for their rights demonstrated that their potential to actively contribute to their social world is no different to that of other young people, and this has helped raise their status in their surroundings. "Being part of the *Girl Power* was the first time we got respect in our community", said one V-Girl who recently sat her final school exams. Many of the girls, including this fourteen year-old girl in Moyamba, found it also helped to increase their status within their own family settings:

> My parents did not consider me before. Whenever there was a kind of, decision-making, they would only consider my brothers

and sister…It's much better now. My father now trusts me to give me a key to the house.

Another outcome not strictly in line with the programme's formal objectives is its impact on the levels of confidence and self-worth of girls with disabilities who participated. A number of studies have found that people with disabilities in Sierra Leone have internalised negative attitudes about themselves, causing them to distance themselves from social situations believing they are not worthy of joining in (Berghs and Dos Santos-Zingale 2011, Chataika et al. 2011). "They push themselves far away from us" said one V-Boy in his early twenties about people with disabilities.

In the GPP, the OFP staff repeatedly emphasised that all girls are capable of achieving their goals, and that "disability is not inability", a motto they frequently repeat to boost the girls' morale. Being mainstreamed within the GPP has enabled girls with disabilities to learn new skills and strengthen their capacity as vocal and confident young women. One of the girls with disabilities recalled, "Before I knew this organisation [OFP], I was ashamed. I thought when I talked, people would never even consider me". She is now attending Sierra Leone's most prestigious university, Fourah Bay College, and credits the GPP for helping her get there: "It helped us know who we are, how we really belong in society". The girls I came to know carry themselves with pride and dignity in a way that I rarely saw from other girls with disabilities in Freetown.

By speaking out on issues of sexual violence and early marriage in the GPP, girls with disabilities have learned that they are able to articulate their frustrations, and are now more capacitated to defend themselves against the prejudices they encounter having a disability. This is reflected in the experience of an eighteen year-old girl living in Hastings:

> Before *Girl Power*, I would just keep my head looking down. But now if someone discriminates against me, I use this as an opportunity to defend myself and educate them!

Some people with disabilities attribute the failures of disability advocacy in Sierra Leone less to the abundant discrimination than to their lack of credibility as a group due to their lower levels of schooling and higher tendencies towards anti-social behaviour, meaning they are "denied the chance to develop self-advocacy skills" (Stainton 2005: 292). For many people in Sierra Leone, the disability experience is stalled in a vicious cycle whereby prejudice leads to exclusion, exclusion leads to anger, anger leads to aggression, and aggression leads to further prejudice. Taking part in the GPP has helped to break this cycle and build the girls' capacity in what is a necessary pre-condition to advocacy if these girls are to fight for their disability rights in future. Simply the act of participating in this project, regardless of the project's content or objectives, has played a vital role in helping these girls grow in confidence and maturity. Their place in the project has also impacted other girls with disabilities who see them taking part, as explained by one of the Gold Champion girls:

> Disabled girls were admiring us! They were thinking, "These girls are disabled and they are speaking out against sexual violence. If they can stand up and say 'No' to violence, then so can we!"

The GPP has reared a large number of vocal, talented girls for other such girls to emulate, in a context where few such role models existed before.

Mainstreaming the girls can be seen as a form of sensitisation, defined here as "a process by which the community is made to be aware of and be responsive to certain ideas, events, situations or experiences" (Zulu, n.d.). Although there is a certain degree of overlap between sensitisation and advocacy, there are distinctions. Advocacy activities tend to concentrate on "influencing the decisions, policies and practices of powerful decision-makers" (Watson 2015: 4). Sensitisation, on the other hand, is about impacting the beliefs and attitudes of the public. There is widely acknowledged to be a simultaneous relationship between successful social justice advocacy and public opinion (Giugni and Passy 1998, Kolb 2007). For this reason, social movements scholars have stressed the need for sensitisation to help strengthen the base of public support in order to affect structural changes: "changing policy is about changing people" (VeneKlasen and Miller 2002: 13). A recent assessment of disability in development policies in Sierra Leone found that negative attitudes are the "biggest obstacle" for disability inclusion and claiming rights (Chataika et al. 2011: 6). This was supported by my encounters with the girls, including one who lives in Grafton:

> V-Girl: When you go to the hospital, if you don't have money, they won't treat you.
> Me: Do you ever say the law says you are entitled to free medical care because you have a disability?
> V-Girl: Yes, but then they just shout and call us trouble-makers.

Negative stereotypes often provoke hostile reactions to self-advocacy efforts by people with disabilities. Before more direct forms of disability advocacy can be done on a larger scale to affect systemic change in future, there is clearly a need for sensitisation to re-frame people with disabilities in a way that challenges pre-conceived notions that disability is linked to aggression and immorality. Doing so is essential for advocacy efforts to gain more public support and increase the pressure on government to act.

The GPP has made an important start in doing this. Framing girls with disabilities as capable rights-holders and foregrounding their role in discussions of sexual and economic empowerment has led to a shift in social norms, one of the potential outcomes of social justice advocacy outlined in Reisman et al.'s (2007) framework. Norms are the "knowledge, attitudes, values, and behaviours that comprise the normative structure of culture and society" (Reisman et al. 2007: 17). For those who have participated in or observed the activities of GPP, witnessing a group of girls with disabilities in this way for the first time has helped to shift attitudes around disability. It can be a long and challenging process for new norms to compete with traditional norms and fight their way into societal and institutional thinking. But there is evidence that the GPP has helped to change the mindsets of audiences, including one government official I interviewed:

> *One Family People* have opened my eyes that these girls have a lot of abilities. It also inspired me to know, because frankly, I won't lie, before I met *One Family People*, I was the same as everyone. I only

felt pity for the disabled. But since I met *One Family People*, my perception changed. I see them as being unique and they have lots to offer, but are not given the chance.

The depiction of girls with disabilities as eloquent and confident young individuals taking the lead in a community initiative is a stark departure from their conceptualisation merely as victims or vagrants. In this sense, mainstreaming girls with disabilities in the GPP has left a symbolic contribution on audiences about what it means to have a disability.

Despite being hesitant to include girls with disabilities at the beginning of the GPP, the other partner organisations began to consider them more: "All throughout the *Girl Power* Programme, they [OFP] had this energy, this passion, to include disability, and it really made us pay attention to it too", said an employee at one of the co-implementing organisations. So the benefits of the GPP also extended to girls with disabilities living in communities where the GPP was implemented by other partners.

This chapter has illustrated the outcomes of OFP's implementation of the *Girl Power* Programme for girls with disabilities. Framing these girls as vocal participants in the same way as the other girls, and opening a space for them to actively discuss issues of girls' rights, not only succeeded in changing onlookers' perceptions about girls with disabilities, but also helped to change the perceptions these girls have about themselves.

FOUR

Assessing the Efficacy of Disability Mainstreaming in the GPP for Advancing Disability Rights

Photograph 4

"I know this girl, she is a deaf. She has been living on the streets for many years."

It is clear that the GPP brought numerous outcomes, both intended and unintended, for the girls with disabilities that participated. The focus of this chapter is to move further and analyse the extent to which the GPP achieved disability-related outcomes beyond the individual level. This is an important question because it can trigger reflections on the role of this kind of mainstreaming in the broader goal of forwarding the cause of disability rights.

Kolb (2007) argues that one of the major difficulties in identifying results from advocacy is "time lag", which is when outcomes do occur, but long after the advocacy took place. This is worth noting, because it may be that the sensitisation effects from the GPP have helped strengthen the base of support and that this might eventually lead to changes in disability policies in future. However, as yet, there have been no such policy or legislative improvements. Even though girls with disabilities are more confident and upbeat since the GPP, they continue to encounter regular infringements of their most basic human rights, that have not been addressed by their participation in the GPP:

> There are many things that are a struggle. And I don't see any progress on these things. Even the President, he has been at our events more than five times now, and he didn't do anything for us. We expected him at least to provide us some accommodation. But he hasn't done nothing for us.

The V-Girl who said this was abandoned by her family when she contracted polio at the age of five, spending the majority of her childhood living on the streets before she met OFP as a teenager. Like many other people with disabilities in Sierra Leone, she holds a great deal of frustration towards the perceived inaction of the state.

As Roberts claims, there are considerable ethical dilemmas when including young people "who have systematically been excluded from the domains where they might otherwise have a voice" (2000: 237). Having been hidden from their communities, excluded from school and silenced throughout their lives, the girls with disabilities have a natural tendency to lack self-confidence and recede in public. OFP have consistently urged the girls to take part in the GPP and perform beyond their natural limit. On the one hand, ethical questions could be raised by those pointing to Fletcher's (2016) Rubic in Table 4 as evidence that there is an element of tokenism or manipulation of the girls in the GPP. Milner and Kelly contend that people with disabilities want "control over the timing or form of participation (as opposed to the when, where and how)" dictated to them (cited in Schur et al. 2013: 117). During my stay, I noticed there was one Gold Champion girl in particular who is asked to speak by OFP at every public event. This girl, whose physical disability is towards the more severe end of the spectrum, speaks extremely powerfully and eloquently about the importance of addressing problems of sexual violence against girls including those with disabilities. She has become quite well-known as a spokesperson for the programme. Because her gender and embodiment of disability is a symbol of the injustice and discrimination faced by girls with disabilities, her voice can represent girls' issues and she is a powerful tool for advocacy for the rights of girls generally and for girls with disabilities. However, the organisation should be wary of being perceived as singling out a particular girl

and ventriloquising her from an essentialist perspective. There is a danger that this individual is being showcased as a vehicle for disability sensitisation, and that substantive issues are lost on the way. One of the criticisms levelled against the mainstreaming approach is that it risks inadvertently "diluting or distorting the issues, or making them disappear altogether" (Smyth 1999: 10). Instead of any real discussions on disability concerns, discourses within the GPP have centred exclusively around gender.

However, the GPP was an advocacy programme for girls' empowerment: advancing disability rights was never its objective. From the operational processes of framing model in Table 2, one can see how the GPP's diagnostic and prognostic framing elements concentrate on girls' rights and protections, and are not related to disability. Space was not afforded for full discussions of disability issues in the GPP because the terms of the project were prescribed from outside. Like the girls, OFP found themselves operating with a sense of constrained agency, as their own voice was silently but powerfully steered towards the goals of the donor, as explained by one of OFP's employees:

> When the *Girl Power* came in, we felt somehow – I don't want to say threatened – but we were kind of *dominated* by the words "*Girl Power*". Because we felt we were losing our identity, we felt we were losing our mandate. Like when we were talking about our focus, we would say "girls and young women, including those with disabilities", and that is not really who we are, we are not really that organisation. We are an organisation for persons with disability, in general – children, adults, men, women. So that was a big challenge for us, to stand our ground.

That there is a strong current of Foucauldian power running through the project, directing the girls to talk about one particular issue over others (Foucault 1991, 2002). This is common occurrence in development aid: "recipients must be ready to observe donor interests, which do not always coincide with the public interest or the preferred goals of the groups themselves" (Kew and Oshikoya 2014: 21). With no overseas funding available for disability-specific advocacy projects, OFP took the advantage of the trend in gender advocacy and saw an opportunity to mainstream their target group within it, bringing many improvements to their lives, and the lives of girls in general. While this has been a significant start, there is however room to go a step further and expand the space for more diverse discussions that extend to issues of disability.

Disability is, of course, a hugely heterogeneous term covering a wide variation in the types and severities of different impairments. One of the limitations of mainstreaming is that it provides an equal platform for all, failing to resolve the reality that certain groups are disadvantaged from the outset (Mukhopadhyay 2004). While the GPP is supposed to enhance the inclusion of girls with disabilities, it is not cognizant of the unique obstacles that can sometimes constrain their participation. Transportation is a common problem for people with physical disabilities in the fast-paced city of Freetown, because taxi drivers and *poda-podas* [minibuses] are reluctant to stop and wait for the extra time it takes for them to disassemble their wheelchairs and enter the vehicle. During the rainy season, competition for vehicles is so great that finding transport is al-

most impossible. At some of OFP's events I attended, transport problems often meant that the participants with disabilities arrived much later and sometimes not at all, meaning their voices were effectively absent in the discussions. Assimilating and homogenising everyone in an equal manner cannot be the solution, if their specific needs and differences are not accounted for.

OFP have framed girls with disabilities in the GPP by emphasising that these girls can take part in the activities in the same way as the other girls. However, the nature of mainstreaming in this way means that girls with certain categories of disabilities have benefited more than others. Of the 475 girls with disabilities in the GPP, 325 had physical impairments (68%), 78 had visual impairments (17%) and 72 had speech and hearing impairments (15%)[4]. Although no data exists on the prevalence and range of disabilities among children in Western Area and Moyamba districts, a thorough study was conducted in the nearby district of Kambia. This report revealed that, of the children with disabilities surveyed, 48% have physical impairments, 10% have visual impairments, 27% have speech and hearing impairments, and the remaining 15% have other conditions including epilepsy, albinism and learning disabilities (Children in Crisis et al. 2012). Based on the unsubstantiated assumption that these findings might be somewhat applicable to the Western Area and Moyamba, it appears that the policy of mainstreaming in the GPP has disproportionately benefited girls with physical disabilities, who were overrepresented in the programme, while girls with learning disabilities and epilepsy have been left out altogether. Since the outcomes of the GPP for girls with disabilities have mostly occurred at an individual level, the outcomes of the project cannot benefit girls who were not included.

Framing the girls as "the same" as their peers ignores the reality that they are not the same, and their differences are such that some cannot be mainstreamed. Girls with speech and hearing impairments, for example, have been underrepresented in the activities of the GPP, and for them, the policy of mainstreaming is not necessarily consensual:

> Me: SLUDI advocate for a policy of inclusion for all people
>   with disabilities in this country. Do you think inclusion is
>   the best policy for you? Is inclusion what you want?
>
> [*Interpreter translates*]
>
> [*Girls with speech and hearing impairments vigorously shake their heads,
> mouth the word, "No", and gesture a thumbs down*]
>
> Interpreter: They all say "no".

Even though girls with speech and hearing impairments have been included in the GPP, their voices have not been foregrounded. OFP hire an interpreter to attend all the workshops and events to which the girls with speech and hearing impairments are invited, yet his main function is to translate so the girls can understand. While OFP are the first and only organisation to create an atmosphere in which people with speech and hearing impairments are welcome, this

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[4] Data provided by OFP staff member

one-way flow of communication limits their role to spectators and fails to create a space into which they can contribute.

> Me: Do you feel like you have made your voices heard to the government?
> *[Interpreter translates]*
> Interpreter: They say they have never spoken to the government. Normally at the events, Mr Edward asks them to perform a dance. But for talking, he advocates on their behalf.
> Me: How does Edward know what things to advocate about?
> *[Interpreter translates]*
> Interpreter: They say they do not know.

Again, "voice" here is not limited to its literal meaning, but is about recognising the heterogeneity of voice and the different ways it may be expressed. The danger of this kind of framing is that it eradicates diversity, and that girls with disabilities are simply submerged under the category of girls. Universalising girls with disabilities glosses over their distinctiveness and strips them of part of their identity to promote conformity and homogenisation rather than responding to the diversity and heterogeneity of disability.

Furthermore, by emphasising the girls' gendered identity to camouflage their disability identity does little to challenge or redress the stigma surrounding disability. On the one hand, these frames resonate well with cultural attitudes and enable the girls to take part in the GPP and to benefit from the project's many outcomes. On the other hand, these frames appear to tacitly accept the idea that disability is a shameful trait, and that ignoring their condition is the best way for the girls to gain acceptance from their peers. The frames site disability as a personal shortcoming, suggesting that the girls need to overcome their challenges at an individual level. Critics of mainstreaming argue that the approach is overly concentrated on manoeuvring within social structures "characterised by fundamental inequalities and ideologies which divide people against each other", rather than trying to reform these attitudes and structures from outside, thereby ensuring the maintenance of the status quo (Morris 1992: 157). Norms and ideologies have an inextricable influence on how frames are constructed, and there was sometimes a slight sense that negative attitudes about disability have even become ingrained in the mindset of OFP, potentially affecting how they have decided to frame the girls. As one member of staff said, "The word 'disabled' to me is associated to poverty, to weakness, to hopelessness". Nevertheless, if advocacy efforts do not explicitly challenge the perceptions and policies that uphold the social exclusion of girls with disabilities, they cannot contribute to an advancement of their rights. Continuing to frame participants with disabilities in this way risks reinforcing negative beliefs about disability, and so this form of assimilation mainstreaming is limited for furthering disability rights over the long term.

The concept of mainstreaming in itself is a contested process because it involves two potentially inimical frames: "equality" and "the mainstream" (Walby 2005: 322). Social justice advocacy throughout history has centred on the goal of equality, yet the method to reach this goal sharply divides opinion. Followers of liberal principles of equality argue that marginalised social groups

can transcend prejudices and become "the same as" the dominant social groups (Squires 2005). Meanwhile, post-structuralists including Baudrillard (1994) and Foucault (2002) claim that this approach inevitably requires a suppression of individualism to adhere to norms that privilege certain groups over others. Here, the emphasis is on the importance of difference and multiple identities. After all, "equality is not synonymous with sameness" (Council of Europe cited in Walby 2005: 327). Mainstreaming can open the possibilities for greater diversity and acceptance of every individual's intersectional experiences. Nancy Fraser argues that social justice claims are increasingly directed towards a "politics of recognition":

> Here the goal, in its most plausible form, is a difference-friendly world, where assimilation to majority or dominant cultural norms is no longer the price of equal respect.
>
> (Fraser 1996: 3)

More sustainable and transformative mainstreaming practices could welcome a plurality of identities of girls with disabilities, while giving equal valuation of different contributions from individuals with different abilities. This idea supports pleas from writers in the field of critical disability studies for more opportunities of "celebrating our potential to be abnormal" (Goodley 2013).

In order to allow for more diversified forms of mainstreaming, activists need to incorporate positive disability frames, undertaking what Snow et al. (1986) term frame transformation, changing old understandings and generating new meanings. Showing the girls in a new way has been a start and has brought a shift in norms. Now there is potential to take this even further and to promote a positive disability identity, bringing new meanings around disability. As Snow and Benford argue, "extant ideologies, or aspects of them, can function as points of contention to which collective action frames are developed and proffered as antidotes or emergent counter-ideologies" (2000: 59). In matters of social justice, real change can only begin when actors go against the grain and tackle the discourses around the harmful cultural beliefs and stigma.

It is important I resist the temptation to impose my Western gaze and remember that disability is not universally understood. Images of disability pride and the Paralympic athletes might not find the same resonance in Sierra Leone. Different cultures maintain diverse interpretations and casual factors relating to impairment, and "we cannot simply dismiss these as 'primitive'" (Meekosha 2011: 679). Nevertheless, cultural universalists including Goonesekere (1998) have questioned whether harmful beliefs and practices can be defended purely on the grounds that they are part of local culture, and that human rights are just as relevant for people in developing countries as they are for people in the West. It is not my intention to take a position on the universalist-relativist debate here, but I do wish to present the voices of the girls with disabilities I came to know in Sierra Leone, and for these girls, negative stereotypes are the persistent cause of their entrenched social exclusion.

New frames are particularly important when one considers the GPP in terms of its scope and sustainability. No statistics exist for the number of girls with disabilities in Sierra Leone, however a basic calculation suggests it may be around 300,000[5]. If this is the case, then the 475 girls OFP reached over the five years of the GPP account for approximately 0.2% of all girls with disabilities in the country. While this is certainly an important step, the outcomes for girls with disability have occurred only for those who have been directly involved. Assessments of gender mainstreaming claim that benefits tend to "concern only few" (MOFA 2015a: 166), and that there has been a general "lack of consistent attention and…sustained commitment" from a multitude of stakeholders working in coalition (Smyth 1999: 10). Despite all their efforts, OFP operate with a skeletal staff and their capacity is limited. Outside of the GPP, disability exclusion continues unabated and few other organisations show any interest in the issue.

The sustainability of the work of OFP is a matter of considerable concern that was echoed throughout my research, even among the members of staff themselves. Since the end of the GPP, OFP enrolled on the *Her Choice* Initiative, while a number of the GPP's co-implementing partners formed another alliance and embarked upon a new gender advocacy programme. Some of the V-Girls with disabilities attended the launch of this new programme and were disappointed that disability was not mentioned by any of the stakeholders nor by the President who was in attendance. It seemed that without OFP in the coalition to push forward the issue of disability, none of the organisations were prepared to pay it much attention. My friend became extremely emotional and disheartened about the lack of progress on disability concerns, exclaiming, "What happens if OFP goes away? That's what worries me".

Ultimately, mainstreaming carries a risk of domesticating dissent and de-politicising claims for equality, rather than offering participants the means to challenge the structures and systems that duplicate their unequal status in society (Charlesworth 2005). "The essentially consensual line that has been pursued as part of a strategy for mainstreaming…strives not to ruffle any feathers or provoke any hostilities" (Cornwall et al. 2008: 8). Along with a number of academics, including Jahan (1996), Mukhopadhyay (2004) and Smyth (2010), I argue that mainstreaming is not just a technical process, but a political process that cannot avoid looking at the wider social and political context. The integrationist disability mainstreaming efforts in the GPP brought multiple successes, but more effective long-term strategies require moves towards radical and democratic agenda-setting forms of mainstreaming, that seek lasting changes in organisational cultures and deeply-rooted ways of thinking. Challenging and potentially transforming existing power relations involves not only empowerment but also resistance to currently-held assumptions about disability to change the behaviour and attitudes of people without disabilities as well (Cornwall et al. 2008).

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[5] Sierra Leone's population is estimated at 6.5 million (World Bank 2015), half are female, 60% are under the age of 24 (CIA 2014) and 15% have a disability (WHO and World Bank 2011).

This chapter has intended to highlight some of the constraints of disability mainstreaming in the GPP for challenging the broader structures that reproduce the oppressions against girls with disabilities. While the GPP was somewhat of a ground-breaking project for the girls with disabilities who participated, even more ground could be broken with a more transformative and diversified approach to impact structural and sustainable change for these girls.

FIVE

Envisioning the Transformative and Diversified Potential of Disability Mainstreaming

Photograph 5

"These girls are fetching water near my house.
It's okay living there, but I like being with my friends more."

My purpose in this research paper has been to examine the strategies and outcomes of *One Family People*'s mainstreaming of girls with disabilities in the *Girl Power* Programme. In particular, I have attempted to analyse how framing and the girls' voices shaped the outcomes. Overall, the findings show a nuanced picture of the achievements of the GPP for girls with disabilities. While the programme brought many tangible effects in enhancing their wellbeing, its impact on the broader structures that continue to exclude girls with disabilities is more complicated. These findings are relevant because they show the possibilities and limitations of disability mainstreaming in the context of advocacy.

Against the wishes of the co-implementing partners, OFP included girls with disabilities throughout the GPP. They mainstreamed deliberately, consciously and relentlessly, in a way that could not have been expected from other organisations whose mandate is not disability. OFP were the first organisation to emphasise the value of these girls and to encourage them to join a community initiative. The girls took full advantage of their opportunity to participate and repositioned themselves as active members of the programme, playing an integral role throughout the GPP, and in some ways trying harder than their peers without disabilities. OFP framed them in a new way and provided a space for these girls to demonstrate their potential as vocal and capable rights-holders. Even though it was a project focused on the rights of girls, the GPP provided a platform to improve the wellbeing of girls with disabilities in many ways, not limited to the intended objectives of lowering their risk of sexual violence and increasing their levels of educational empowerment. Taking part in the GPP has significantly helped to break the invisible walls segregating these girls from their communities, creating friendships with girls without disabilities, raising their status in their families and boosting their confidence. The GPP has demonstrated that, even in a context of extreme discrimination and social exclusion, it is possible to achieve real inclusion for girls with disabilities. To harmonise with social norms that perceive disability as a highly negative trait, OFP framed the girls not as "the disabled", but as "girls", to remove focus from their disability, instead showing that these girls are not so different from their peers, as they too have a sexual identity, academic potential and a capacity to play a role in their social world. There is evidence that the girls' participation in this programme has helped to sensitise and change the mindsets of audiences and power-holders who have seen this group in a completely new light and this has contributed to a shift in social norms about what it means to be a girl with a disability. Despite their limited resources, OFP displayed a set of core competencies in the GPP and this case study can therefore offer many positive reflections for good mainstreaming practices in future, including setting the agenda and mobilising communities to demand their rights from the state. As an eighteen year-old V-Girl with a physical disability expressed her gratefulness for being included, saying "Thank God for OFP!".

At this point, the question turns to whether, and to what extent, disability mainstreaming in the GPP has advanced the broader rights of girls with disabilities in Sierra Leone, and here the answers become more multifaceted. Since it was a project on gender, the GPP did not overtly challenge the policies or the underlying structures that sustain the marginalisation of girls with disabilities in society, and did not result in a tightening of laws or policies on disability. The voices of the girls were directed towards discussions of gender issues, in

accordance with the objectives of the project prescribed by the donor, and thus the programme has had a negligible impact on raising awareness about basic disability rights and concerns. Neither did the GPP make explicit effort to mobilise these girls to challenge negative cultural perceptions about disability. Indeed, framing the girls in such a way that they assimilate with their peers runs the risk of subscribing to cultural beliefs that disability is a sign of shame and that the challenges must be overcome at a personal level. In the long term, assimilation mainstreaming shows limited potential for advancing the rights of girls with disabilities in Sierra Leone, because it does little to stimulate the larger issues of disability rights. As long as advocacy does not explicitly target the norms, policies and cultural practices that continue to marginalise people with disabilities, it will do little to contribute to an advancement of their rights.

The gains from this programme for girls with disabilities have remained largely at an individual level rather than the structural level. Certainly these individual gains have been substantial, and this example of mainstreaming demonstrates many promising elements for improving the lives of the participants. Yet there is potential to go even further and to continue mainstreaming in a way that might achieve not just personal benefits, but also outcomes at a macro level for advancing disability rights. This is important because NGOs are limited in their outreach; they cannot target every person directly. Advocacy offers possibilities for more substantive and inclusive forms of disability mainstreaming that recognise and accept difference and the possibilities for individuals to make their own unique contributions to the programme's activities. Framing girls can occur in more diverse ways, along with new portrayals that explicitly challenge the cultural perceptions that disability equates to sin and shame. Mainstreaming can be about amplifying the heterogeneity of voice and understanding the alternative ways that voice can be expressed. In doing so, activists can realise a more transformative potential of mainstreaming to reform the existing social and political structures that persistently exclude girls with disabilities from society. After all, the wider politicisation of mainstreaming is a "fundamental antecedent to the realization of disability rights and freedoms" (Chataika et al. 2015: 197).

I was encouraged during my stay to see signs that OFP had already begun to take some of this feedback on board. At the official launch of *Her Choice*, a successor project to *Girl Power* which aims to end child marriage and teenage pregnancy, one of the V-Girls with a disability made an impassioned speech about the difficulties she faces accessing transportation and the need for improved transport facilities for people with disabilities. In amongst the dialogues and performances about girls' rights, this girl spoke passionately about a topic of her preference in front of a number of high-ranking ministers. This signals a change in the relationship between audiences and girls with disabilities; she was not merely an object of disability sensitisation or an ambassador for a gender project, but was given the space to exercise her agency and voice her feelings, and the effect was very powerful.

The longer I stayed in Sierra Leone and the closer I became to the girls, the more frustration I felt at the lack of progress on disability rights, apart from the work of OFP. However, while it is easy to become disheartened, it must be remembered that successful advocacy does not happen overnight. The

achievements of the GPP in reducing sexual violence and increasing girls' empowerment have occurred within a context of increasing gender equality and consistent pressure on power-holders from stakeholders at the local and global levels over a period of decades. Advocacy is a continuous, long-term process and successful outcomes are rarely achieved from a one-off undertaking, nor are they achieved in isolation. Alliances must be built and the pressure on power-holders must remain constant in order to transform the place of girls with disabilities within their communities and allow them to achieve full social inclusion, in the hopes of creating a more just and equal society.

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